

Dear Mr. Moran
Dear Advisory Group members

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to express suggestions of how to improve the professionalism, efficiency and effectiveness of the Australian Public Service (APS).

Many others have already contributed. Many of the suggestions are common sense, and getting the most qualified people a voice in decisions. Fixing communication issues. I hope things move in that direction. Departments that invest in 'Organic' growth need to be rewarded. Project end dates should be fixed based on existing resource capability.

Knowledge is power. Presently most departments deliberately do not allow blogs, or cripple who can participate. And they make sure there is no moderation system, so that popular ideas can be ignored. I strongly recommend that Web II be opened up, so that there is a starting point - a birthplace for innovation. One way to get quick wins in, is to enable Web II collaboration. Please ensure that is done properly, openly and sustained -not shut down or made difficult to use. At least this way, some strategic knowledge will flow.

The core issue is personal accountability, or rather lack of it. There has been an unfortunate trend to get rid of details - never mind the technical details - and run with just hope and enthusiasm. Bad decisions, bad planning - lead to poor outcomes.

In the last decade, SES has neglected staff development and stifled opportunity by importing hoards of consultants and outsourced providers. They have lost strategic judgment. It seemed expedient to bring in external talent to execute a project or initiative, and not have to bother about staff development.

Nearly 100% of project schedules nowadays, are drawn up to meet a political or self serving deadline, and everything worked from some dreamed up target date - 'down', then bits of the project go red, then code brown, because the details were never actually looked at, nor was there genuine, ground level consultation.

By and large, experienced staff has no input to 'Big Ticket' projects that develop a life of their own. When bad ideas turn sour, costs blowout, the blame management process come into play, where consultants and providers can be blamed. Strategic values would shift strongly, if the decision maker was made personally accountable. Presently they game the system, and can say 'Oh the committee agreed'.

Many people have identified deficiencies yet nothing seems actually done. 'Frank and fearless' seems out, or circumvented. Therefore it follows that SES leadership is wanting, especially in the strategic area. The 'fix' is surprisingly simple - trim down senior level consultants / advisors, project managers. Finance has already identified this area has 'grown' - so is due for a haircut. It would also appear, once consultants come in the door, and they gain favor, SES positions are created for them to step into.

The Department of Finance is also guilty of being too smart. One of their tricks is to approve a project, approve the money, then tell them not to start the project now, but in four months time. They then say, oh, you only need 16 months of money, we have just 'saved' four months worth, which we keep, and you adjust your project schedule. Obviously Finance has no idea of the cost/time/quality triangle. Or they do, but don't care.

The end result is orgy of spending and buying in what's available to give effect to the project/program, and in the rush, quality and staff development go out the window. When

the project goes over budget, another round of cutbacks is imposed, and staff development gets the chop. The consultants that advised 'things will be tight' move on to another client.

Before Finance begins another round of cutbacks, they should link it with the growth in staff capability, able to step into the saving created by trimming top level. When departments cry out they don't have the right mix of staff, SES need to be directly questioned on staff development.

One idea would be to allow easy rotation between departments. Presently some permanent staff are threatened or otherwise induced to stay put, because it is too hard to rotate someone else into the vacated position. Therefore, training, staff agility, and opportunity - become the vector of change. The APS culture will need adjusting too. Presently some cash strapped departments are advertising for rotations within existing BSL's, which is a poor and cynical practice

Focusing on Strategic matters.

Strategic skill is earned and gained through hard experience. Most SES confuse operational with strategic.

They also don't realise by outsourcing the high value work, their own department will become enfeebled and reliant on outside providers, who nearly always have a vested interest.

Management may feel lost if all their props and consultants were removed. Their main strategic concern, is not copping another arbitrary budget cut, is surviving . On one hand, they work hard, and have a lot on their plate. On the other, 60% of staff say their managers will not promote ideas. Until this communication gap is honestly addressed, bad strategic decisions will be made in isolation to actual capacity and capability to execute business requirements. Managers who say yes, and promise things, then consult later, need to be made responsible.

Elimination of Waste.

Web II enablement, will help common sense prevail over policy and gross over simplifications. It will improve accountability, and be a good means in selecting those with superior strategic capability.

It is too much to hope for, that all documents will be indexed and findable with say, Google or the like, but it would be nice. Eventually the big ticket items will be properly researched and planned in the right timeframe. Some of the more recent projects were not successful - but also the 'lessons learned' were not passed on.

Conclusion.

There are no easy cuts or savings to be made in this review. All the prior budget cuts and 'haircuts' means things are running quite leanly. Many departments are thrashing - not enough resources, but too scared to ask for more. Money spent on removing unproductive thrashing and fixing problems through initiatives would be a good start.

Training up people to replace non full time employees - and ramping up strategic capability, as well as rotation money is another worthwhile direction. The skilling of technical people and specialists will go a long way to repair what's been allowed to be run-down.

Agility and innovation needs to be targeted at problems identified by front line staff, and not

down from the top.

This is not new - if it does not turn into another whitewash project.