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TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

WORK WITH PURPOSE
EPISODE #38

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Deputy Program Leader, Department of Defence
Superstar of STEM

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DAVID PEMBROKE: Hello everyone, and welcome to Work with Purpose, a podcast about the Australian Public Service. My name's David Pembroke. Thanks for joining me. I begin today's podcast by acknowledging the Ngunnawal people on whose land the broadcast is created today, and pay my respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging and recognise the ongoing contribution that they make to the life of our city and region. Today, a special edition of Work with Purpose, where we look at women in leadership. Andrew Campbell, the Chief Executive of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research hosts a conversation with Dr Cathy Foley, Australia's Chief Scientist, Professor Tanya Monro, who's the Chief Defence Scientist at the Department of Defence, and Dr Cayt Rowe, the Deputy Program Leader at the Department of Defence.

DAVID PEMBROKE: And with these three talented and intelligent ladies, he talks about women in science and science leadership, more specifically, and their personal experiences in the public, private and academic sectors. It's a future-focused conversation where all sorts of interesting conversations around diversity and innovation and other topics are covered in what is a very interesting conversation.

I'm sure you'll enjoy it.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Hello everyone. My name's Andrew Campbell. I'm the Chief Executive of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research. And today we're talking about women in leadership and specifically women in science leadership, although I'm sure we'll cover much broader terrain than that. And we're lucky to have three fabulous women leaders with us. Dr Cathy Foley, Australia's Chief Scientist, Professor Tanya Monro, who's the Chief Defence Scientist at the Department of Defence, and Dr Cayt Rowe, who's Deputy Programme Leader at the Department of Defence.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: So all have had amazing careers and in a half hour, we'll try and just get the tip of the iceberg of lessons about leadership, not just for women in STEM, but women generally. Can we start by reflecting on the year that we've just had, the year that we are still in, and lessons that we may have learned about leadership during what I'm sure for most of us has been an extraordinary period of disruption and responding on the go. Cayt, can I start with you and also introduce yourself a bit. What's inspired you to get where you are and what have been some of your main formative experiences?

CAYT ROWE: Okay. Thank you, Andrew. So to introduce myself, yes, I am the Deputy Program Leader for a Program of Research in Defence Science and Technology Group, looking at long-term force design and supporting force integration. There've been many, a convoluted journey to get to where I am, as I think is probably true of most people who reach a senior role and particularly women in science. So I started out as an aeronautical engineer in aircraft structural integrity, moved around a little bit within DST, and I've ended up in this area doing operations analysis to support long-term force design, which I absolutely love.

CAYT ROWE: This last year has been very interesting, as it has for many. The team that I work with is spread across four states, and previously we have spent a lot of time travelling and working together that way. And we've had to be very innovative. And I think the thing I would like to share reflecting on my year is actually that, that innovation in terms of how we work has actually also been born out in what we are doing, that we've really actually been being creative, not just in how we communicate and how we get together, but in doing our science as well. And in some ways I think the distributed collaboration through COVID has brought in more disciplines and we've got some really exciting products out of that as a result.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Fantastic. We might come back to that point about bringing in more disciplines and some diverse perspectives. Tanya.

TANYA MONRO: Thank you, Andrew. It's a pleasure to be here to talk with you today. So, I'm Australia's Chief Defence Scientist, and I've been in this role for two and a bit years now after a career that has seen me spend most of my time in research and research leadership in Australia's universities. It's interesting to reflect on this period of COVID because it actually makes me reflect on my own choices along my career pathway. I'm really focused on fostering environments where really good science and technology can pull through to impact. And there's one thing we've had during the COVID period, which is absolute clarity around priorities. There have been numerous things that we've been able to do over the last year, year and a half, which have required us to knock down some of the barriers between government departments, between organisations focused on some of the COVID priorities.

TANYA MONRO: And what I've learned is that when people have absolute clarity on what's important, they tend to get on with it and be energised and deliver outcomes. And if I reflect on myself and my own choices and my own path here, while I think once a scientist, always a scientist, I feel everyday that has some real science in it and some real interaction with scientists is a good one. I am absolutely drawn to roles where I can make a difference in ensuring that knowledge, those new ideas actually make a difference. And I think COVID has shown us some new ways of doing that, which I think are very exciting.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Cathy, our Chief Scientist.

CATHY FOLEY: Well, Andrew you're right. I am Australia's Chief Scientist. I've been in this role just since the beginning of 2021. Before that I was CSIRO's Chief Scientist, but had worked in the organisation for 36 years on a whole range of things from starting as a postdoc all the way through to Chiefs of Division and the Chief Scientist. So I guess I've been from the grassroots all the way through to looking at how to make science impactful and take it all the way through from the bench and initial discovery through to commercialization.

CATHY FOLEY: I guess my role at the moment is threefold. One is to make sure that the government has the best possible scientific advice so that they can use that when they're making complex decisions and policy development. The second is to be an advocate for Australian science, both here and overseas. And the third one is working with the sector and government and industry to see how we can make our science sector as effective, impactful, and efficient as possible. So that's sort of the area I'm working in.

CATHY FOLEY: And it's been really interesting just, I thought maybe I'd talk a little bit from a personal perspective about the impact that COVID or the pandemics had on me, particularly going from someone who's always at work and had my private life private in a sense, so that when I was at work, I was the boss and in charge, at home, I was the mum and the wife and the social secretary and all the things that go with often the role of women in the household. Even though I feel like my husband and I have a really equal and balanced relationship, I was really surprised at the anxiety I had when we were told we had to work from home.

CATHY FOLEY: And I thought, how do I actually be at home working and being CSIRO's Chief Scientist while at the same time, being Cathy Foley, mom, wife, housemaker, and all that sort of stuff. And I'll be honest in saying, I found it really anxiety creating, and it's something which surprised me. I've got over it really fast by setting up my office, which is one of the kids, my kids are all grown up now. So one of the empty bedrooms, and I was able to just, that's my office. And when I go in there, I work and no one else comes in there. I close the door and I'd work. And then when I come out, I'm me again as a non-working person. And that was really important to figure out that strategy. And I thought that was something which was a surprise to me. I didn't expect to have that emotional reaction.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Very good. I think we might come back to that also the balance of work and private life in a more tele-connected environment. But first, all of you are what might be called hard scientists, high temperature, semiconductors, photonics, statistics. And I was, my eyebrows certainly hit the roof early in the Brexit debate when Michael Gove said the public is sick of experts. And it may be that COVID has reminded society that expertise does have some uses and that if we can get the balance right with science informing policy, we get good outcomes. Would you each like to reflect on your experiences as a science leader in the public sector, but at the interface between public and private and how we grapple with these big decisions we're facing?

CATHY FOLEY: Well, I guess my business is all about saying, how can we make sure that we get the best possible advice? And that's really hard because it's not as though everything is settled and that you look up in the literature and here's a single paper that says everything is correct and so off you go and this will create a clear pathway forward. So in many ways, it's actually gathering information, understanding what is the best information, because quite often you can see conflicting scientific reports and you need to sort of work out how to turn those into advice. And also then work out how it's meaningful and how it can be interpreted in a way.

CATHY FOLEY: So, one of the things which actually Alan Finkel, my predecessor did last year, which was, I think fantastic was he created what was called the Rapid Response Information Forum, where ministers would ask a question about COVID and then we were able to through the Academy's contact, the best, most recent research and researchers and pull together a sort of a ready rector of the material in 1,500 words if something is understandable of information, not recommendations, just the answer to the scientific question that was being posed and government found that really, really helpful. And I think that's garnered the idea of how we can now provide better ways of information to government through this process. So that's, from my perspective, what I'm seeing is a hunger and a realisation of what we can provide government by being able to answer those questions succinctly and quickly.

TANYA MONRO: And if I may, I think that Cathy has given a good example. I think that we have seen clear recognition of the positive outcomes Australia has benefited from taking the advice of experts seriously. I think we've still got a way to go to really embed that as a cultural piece across all sectors. I have to say that within Defence, I'm constantly pleased to see that evidence and data is at the core of decision-making. I think there's a lot more we can do. I think the opposite the Chief Scientist initiative around policy fellowships is a wonderful initiative, a way of getting some experienced scientists into government. I think there are other initiatives like Science Meets Parliament, which has been going for many years to just give scientists working outside the public sector or public service, a better appreciation of how to communicate their science in a way that's not off-putting, that's engaging. And I think that's very powerful as well.

TANYA MONRO: But I guess I'll be much happier to see more people with science training in a variety of roles on both the policy side and, to be frank, the politics side of the divide, because I think that ultimately we're in a world where the ability to weigh evidence and data and make decisions is ever more important. And we need not just to connect the experts, but to support the decision makers to do that better.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: And Cayt, I know you're working on what we call wicked problems that necessarily don't lend themselves to simple solutions or prescriptions, and you're bringing statistics to that.

CAYT ROWE: I do.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Do you think some of those tools could be used more broadly outside defence and outside war gaming?

CAYT ROWE: Your question, the premise behind your question is actually one of the key reasons that I am interested in raising the profile of my area of science operations analysis. I have actually been very privileged that within the Department of Defence, the science that we do is very well-respected. It's not always listened to precisely, but we have a strong voice and definitely are able to influence in that community. And the tools that we use are really well suited to understanding the kind of problem that government has been grappling with in the last 12 months. I guess on a personal level, I've actually been rather dismayed to realise how many fields this is not the case in, it's not

as routinely accepted as I have, and even among my social group how people don't hear and understand the evidence that's presented to them. And that's a lot of what we do in DST in supporting decision-makers in investing in the future is present the information in a way that they can understand.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Coming back to COVID for a moment. This morning, one of my colleagues in the Philippines said that she'd found leadership with empathy was one of the key things that had emerged, that everyone knows that everyone else is doing it tough in different ways. And so leaders have had to be naturally much more concerned about the welfare of their teams and so on. Has that been something that you guys have found in your work, and what are the things that we've learned out of COVID that we shouldn't lose in future? I won't say at the other end because we don't know when or what that might look like, but what are some of the gains that we've made that we should be very careful to retain?

TANYA MONRO: If I can kick start that, leading DST group and it's eight sites around Australia, I've really been struck by the difference in experience of our people through COVID. The extended duration of the Victorian lockdown made a huge impact that is still felt today by our staff. There's certainly a greater degree of anxiety amongst people who've had that more extended exposure. I think what this period has done is actually made it significantly safer for people to talk within their organisation, within their work groups, with their leaders and managers about the impacts that the workplace has on them. And I think it's blurred the boundaries between the personal and the professional as Cathy flagged before in a way that can be healthy. But I think it's also shown me personally, you can just never assume someone else's experience.

TANYA MONRO: There have been some that have thrived. I know on a personal level, I really feel very lucky over the last year or so to have just spent more time with family and less time on planes. That's just been a wonderful thing. But for many others, it ranges from people who've been separated from family for really long periods, to people who... I was talking to one colleague who was living in a very, very small flat expecting that he'd spend most of his life at large and found he was then in very close confines, working off an ironing board. So people have had very, very different experiences. And I think if it teaches us to think of the whole person, then we'll have gained a lot through COVID.

CAYT ROWE: I think it's also been on one level, real equaliser. I can remember very early on there was a webinar which had the Treasurer, minister Frydenberg talking about the introduction. This is very early on in the pandemic and what his plans were to introduce all the different approaches they've had financially, which have proven to be very successful. And the thing which was really interesting was on, it was on a Zoom webinar and had the former Prime Minister, Mr Howard there, he had a Vice Chancellors, he had PhD students and general public members, all looking like they could have been anybody. And it was something which-

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Has been an enabler.

CAYT ROWE: Yeah, it has been, I guess it's almost like welcoming people into your house to some extent, because back then they didn't have the false backgrounds. And it was something which actually in some ways was, as you were saying, creating that for the full person. But I think the other, which is something to take away from this is new ways of working, which I don't think we'll ever go back to, sort of those of us who were catching multiple planes every week and living on high levels of over tiredness because you're getting up at 4:00 three times a week and working till 11:00 and jumping from city to city, I think that's become a thing of the past because of uplift. I think they said that the transformation in digital capability within industry went in six months or 12 weeks or something, the equivalent of 10 years-worth of development. And so we've seen the ability for people to use digital capabilities and they've just blossomed in that time too.

CAYT ROWE: And then I guess the other is the opportunities for anyone to work anywhere regardless of their circumstances. So that if you've got an internet connection and a computer you're pretty much open to the world. And that's suddenly changing things, I think the paradigm of where you are, we're seeing people willing to relocate to more remote areas so long as they've got good NBN, then off they go. So I think that's going to be interesting to see how that pans out.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Can those developments help women in leadership, is this going to help particularly women in science deal with that career break for family reasons or whatever that have traditionally caused a hole in the CV, the academic CV? Do these new changes provide some opportunities for us to crack some of those longstanding nuts?

CATHY FOLEY: Maybe. The others might have it because...

CAYT ROWE: I might start off this one. So I think it helps in some things certainly that empathetic leadership and the whole person absolutely helps understand where each of your team members are at. However, my observation has been actually, this has really shone the spotlight on the conflicted roles of women in the workplace. And when you are working at home and there's, I've got my husband and my daughter both at home and there is this stronger responsibility often on the woman for all the other jobs. I should say actually my case that my husband home schooled my daughter last year. And so he's all over this. So I've just realised he's going to be listening to this. So I wanted to set the record straight in that matter. But I'm well aware of that stress for many of my colleagues that they're the ones who then feel squeezed.

CAYT ROWE: Having said that, I think this is a good launching pad for us to take the gains that we've made in terms of flexible working arrangements and where people, when it's then a choice rather than a have to, it opens up a whole range of possibilities.

TANYA MONRO: Look, a couple of comments on that. I support everything Cayt said there. I think we've just got to be careful that we don't put too much load or expectation on women to have to juggle everything simultaneously. I think there's some real benefits from the way of working we experienced it over the last year in terms of staying connected. But I think also, I remember as a new mother returning to work after maternity leave, the headspace you have of going into the workplace and knowing that your baby was safe and cared for, gave you the space to engage. If you were trying to do that and ever be attuned to the cry in the next room, I think it would be debilitating.

TANYA MONRO: So I think we do have to be very careful. I think you're absolutely right that there is a disproportionate gendered load on women. I think we've got to be very thoughtful. I mean, some of the things we're tracking within our organisation is as we return to more of a normal balance, what proportion of men use flexible arrangements? Is that sufficiently high? Because that's almost a proxy indicator of whether people who do that feel they can still progress.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Yes. I saw some data coming out of the UK, I think in The Financial Times, that the people who've gone back to work the quickest are the ones that are getting promoted the most, and the ones that have stayed home are not getting promoted at the same rate. So there's some interesting things that we need to keep an eye on.

CATHY FOLEY: That's such a really an important point, is that what is good. And often, sometimes they call it the Santa Claus effect where what you have as performance just before the decision is seen as the basis of which the decision is made, not looking at your work overall. And I think, I do want to raise the issue of hybrid models. I think that what I'm seeing is that working from home all the time or working at work all the time seems to work. When you're actually swapping between the two that actually, well, I have it at the moment I'm working in Canberra three days a week and work from home two days a week. And because I live in Sydney and the job's in Canberra. And the thing is really interesting. I do find I'm always missing something, like there's some critical notes, which is in the wrong location or you're lugging huge amounts of stuff from one city to the other. And I know you should have it all digitally accessible, but well, just the way I operate, I haven't got there yet, I'm getting better at it, but it's just I've always been one to write notes during meetings.

CATHY FOLEY: So that's something and I think is going to be a big issue, particularly in the university sector where they're finding at the moment they've got the hybrid face-to-face and online, and they actually have to prepare two sets of lectures. And I'm hearing that the, and we're beginning to see the evidence scientifically that the publication rates have plummeted. And it just, this year of last year, when everyone was working from home publication rates rose a little bit, but now they've completely dropped to probably 10% of what they were so far this calendar year. And I suspect it's because there's just that hybrid model. We haven't got that right yet. So we need to think through what does that mean and how do we assess the idea of what is good, what is quality, and I think it's interesting that statistic you mentioned, I think highlights that.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Can I get each of you to reflect on your transition to leadership from mid-career to where you are now as women in science, women in the public sector, what are some of the lessons you've learned out of that transition period of stepping up into the C-suite as it were, not that we have one in the public sector. Tanya, do you want to start?

TANYA MONRO: Oh, happy to. Look, it's something I've reflected on a lot because, I guess I'll break it down into a few elements. I've always been someone really driven to form teams that can deliver on outcomes. And so, when you look at it with that lens, my leadership choices along my career path make a lot of sense, but I remember actually finding one of the most difficult aspects was really around identity. And around the perception of the difference way people would see you, whether you're a scientist, and active working scientist, actively creating knowledge, rather than someone leading scientists. My own experience of it was that it was a more gradual evolution, but I did notice a marked difference in perception. And perception that is management and administrative rather than thought leadership and shaping and delivering. I think that's one comment I'd make.

TANYA MONRO: But the other thing I would say is just how empowering I've found the shift, because there's nothing like the feeling that you can make a change to how other people experience the workplace so that they can thrive. And so, that you can deliver outcomes. And while, look, there's equally a thrill in doing science. For me, there was a magnifying effect through leadership where you could make a difference that at scale meant that we could deliver outcomes.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: So Cayt, you've gone from being a deep technical specialist to being an APS leader.

CAYT ROWE: I have, yes. I haven't quite reached the illustrious heights of my colleagues here. I think I'm still firmly in middle level management. However, there's been a significant transition for me from dealing, yes, it's very, very deeply in the science to leading in a mixed workplace. And for me, that's mixed in terms of technical people, military officers in uniform, as well as dealing a lot with, I guess the broader Australian Public Service that's not scientists. So, yes, we are APS. But there's a different personality type that we're dealing with in that. And I really resonated with what you said, Tanya about that sense of amplifying the influence. And it's very exciting to be able to actually take what we do in science and have that influence across the broader community.

CAYT ROWE: So the journey for me has been one of learning to speak another language, learning to communicate without the jargon, and to really keep, I guess has been a key actually to leading these teams is uniting around the common purpose and framing that purpose in a way that everyone in the team can understand and understand how their parts actually feed into this whole. And that's, I think where that synergy and that amplification comes from that is so exciting as a leader.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Mm-hmm. Cathy?

CATHY FOLEY: Yeah. So it's really interesting being in these higher levels. I've been in the situation where I haven't actually had direct line management because the Chief Scientist is, unlike in Tanya's role where she's also the CE, I guess, of her organisation.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: You're up in the satellite.

CATHY FOLEY: I'm actually on the sides. I have all care and no responsibility, I suppose. And so I've had to learn influencing skills extraordinaire, I guess. And it's been really interesting on a couple of levels of it. The first one is the need to always be calm and to, it doesn't matter what's falling to pieces everywhere, that people look to you to be calm and to just think and strategize the way through. And you can't bring your anxieties, whatever's happening at home and things that aren't going well for you. They're left at home, and people look to you to be the highest behaviours, I guess, levels of behaviours, not slagging off on people, not sort of have throwaway comments, which might then be interpreted as therefore everyone's got a rush a way to do things. So it got to be very mindful about all communication I have.

CATHY FOLEY: And then the other is also recognising how to make sure that I recognise that I'm not the fountain of all knowledge. I'm the Chief Scientists of Australia, but I actually don't know everything about all sides. So making it clear that I'm a conduit where I listen to a whole range of ideas, thoughts, and my role is to actually bring those together, I guess, convene the people who bring the information together, but then bring it together into something which is able to influence and think in terms of who is it that has to use this information to be able to do different or have some sort of impact in some way.

CATHY FOLEY: So that's quite a different role than just when I was chief of the division, you pull this lever and something will happen. Although as you get more senior, you also realise that when you're the alternative government, you say, well, if I was in charge, I'd do this, this and this. And then you get in charge, you think, Oh my God, it's not quite as easy as that. And I think that dealing with complexity and recognising where your priorities are and identifying what are the few things, because normally you're in these very senior roles for quite a short time. And so, at the moment, this current role is three years. So what is it I can do in three years that will really make a difference? How do I make sure I'm not trying to do everything, boil the ocean, I think we often say, but as you pick a couple of things and do them really well so that I leave a legacy and an impact. Not because I want to leave a legacy with my name all over it, as more to do with saying it was worth my while being in this position and being able to see if as Australia's Chief Scientist, I leave Australia slightly better place.

CATHY FOLEY: And I guess that it's really changes the way I'm thinking about what I'm doing and what I'm not doing. And that's hard because sometimes you've got to say no to things. And sometimes you've got your greatest passions that you've got to put in your back pocket because this isn't the time.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: When I'm talking to our grads or to young scientists we're funding, I often talk about the T-shaped professional where you try and have one area of expertise that's deep and where you stay in touch with the literature and go to the conferences and so on, but then there's a whole bunch of other generic skills, teamwork, communication, project planning, project management, budgeting, conflict resolution, or whatever, has the pandemic, and they operate in context that we're in now meant that those skills are the ones that get you the job, your discipline might get you the shortlist, but how you plug into a team, how you plug into an organisation is going to be the thing that determines your effectiveness. And does that particularly suit women's leadership attributes?

CAYT ROWE: I want to add one more thing to that, is your networks.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Of course.

CAYT ROWE: Yeah, because I think that's something where probably women don't necessarily realise the importance of their networks and how to identify the links with them because we often talk about the old boys club and we've now got the fantastic women's club and that they're very important to have the ability to know where to go to get support and also, I guess, sponsorship for achieving, trying to push through any change.

TANYA MONRO: I think that's a really good point. I'm not sure I've seen a substantial shift over this time in the way people are being selected for roles. I still think we have some of the old challenges. I still find that we have to work really hard to tap women on the shoulder, on the whole to get them to apply for leadership roles. It's something I still experience. And there are still too few coming up through the pipeline and deciding to stay in science leadership roles. So, I think it's a long-term game. I become more and more focused that actually what we need to do is no one single silver bullet, but a whole range of things. And I think where I'm particularly focused on at the moment is in inclusion, helping create environments where women and men, because I think there's, if you get it right it works across the whole cohort, feel they can make a difference and their contributions are valued. And I think that's often one of the key reasons that women choose not to stay in and move up to more senior roles.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Can I just pick you up on that. We've got some questions here from members of the IPAA Future Leaders Committee. And Amy Burgess from AG, Attorney General's Department has asked what's the most effective initiative you've seen throughout your career to improve gender diversity in science, but we can say that more broadly here, and how could that be replicated more broadly? So to make sure that we do capture gains and not slip back, what are some of the best things you've seen? Cayt.

CAYT ROWE: Well, I'm quite eager to talk about the superstars of STEM program. So I am part of a program this year called Superstars of STEM. And the purpose of that is to try and amplify the voices of women in science because you may notice just how much of the public discourse on technical matters is male voices to try and get more women visible. And so I must confess I can't speak to its long-term effectiveness, but I'm very excited by what I've seen already. So I saw Superstars of STEM previously, which encouraged me to apply for the program. And I've certainly been aware of that need. And so, I'm very excited about this. I know for me personally, there's some gaps in my skillset that this is filling for me and being able to talk to the broader public. So yeah, I think it's a great program.

TANYA MONRO: And building on Cayt's comments. I think Superstars of STEM is fantastic, because if you just at the cohorts we've had so far, what an extraordinary group of future and current leaders we have there across such a diverse range of areas. Look, there's no one single solution. I think it's got to be a range of things. I think the SAGE Initiative, so Science Australia Gender Equity has been critical in focusing organisations on their data because it's just so easy to be complacent and say, ah, that's sorted, it's just about getting them in the door. It's not, it's about a much richer range, understanding your own organisation and putting leaders in a position where they have to be accountable. So I think that's absolutely critical.

TANYA MONRO: And one thing that I think is really powerful is that through SAGE, all of the institutions across Australia that have got their Bronze Accreditation have committed to action plans, and you can read those action plans and you can get great ideas of best practise of what's happening in other places. So it's no one thing. I just think we can't be complacent and we all need to be engaged. I'm a member of the now renamed Male Champions of Change, which is now the Champions of Change Coalition, a name change that I and others welcome. I feel more at home in that name. And we're all in the STEM group, just committed to a bold action. And the bold action that I've committed to for my organisation is to create a mid-career entry program, to bring people into defence research and science that might be five to 15 years out of a PhD, done postdocs, et cetera, looking for that longer term ability to contribute. And that program will be 50, 50 male female with that real commitment to refresh and energise that mid-career level of women in our organisation.

TANYA MONRO: So I think it'll be really interesting to see what all the other organisations do for their bold initiatives and we don't mind beg borrowing or stealing from each other's good ideas.

CATHY FOLEY: So from my perspective, what I've seen made a big difference is organisations realising that if they don't have gender equity on the highest level, they're not necessarily have the best people. And so for example, I know in CSIRO, Larry Marshall just went through saying, we're going to have 50,50 in the board, 50,50 in the executive team, and he's working his way down through the organisation. And I've been really impressed by how he's really lived it.

So to the point where it's been difficult, for example, for me, where I've been in the audience and he's sat on a panel and went, Oh my goodness, there's no women on this panel and he said, "Cathy, we're swapping out." And so suddenly on short notice in a public event, I've had to swap into something I'm completely unprepared for, but he was making that point and he's done that many times, or he's cancelled something when he's got the run sheet and found that that's the case. So he's really lived it.

CATHY FOLEY: The other one, which I've been impressed was the Academy of Technology and Engineering, which has set a really clear target of the percentage of women every year, who are elected to the fellowship. And the thing that is really interesting is the huge number of amazing women who just would have been overlooked in the past. But that's again, because a lot of these things are based on networks and who's recommended, and because you're forcing to look beyond just your normal people you know, I've been blown away by some of the women who've been just elected in ever since they've created this. And every year they easily get to their target and a few more. And then people will think, why weren't they elected years ago? Because they are part of the way of providing evidence and advice to government as well and we're just missing out on that. So that's probably one area. The others which have identified important issues which are truly on a pathway to success.

CATHY FOLEY: I think there's still one thing we haven't nailed yet. And that is particularly for women in the STEM area, the 30s is the time when you traditionally make your career. It's also the time when you're having children. And I don't think we've got the childcare work life balance identifying what does good look like and how we incentivize and promote people. I don't think we've got that right yet.

TANYA MONRO: And to build on Cathy's point there, I think our career structures, particularly in our university sector are really problematic at that particular career stage for women. And you tend to find almost a bi-modal distribution, those women who get sufficiently senior early enough can weather that period of young children relatively easier, whereas those that are still in that tenuous employment at that stage tend to struggle for a long time.

CAYT ROWE: I also think that one of the avenues for addressing that particular issue is around what we were talking about earlier, with access to flexible working arrangements and having that culturally acceptable for men, as well as women, which then enables the couple to share that load more evenly. I think that's one of the key things and we don't focus enough on that particular part of it.

TANYA MONRO: A wonderful initiative I'd love to highlight was ANU's recent one to let men take six months paternity leave, for example.

TANYA MONRO: It's a great example.

CAYT ROWE: Fantastic.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: And there are great examples out there. Just on the 50, 50 Cathy, I've found it was better to have 40, 40, 20, but even then we overshot. So we went from

11% women in senior roles to 70%. So we now have to try and try and get back a bit.

CATHY FOLEY: And that's really good, because there are also careers where there's not enough men from primary school, teachers, carers, and many other and nursing. And these are things where we're also not getting the people who aspire to that. And they're not getting that opportunity and they're males.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Okay. I'd like us to finish up with focusing on people in more junior roles that are not yet in positions of authority. And personally, one of the things I'm most excited about at IPAA is our reverse mentoring program. But what do you think more junior staff can do to encourage cultural change and manage upwards and to influence those above them to shift their thinking?

CAYT ROWE: So people can influence at all levels. And I must confess I think that's something that I have done throughout my career is from first joining a team, you have a voice, a good leader will listen to and hear the feedback if you just are prepared to offer it and not think, Oh, that's not my place. It is your place. I think that's probably my key message, is it is the place of every single team member to contribute to the culture of that team.

CAYT ROWE: I do acknowledge that not all leaders will hear that willingly, but even in whatever circumstance you find yourself with under a particular leader, that there will be a circle of influence, and to focus on that circle of influence rather than on ranting about factors that are beyond your control. I think most people actually have more power to influence than they realise.

TANYA MONRO: I think Cayt's absolutely right. And what I'd say is never assume you can't make a difference regardless of the seniority of your role. If you phrase it in a constructive way and authentic way based on your own experience. I'd say as a leader, some of my most energising times are when a negative feedback comes to you and you see something from a perspective you haven't before and you change your view or your approach as a result. It can be from the almost trivial, like recently I was told that we'd planned an all-staff event for a date, which in one state was still school holidays, so I canned it and rescheduled it, or two things that are really quite strategic. I think never feel you can't make a difference if you do it in a positive, constructive way.

CAYT ROWE: Probably some practical ways are things like putting your hand up to be on the staff management joint meetings of some sort, they are often a way to get a really clear pathway into having influence. The other one is also, I think it's sort of touched on, but when you see something that could improve workplace, in a respectful way raise it. I know as an early career researcher, I started having kids 30 something years ago when there was no long daycare. And a couple of us did a survey, gathered information, found that there was a need for it, garnered the input from local council who got a grant, got CSIRO to give us some land and we built a childcare centre. And for the last 30 something years, that's been available to the staff and the community.

CAYT ROWE: And it's something which was a consequence of quite junior staff recognising a need, but going through a very business-like approach and not just sitting around whinging about it. I think quite often people think that if I whinge about it somehow the osmosis will take over and it'll go up the way to the C, C, C office or whatever. So it's a, but it's not that. It's actually being respectful, working out how the system works and how to make sure you can put your voice across in a way that it will be heard. And there's always ways of... Or any research or any workplace usually has a good way of hearing from its staff. Otherwise, it's probably not the place you want to work.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: I agree. Constructive feedback from below will always impress a good boss and they're the ones you want to be working for anyway.

CAYT ROWE: That's actually the truth.

ANDREW CAMPBELL: Thank you very much to all three of you fantastic leaders for sharing your insights with the audience today.

CAYT ROWE: Thanks for having us.

TANYA MONRO: Thank you.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Fantastic conversation there between Andrew Campbell and as I say, three incredibly talented and smart women working in the Australian Public Service, Dr Cathy Foley, Professor Tanya Monro, and Dr Cayt Rowe. And a big thanks to Andrew Campbell for hosting that enlightening conversation. Thanks again to you, the audience for coming back once again to Work with Purpose, we are very grateful for your support. If you do see the social media promotion, please pass it along, acknowledgement, a reference, a pass along, a vote of some sort of acknowledgement always helps and a review, that never goes astray either. So thank you again very much for your support.

DAVID PEMBROKE: A big thanks to IPAA and the Australian Public Service Commission, without their support, Work with Purpose doesn't happen. And to the team at contentgroup who continue to work so hard to find, and not just find the great talent, but to put the programs together. A big thanks to them as well. We'll be back at the same time in two weeks, but for the moment, it's bye for now.

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