

TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

WORK WITH PURPOSE EPISODE #39

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DAVID PEMBROKE: Hello, ladies and gentlemen, 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 as always by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet today, the Nggunawal people, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging, and acknowledge the ongoing contribution they make to the life of our city and this region.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Today, we address an issue that is top of mind for every organisation, be they public, private, or not-for-profit, and that is the future of work. And it's not just here in Australia. The OECD says that the context and challenges of the public sector are changing at such a rapid pace that the capabilities of public servants must keep up. It's a first-order issue as organisations seek to understand just what are the skills, the knowledge, the behaviour, and the attitude that they will need in their people to successfully compete and operate in a digitally-enabled data-led mobile world.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Now, of course, the APS, being the diligent enterprise that it is, has been thinking and planning for many years and recently released the APS Workforce Strategy for 2025, and it's called Delivering for Tomorrow. Now, if you haven't had a chance to read that report, I would commend it to you because what it does do is set out a very clear context, objective, and action plan, and it calls out the specific challenges of attracting, building, and retaining skills, expertise, and talent, embracing data, and technology, and flexible and responsive work models, also strengthening integrity and purposeful leadership.

DAVID PEMBROKE: To discuss the APS Workforce Strategy, I'm joined by Mary Wiley-Smith, who is the Deputy Commissioner of the Australian Public Service Commission, and Clare Walsh, the Deputy Secretary of Business Enabling Services at the Department of Finance too. Mary and Clare, welcome to Work with Purpose.

CLARE WALSH: Thank you very much.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: Thank you.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Now, listen, before we get started, I should declare an interest that contentgroup is currently working with the APSC on what is a very exciting and highly prospective project, the APS Academy which indeed is an important part of the APS workforce strategies. So, I thought in the interest of transparency that I would point out that that is taking place. But Mary, if I might start with you, workforce really is the APSC's core business. So, how challenging is it for the APSC to assemble a workforce that can consistently meet the needs of government and through them, the needs of the Australian people?

MARY WILEY-SMITH: Great question. And I would say that the APSC doesn't do anything by itself, that we're kind of sitting at the heart of the public service, and that we work pretty closely with all of our agencies out there. The Workforce Strategy is, if you like, it's an umbrella for what we need to achieve for the future. And you just went through and listed kind of three focus areas that we're really looking at, at the moment, around data, and digital, attracting and retaining talent, and also really building the leadership qualities that we want for the future with that strong focus on integrity. So, the strategy that the APSC led the development of kind of is the overarching plan, if you like, for what we need to do in the future to ensure that we can continue to deliver for government and also for the Australian people.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: And, the workforce is changing like you've just said. I started 30 years ago and it was certainly a different world. We didn't have internet. And when you look at how we're established, the classifications that we have within the public service, it was all kind of set up back then. And so, it's timely, I think that we look at what we need for the future now and going forward just to make sure that we are fit for purpose. And I know Thodey Review also talked about this and the need for the Workforce Strategy. It is the first Workforce Strategy for the public service, and there's lots of work to be done. One of the first initiatives under it has just been announced, and it's the Hierarchy and Classification review which I think, given that it has been 30 years since we've looked at this issue in detail, pretty important for us to get right, to make sure that we have staff that are engaged, empowered, and ready for the future.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: You also just mentioned the APS Academy. That's another initiative from the Workforce Strategy, and we really want to build that capability of the staff that we have for the future because the APS, like all employees, all employers, I should say, we're only as strong as the staff that we have in the institutions. It's pretty important.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So, if you were to look at those contextual challenges because it's a competitive marketplace out there for skills and again, adapting, changing mindset so people can be agile. Is there any one particular area where you're going to sort of start the work of getting people ready and getting the APS workforce ready to meet the challenges that we know that are coming?

MARY WILEY-SMITH: Yeah. So, one of the key initiatives that I think all agencies will really need to focus on from the strategy is doing their own workforce planning. And we have a centre of excellence within the APSC that can assist them to do it. But as part of that planning, they really need to look at what are the skills they need for the future. And that goes to basically everything that they do on workforce, how they attract their people, how they build their capability. And we know that automation's happening. We know that AI, there's technology changes.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: So, through the work that we're doing in that space and the work with the National Skills Commission, we're working out where we need to reskill people to do other types of activities and other types of jobs, and the good news for the public service is that we've got time to do that, though, we need to start now. So, that will be pretty crucial. And it's something that I know Clare is working with us on through the Chief Operating Officer Committee because they've just agreed, I think at the last meeting, to really focus on doing some skills pilots in agencies so that we can share it with all agencies and see what we need to do because we do need to attract slightly different types of skill sets.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: You just talked about staff that have got very good entrepreneurial kind of skills, people skills, communicating, negotiating. And traditionally, we've been very focused on the analytical skills. They're still important, but we also know that we need specialist skills and experts in particular areas so that we don't have to rely on contractors, and that's pretty important. And I know that the Chief Operating Officer Committee is really focused on this and getting these skills pilots up and running and so that we can all learn from it.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Okay. Well, that'll be interesting to follow. But I've got a list here from a speech that Peter Woolcott made and change leadership, design capability, commercial and business acumen, data analytics, behavioural economics, organisational psychology, Clare, these are different skills that are going to have to be integrated into the public service, and these pilots sound like a pretty smart way to go about that. From your point of view, sitting there at the department of finance, again, you have some responsibilities for whole of government, particularly in areas like procurement, but what do you see as your particular challenges as you're starting to develop your workforce?

CLARE WALSH: In the Department of Finance?

DAVID PEMBROKE: Yeah.

CLARE WALSH: So, I think that it's important to start by saying that or dispelling any sense that we're starting from a zero base.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Yeah, I think.

CLARE WALSH: So, yes, there are these emerging areas that we recognise that we need to upskill in, but that's not to say that we don't have pockets that we can build on and connect across the service. So, before I go directly to your question about the Department of Finance, I think, firstly, some of the work that the APSC has done with this Workforce Strategy is allow us to have a look at the service as a whole and the COO Committee feel more confident, and we're starting this journey, to know where there is actually good practice or things that we can build on and not sort of try and reinvent this in every single department over and over again. So, I think that that's a really important thing for us to do as a service, as well as within our own organisations.

CLARE WALSH: And so, if I think about the Department of Finance, I've only been there just under a year, and it's probably shows my ignorance in admitting that I underestimated the diversity in this portfolio and in the department. And so, we have areas where we need deep expertise. Now, that's in commercial because of the nature of the government business enterprises that we have responsibilities for. It's certainly in budget, but a budget is not really about just numbers, obviously. It's actually being able to see what all the various components of the budget add up to and see across that to see how you put the tapestry together in a way. So, that sophistication is really important.

CLARE WALSH: I mean, I can go through a lot of different areas within the department, but one thing that strikes me is that ability to see where the Australian community wants to go because all we are is conduits of advice that has to be deeply embedded in what the Australian people are looking for and so we need to understand that better. And so, I think our ability to actually connect with community and be able to understand what that means in terms of policy advice and program settings is really important and an area to continue to develop.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So, if the Workforce Strategy, which as I say, and I would encourage people to go and have a look at it because it is very clear articulation of exactly what is needed and what's got to be done, but these are skills that everyone's looking for. This is a hyper-competitive market. Perhaps to you first, Clare, how competitive can the APS be in attracting people to come to work in the APS when there's obvious opportunity for people with these skills in many other places?

CLARE WALSH: So, two things I would say. One is that the APS needs to continue to promote the value proposition of working in the public sector. I think it's risky to assume that the workforce of the future or even the current workforce is going to be incentivized by the competitive wage rates that they might be able to get, say, in the commercial sector. Sure, that's an element, but actually, there's a massive value proposition that attracts people into the public service. And so, I think we need to work with that and understand where and attract those people who actually see that as part of their value in their continued-

DAVID PEMBROKE: It's certainly one of the big global themes, isn't it? Purpose-

CLARE WALSH: Purpose.

DAVID PEMBROKE: ... in work. And obviously, this podcast is Work with Purpose, and really, it does sit centre as a major attractor, and really, the APS, that's what it is. It is work with purpose.

CLARE WALSH: Yeah, and also kind of diversity. Right? You can have a really diverse career, and Mary and I can speak to-

DAVID PEMBROKE: Yeah, I think that's a really good point.

CLARE WALSH: You've got very good skills in an almost general sense that are very applicable in such a wide variety of policy areas, program areas. I think that that's something that we really need to work on. I think where some of our challenges will be, and this is not a comprehensive answer, it's just a provide you an example, I suppose, is in the area of ICT. I think that this is an area that's still, while it's pretty sophisticated, it's still evolving in terms of where that's going to be, what the public service needs, what government needs, and the role that we play. And I think that there's some really interesting challenges for us in that particular part of our workforce.

DAVID PEMBROKE: And can you explain that to me a little bit more in terms of the needs around ICT? Do you see that as difficult to attract or that it's evolving and therefore it's going to require a diversity of skills to enable us to make best use of ICT's advice?

CLARE WALSH: I think both.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Okay.

CLARE WALSH: I think that as we get more digital, more data-driven, more automated in some of the ways that we do functions that traditionally we would have had a person doing, we need people who can think that way. They might not be ICT experts. They're systems thinkers, if you like, to connect to then the capability to build infrastructure in an ICT platform, if you like, of some sort. And then there's the kind of fast-moving environment we work in and the security issues around that. It's pretty complex. And I'm not saying that it's impossible. It's actually really fun to think through these issues. And so, if we can have a value proposition out there that says, "Actually, if you've got these skills, and this is the kinds of in some areas, mind-bending ways of thinking about complexity, here's the place to be. This is what you love doing."

DAVID PEMBROKE: We got plenty of problems. Come and solve them. That's a good point that Clare raised before I think, Mary, around that value proposition to come and work. And again, both of you are great demonstrations of the wonderful careers that you can have in the public service. They're wonderfully diverse and challenging, and every day is a different day across a whole range of different areas. So, why do you think we haven't been good at getting that message across, that people don't see that diversity? Do you think we've just been too busy to tell the story of what is it?

MARY WILEY-SMITH: So, I'm not sure that we've been too busy to tell the story. I think the story is there because we know that we attract amazing graduates and people into the service, including Year 12 leavers that are coming in, and they're high quality. And we know how we benchmark, particularly at our senior leadership level against the private sector and our people are brilliant, and they're really good at what they do in dealing with ambiguity and complexity. We're very lucky because we do attract that talent. I think the issue is that we're not attracting enough talent in particular areas. And Clare went to it with ICT. We've got ICT data and digital are areas where we know we need to really build capability, and we haven't traditionally been doing that and tapping out into the market.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: As you said, there's also a lot of interest from the private sector and other institutions in those types of skills. So, we're going to have to be able to build our own and retain them into the future. And so, I think targeted kind of EVP, employee value propositions, for people in those types of areas is going to be pretty important for us because if we don't build the skills in those areas, we have a bit of a issue within the service because they're the areas where we actually go out to market and we deal with the private sector. It's where sometimes we're procuring large companies to come in and to assist us, and to really interact with the private sector, we need to actually have experts in the service that can actually speak the language and get the most from the private sector. So, for us, that's quite crucial.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: It's also in the ICT space, outsourcing was chosen way many, many years ago. Unfortunately, I'm old enough to remember it all but that was a decision made from previous governments, many previous governments, and I think we've never really caught back up in that space. And so, we do rely heavily on the private sector. For us as agencies, as some senior leaders in the service to make a decision about insourcing, we need to have capability first. So, for me, that's absolutely crucial and we need to tap into what people that are in those sectors really want. And I suspect that it's very similar to what we see overall, and it's about purpose, which you've just gone to. We attract a lot of people in the public service that want to actually serve their government and make a difference. And that's awesome because not many other institutions or employers have that ability to offer that to prospective employees.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: And the other issue is flexibility. And so, we know before COVID, we have 20% of our staff working flexibly. Now with COVID and all businesses basically moving people to working from home, that's going to have to be, I think, part of the mix and part of the value that we can offer in working in the service is continue to actually look at flexible work opportunities. And we know at the moment, I think around 50% of public servants are working flexibly at the moment. And so, really tapping into that and seeing how we can actually bring people in, in those particular areas, I think will be part of what we need to do for the future. And I do know, I think in the Workforce Strategy, it actually talks about EVP and getting out there in these sectors.

CLARE WALSH: Yeah, it does.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Now, both of you played important roles on the COO Committee, which obviously was a key part of the COVID response, the government's COVID response last year. And it was, I think generally recognised the response has been a high watermark really for the APS. It moved quickly, efficiently, effectively into a mobile dispersed digital-first powerhouse, really, in many ways. How do you, particularly as leaders, sustain the change, and that momentum that's been achieved? Clare, to you first.

CLARE WALSH: So, first, I don't want to be thanked or congratulated for work in the COO Committee last year because I wasn't in the COO committee last year-

DAVID PEMBROKE: Yeah, you're quite right.

CLARE WALSH: ... so I don't want to take the credit for other people's, as you say, excellent work. So, in some ways, I've got a perspective to offer because I wasn't there.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Okay.

CLARE WALSH: And I am now been asked to chair the COO Committee at that point of transition where we're coming out of a year of very clear purpose and every incentive to work collaboratively and collectively because every part of the service was challenged with a whole bunch of new staff and to find solutions quickly, and that leads to a lot of reasons to come together and find solutions in a very collaborative way.

CLARE WALSH: So, what the COO Committee now is having a conversation with itself about is okay, what does steady-state look like and how do you not lose all of the positives from last year? And there were some in terms of what we learned about ourselves, but also not if we made some mistakes to learn from those and self-correct, if you like. And so, I think the way that we're thinking about this is what are the enterprise-wide set of issues that unless we all put our heads together to try and work through, we're not going to get optimum outcomes. Now, whether that's looking at how and where will our workforce be operating the next, say, let's pick five years. It seems a good enough number. So, it picks up the issues of flexible work, but it also picks up the issues of location. It picks up community expectations, and staff expectations, and how that's changed, but also all the other issues that come with work health and safety, from security for people and information. There's a whole bunch of really interconnecting set of issues that you just didn't have the last year to think through that level of complexity.

CLARE WALSH: And so, that's actually where the opportunity lies for us now is to actually stand back and say, "Okay, it was great that people learned a whole bunch of lessons by working at home. But then we were all doing that. But did we fully understand every component part if you did this over a long period of time? If it became a more permanent state, then what are all the things we need to think through?" That's where our opportunity is now, I think, and there's lots of other areas. That's just an example.

DAVID PEMBROKE: But then perhaps thinking through is obviously part of it, but then it's how do you keep the system moving? How do you sort of adapt the system in such a way that it can reach this sort of... Because the tempo from what I observe anyway is still pretty high across lots of places. The problems aren't going away. They're quite complex. So, how do you do that thinking at a time where there is still quite a bit of momentum in the system?

CLARE WALSH: Well, I mean, there's no easy answer to that. You just have to make that space and that time because all of us know while you're in the moment, it feels impossible to find that space and time. You know that if you don't, it's only going to get worse in terms of your inability to grab hold of these kind of big issues and run with them. Mary can speak to this because she has been on the COO journey the whole way, but the COO Committee, and look, it's not just the COO Committee that's going to be a part of the answer to this question. But the level of participation, ongoing enthusiasm, desire to be practical. So, the COO Committee, for example, does not see itself as doing a lot of high policy thinking. It's actually like, "No, no, the high policy thinking's been done, actually get it done. How are we going to make this happen?" And so, there's a lot of people around that table that just want to get their teeth into something and get it done, like really, really, very motivated to do that. Right?

DAVID PEMBROKE: Yeah.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: Yeah, they are. And I think the level of collaboration that we've seen across the service, including in the COO Committee, I hope that that continues into the future. And there's a lot of goodwill there and they want that to happen, and there's kind of focus on one APS. So, we're not competing between agencies. We're kind of looking at solutions that will actually benefit the whole of the APS. So, I think that's pretty important. And it's interesting. When you go back and have a look at Thodey Review and the government's accepted recommendations from Thodey, it talked about a whole range of things that they would like to change in the public service.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: Early on in COVID, we paused the Thodey Review and the government's response because we thought we're too busy because all these other things are happening. We need to support the community. In reality, a lot of the future state, which they were talking that they'd like to see, it happened because of COVID and that's that one APS sits, they're working with each other.

CLARE WALSH: The surge.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: It's, yeah, the surge, staff just being mobilised, moving between departments because you needed to actually ensure that we were supporting the community. It just happened. And it's how we capture that into the future, and already, the COO Committee, and also secretaries and agencies are looking at some of these success stories and how we embed them. And one of them is the surge that we saw to Services Australia with 2,000 staff going out at the same time as everybody else was going home to work. You know, they were going out to Tuggeranong to work in a kind of an office. And that goodwill, the work that was done there, that whole of government approach, we want to embed it.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: So, we've now set up a permanent Surge Reserve and already we've had over 2,000 staff put their hand up to say they want to be part of that into the future and all the agencies, all the way through to secretary's board agreeing that this is something that the public service that we need to invest in and make sure it happens for the future. So, it's now kind of being normalised, if you like, but it happened because of COVID and our response.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So, the one APS sort of construct, I think, as a theme is a very interesting theme given that perhaps, traditionally, it may not have been as strong as it is now, and certainly, the focus and the leadership that's being brought around that. And a question to both of you is in your leadership roles, as you look further into the future, what else would you like to see come to life as part of that one APS? Clare, to you first, maybe.

CLARE WALSH: So, given that we're talking about kind of workforce strategy and planning, one of the things that has struck me recently, and in particular, recent conversations around the APS Academy is thinking about an individual's career. So, I recall when I started in the public service, I don't know, 22 years ago. [crosstalk 00:25:48]. Yeah, something like that. I was such a young person. That's not true. I don't think I ever had a conversation with anybody about development and my career, except in the context of the job I was in at the time.

CLARE WALSH: And being able to sort of step back and have many more conversations now about actually, if you're going to spend whatever time you define your career to be, 10 years, 20 years, a lifer, then what does that look like to be the best public servant you can be in serving the Australian people. And that makes you start thinking about the connections across the public service. Right? Because if you're not going to, I don't think the APS person of the future will be the person who stays in the same area, but there's certainly going to be some of that. Right? But I think, well, we're hoping, a lot more mobility. But if you think about that more in terms of your whole career and what that brings both to the public service and to yourself, I think you start thinking about this one APS collectively in a very different way. It sort of generates a momentum around that. That's just, again, a narrow part of the story.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Yeah. No, no.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: Yeah. And I just want to say ditto, and I know Clare and I have talked about this anyway, but this is really crucial, I think. We see so many people, including senior leaders, we have a lot of information on them now and their journey through the public service. Most of the time when they hit a talent assessment, and sometimes that's at the Band 3 level, that's the first time that they've ever stopped, thought about their career, their strengths and weaknesses, where they want to go. And that's pretty shocking because it's kind of like we've failed somewhere along the line because it's okay to develop ourselves and to know who we are, strengths and weaknesses, and what we need to do to actually build our capability over time and to be the best that we can be, and that hasn't been happening. And so, we can see that, and so we hope that that will actually be different in the future, and that is part of the work that the academy will be focusing on.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: But I don't know if going out to the private sector, they would be shocked if they saw the comparison. And I think even going back to Thodey Review, I think the private sector members of that panel were very shocked at how much money and investment we put into development of capability of our people which are our greatest asset. It was minuscule. And so, there's a bit of a problem there. And hopefully, the future will look very different.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Well, I suppose, the first step to resolution is to identify these quite specific things because it's new types of skills, it's new mindsets, and it's really, this whole thing over career management, that would be a great innovation into the public service to create value for people over time. Wouldn't it?

CLARE WALSH: Also, I think increasingly, we're understanding that this artificial differentiation we've had between oh, I'm a policy person, I'm a program person, I'm a regulator, it's not like these are unconnected pieces of the work that we do. You can't do good program if you don't have good policy. You can't do good policy if you don't understand how program work. You can't really do international policy if you don't connect that to domestic and vice versa. The world is getting smaller and smaller in many ways. And our ability to be able to traverse across all of that and comprehend it means we need perspective and you kind of don't get perspective just by sort of staying in one area or doing one kind of skill and just honing that particular skill.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Well, what do you need from the men and women in the APS who are listening to this podcast? What did they need to do to play their part? Again, you're at that strategic leadership level at the top, and we'll come to that question of leadership in more detail just in a moment, but what do you need from people in order to make this change, to create this new reality? Mary, I'll go to you first.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: Good. I'm watching Clare's face here. We're both kind of looking at each other. I actually think that we need to give our staff permission to really focus on what they need to actually build their capability and to have a career in the public service, and I suspect that's not there. I think from the engagement that I've had to date with a lot of people coming through some of our leadership courses and talent programs, they're very focused on doing the job at hand, and delivery, and what they need to get done in a day. And they're not focused on themselves, and they're our greatest asset. And so, somehow allowing them to be able to focus and understand that that's part of what they need to do as a good public servant is to actually think about their own development and capability, and their career, and where they want to head, and why. I think that's probably the most important thing that we as leaders can do for them. And the most important thing that they can do is actually take up that offer and really look at what they want to do.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: A lot of people in public service just go to different jobs because they're asked to. I think that people need to take a bit of ownership of their own career and really think about who they are as individuals, what's important to them, what are their values, and what they want to achieve during their career, and actually, they should be in the driver's seat.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Do you think they also have a responsibility to step into some of this opportunity, and to have ideas, and to innovate, and to push forward rather than sitting and waiting, and being perhaps static rather than contributing? Clare?

CLARE WALSH: Well, of course. You always want any workforce to be one that's engaged and enthusiastic, and people tend to be engaged and enthusiastic where they see opportunity to contribute. So, any organisation should have a culture where that is valued. But to add on to Mary's comment just now, I think the other thing that I would encourage anyone in the APS to think about is to continue to focus on their engagement and curiosity with external parties where expertise lies. Now, that is both in terms of private sector industry, non-government enterprises, community groups who actually live and breathe this thing whatever it is on the daily basis. How do we feel confident in the advice that we give to government that we are drawing on a really diverse set of skills and experience that isn't just the public service one? Now we've always done this. I'm not saying this is a new thing that's revolutionary, but I just think it's something we need to continue honing and doing really well is being able to harness that expertise.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Just a final sort of topic before we close out, and it's around leadership and the importance of leadership through an organisation, not just the people that sit at the top. What are your views on what needs to happen around leadership inside the APS in order for it to achieve this one APS high-performing status, whether it is delivering across a range of skills, motivated staff? How do we get leadership really embedded into the work that is happening on a daily basis?

CLARE WALSH: Well, I guess my starting point would be that to be a really good leader in the APS, and regardless of what level you're at, I don't think leadership starts, as you said, at a certain classification, is seeing yourself not just a leader in your work unit or your department even. It's actually, what does leadership mean more broadly across the public service? So, when you think about whatever you're doing in your place of work, your point of time, stepping back, seeing a broader perspective, and connecting with it because I think a lot of leadership is confused with management, and actually, I wanted to sort of separate that out and say actually leadership is being able to stand back, see a broader perspective, provide vision and guidance if you like, and, yeah, see beyond yourself and see yourself as part of something bigger.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Okay. Mary?

MARY WILEY-SMITH: Yeah, I agree with Clare. And if you have a look at, even like in the Public Service Act what it says about the SES cohort and what they were established to do, it's actually the system-wide leadership. And so, it's really important that we do focus on that, particularly at the senior leadership cohorts.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: But for me, it's actually as a leader in the public service, I think it's about empowering your staff. And so, really pushing down responsibility, enabling them to grow, helping them with their challenges and guiding them, but not stepping in and doing it, and focusing on their capability and how you build it. And we know that sometimes that doesn't happen, unfortunately, and that risk is kind of elevated, but I think that they're an amazing resource for the future. We need to really focus on them. And unless we, as leaders, take responsibility and make sure that we're there to nurture and to nourish that capability, build for them, I think that the public service, the stewardship won't look as good as it could. And we've got to think about the future as leaders, and that means that we're actually building the people that we're working with.

DAVID PEMBROKE: A final question on indulgence. And it's a personal question to both of you, really. How are you feeling? When you look at this, this is a big, big task. It's not going to happen in five minutes. There's lots to do. And as you say, you could break this down. But how personally are you feeling about it? Because I get quite jazzed about all of this. I think that if you can get this sorted, you can improve the performance and then deliver for the Australian people. It's such a great thing to be involved in. You must feel the same way. You must feel excited by the prospect.

CLARE WALSH: Absolutely, absolutely. You're right. And often, sometimes looking back gives you perspective. So, you look back at 20 years ago and think about the kind of workforce we were, and what we were focused on, and what's actually been achieved in that period of time, it gives you a lot of enthusiasm, actually, what can be continued to be pushed. One of the areas that I think we need to do better on, and I think that we've got this great run-up to it, and we've done some fabulous work is around diversity. If I think about the departments I worked in of old, they don't look the same now, particularly from a gender perspective and seniority, particularly with gender, but there's more to do in other areas. But I just think that there's a much better understanding of that and a much greater expectation from Australians that the public service represents Australia. And I just think that there's a massive piece of work and that's where I feel really enthusiastic, that actually, we've got some opportunity in that space.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Excellent. Mary?

MARY WILEY-SMITH: So, I'm feeling upbeat about it. I actually think that we've got a lot of support across the system for reform and to make a difference. And the fact that you've got all agencies kind of signing up to Workforce Strategy, the academy, and kind of thinking about the future and what we need to do together, I think that's an opportunity that we've just got to take. And so, for me, all the things that we know we need to do, we've probably known about those things for probably 15 years. There's probably three or four reviews there that all have very similar recommendations about the future of the service.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: But I think at the moment, we've got the right climate and we've got the right support to be able to really make a difference and see some of these initiatives through. The fact that we're even doing the Hierarchy and Classification review at the moment, that's huge because that's really looking at how you empower staff and the levels in the service. Depending on where they end up, that could actually have quite a big transformation impact on the service and how we operate into the future. It's an exciting time.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Just quickly, could you just explain what that impact might be?

MARY WILEY-SMITH: So, the Hierarchy and Class review is looking at the classifications within the service. So, APS 1 to 6, EL 1s, EL 2s, SES, and looking at is that actually what we need right now for the future. And we know that the private sector have been doing this and looking at how they're structured. And so, for us, we're looking at fundamentally how we're structured. And that goes to how we operate, how we delegate. It goes to empowering staff. So, instead of actually clearing a brief, for example, through three or four levels, perhaps it's just two people.

MARY WILEY-SMITH: And so, I think the opportunities there are fantastic, and I would encourage anyone that's listening to get involved with that review. There's information on the APSC's website. So, I'm doing a plug for it now. And get engaged. We have Finn Pratt, Heather Smith, so both ex-secretaries, and also Kathryn Fagg from the private sector all working on this at the moment. It's an independent review. But that's just one of many things that are happening across the service at the moment, and I just think it's a really exciting time with a lot of support and momentum for change.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Well, Mary, Clare, thank you for your service. And ladies and gentlemen, as you hear every week on Work with Purpose, I think we are in great hands when we have leaders such as Mary and Clare leading the charge, really, around this transformation. And I think this is something that it's real, it's possible, it can happen on a daily basis, and really, the benefits are there and the benefits are obvious. Thanks again for tuning in, as always, a big thanks to you for doing that. And if you do see the social media promotion for Work with Purpose, a like, a share, a comment, a review, something like that, but push it around. It's an important conversation that we've just had today so let's make sure that as many people as possible hear what the leaders of the public service are talking about today.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Thanks also to IPAA, as always, for their ongoing support for Work with Purpose, and also to the Australian Public Service Commission has been a great supporter of Work with Purpose since day one. Thanks also to the team at contentgroup who work very hard to get this program to air every week. So, that's it for this episode of Work with Purpose. We'll be back at the same time in a fortnight, but for the moment, it's bye for now.

VOICEOVER: Work with Purpose is a production of contentgroup in partnership with the Institute of Public Administration Australia, and with the support of the Australian Public Service Commission.