

How do you think a stronger culture of innovation can be fostered?

Currently the Public Service is dysfunctional. It exists too often for purely political purposes, contrary to its assertion that it is "apolitical". There are people in the PS that are totally overworked, yet others are completely underworked and underdeveloped. They lie languishing in a pool of red tape, excessive over-management, political concerns at the expense of more important concerns and a truly vast hierarchy that is sure to filter out the slightest idea of innovation or improvement. Add to that a siloed, process-driven, departmentalised, and non-standardised approach to everything, including its own IT and HR systems and you are left with a demoralised work force that lacks any sense of empowerment or ownership.

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What can be done to improve the PS and inculcate a culture of innovation?

1) Flatten the PS management hierarchy - eliminate "divisions" and "branches", reduce management especially SES and EL1 and 2's, create more meaningful and functional sections, as well as much larger sections with more APS level staff. This will create a more direct link between APS staff (that do the work), give them more opportunity to do more meaningful work and provide more functional, relevant and clearer purpose for each section. No section should have less than 10-15 employees, with one EL1 per section. I am not specifically referring to Comcare but rather past PS experience.

2) Clarify roles within the PS. Create a database of job descriptions, expectations for each job and for each level. Too often staff are confused about what it is they are supposed to be doing and management are equally unclear. These new job descriptions should be equal across the entire PS. "Policy Officers" for example should not end up doing 70% of their work on contracts, for example, i.e. their job title should be accurate.

3) Policies and procedures for HR, OHS, performance reviews, salaries, leave entitlements, etc etc should be standardised across the entire PS. It is ridiculous the one Department has a different OHS procedure, for example, than another. Linked to this is the importance of a single Collective Agreement for the entire PS.

4) IT systems, software, resources should be the same across the entire PS. Why should one department be using software with a better capability than another?

5) Training and development. Clearly this is currently handled on an "as needed" basis, i.e. according to the management discretion and budgetary concerns, not even on shallow departmental concerns. Surely, all staff, for example, should be entitled to the same training and development to bring them up to standards? There should be consistent policies and procedures on this across the entire PS. Why does one department/division/branch/section/person (yes it happens!) pay 100% for someone to get a degree yet if someone wants OH&S training to be an Inspector, for example, suddenly it "is not in

the budget". What a surprise that some staff perform better than others.

6) Management training - Management, i.e. EL1's and above should all be subject to special communication training emphasising the need to communicate effectively to their staff. Likewise, selection criteria and interviews for new staff should significantly emphasise communication testing - special tests for management candidates should be devised to test their actual, not just their stated, communication abilities. Too many managers in the PS are very poor communicators, petty, unfair, concerned only with pleasing their immediate supervisor and not with staff.

7) Create a CEO-level "Innovation Officer" to review all initiatives, with equal powers to the CEO, to require innovation for all initiatives? All processes should also be reviewed internally to require innovation.

8) The Open Office concept restricts and does not encourage openness, frank and fearless" advice.

9) The Freedom of Information Act needs to be amended to take away most of its exceptions to disclosure - on the one hand the government wants to disclose information then on the other hand it says it won't for what looks like almost everything!! What happened to transparency?

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§ What can be done to bring the workforce development approach of the APS up to the level of the best organisations globally?

In addition to the above suggestions,

1) The HR function should be based on consistent and standardised policies and procedures for the entire PS. Things like contract management, instead of being run on a section by section basis using a word template partially filled out with legalese, can be web-based, standardised and automated to allow for alerts to the correct staff to manage. The fact is, APS level staff in each section for example are being asked to manage increasingly complex and time consuming contracts which can be run from a central point much more smoothly and automating many of the tasks. There are literally hundreds of contracts being run separately and many of which are being neglected (i.e. not being managed at all). There are simply too many contracts floating about with no one clear about how to run them or manage them properly, despite internal "contract management" courses given out selectively. Most managers in the PS have no idea on how contracts should be run. This is a situation begging for a colossal error to occur.

Why not have the Public Service Commission empowered, properly staffed and assisting the entire PS running HR, creating PS-wide policies and procedures? What is the point of having a Public Service Commission if it can't do these things?

2) Courses currently being offered should be assessed for their effectiveness and value for staff. Does the "Contract Management" course being run, for example, truly assist staff in running their contracts? Given the massive and excessive volume of contracts, I think not.

3) The government over-relies on contracting out to do its work, run its programs and do studies. Why can't the government do its own work instead of contracting out? Question - just how many contracts does the government "run" every year? Answer - in the thousands!!! (Literally). No one actually knows the answer to this (shockingly). Yet are they all run in the same way and consistently? Efficiently? Who knows? Is contracting truly cost-effective? Has anyone studied this? Better contract that one out to find out....

The same is true for the government's over-reliance on contract staff. How can staff be innovative or developed when they are always worrying about their contracts' ending?

4) Training and development - I can't emphasise enough how important consistent, quality, relevant training for ALL staff, not just a select few - consistently applied for the entire PS. Clearly currently it is unfairly applied. Divergent Collective Agreements need to be amalgamated. Simple things like induction are not even done for all staff currently.

5) Performance expectations - performance expectations should be clear, in writing, standardised, fair and understood. Staff should have the opportunity to have input into them of at least 50%, not just "Please sign this since you are required to as a job requirement".

6) Many departments appear to be doing the same thing with only different views, i.e. the Department of the Environment and the Department of Climate Change and the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism - surely these could be amalgamated for example?

7) Many quasi government agencies work with/for the actual government creating further confusion, e.g. Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and research and the Australian Research Council? CSIRO? ANSTO? Universities? Surely there is scope to make more sense from this chaotic scene?

8) Involve lower level staff in decision making more, even for "policy concerns". Currently, only upper level, mostly SES level management, do decision making, particularly internal decision making like decisions on staffing, hiring, promoting, too often on a very subjective basis. Consistent HR policies and procedures for the entire PS will help, but clearer written directions for staff - all staff - will help also. Not long ago, many PS jobs used to have "industrial democracy" as a selection criteria - i.e. demonstrate examples of "industrial democracy"? This is another example of the government "speaking with forked tongue". Maybe it is time to actually practice as an example to others "industrial democracy" instead of merely asking others to provide examples of it? I notice more recent selection criteria no longer lists this as a category - I wonder why?

Thanks

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