



Trailblazing with
 CorbettPrice



Series 2 - Embracing organisational change

Trailblazing with CorbettPrice Podcast – Series 2, Episode 4

Transcription

INTRO: Welcome to Trailblazing with CorbettPrice, where we present new and fresh perspectives that challenge how you approach change to solve some of the biggest challenges faced by business and government leaders today. Here's our host, Andy Corbett, to introduce the fourth episode in our series on embracing organisational change.

ANDY CORBETT: Hi everyone. I'm Andy Corbett, Managing Director of CorbettPrice. We hope that you've been enjoying our second podcast series on embracing organisational change, where we've spoken with trailblazers on important transformational changes that leaders need to embrace to succeed now and into the future.

Last week we were joined by Julie Etchells, who's the Chief Human Resources Officer for the Department of Child Safety, Seniors, and Disability Services for the Queensland Government. Julie shared her valuable perspectives based from her long career working for the Queensland Government, and offered advice on how public sector organisations' can come closer to realising diversity, equity and inclusion aspirations, and how they can do this through closing the gaps and creating inclusive workplaces where employees feel valued and importantly, feel safe to contribute and be their authentic selves.

In our fourth episode, we're continuing to explore an underpinning theme across many of our episodes, which is about empowering employees, and more specifically in today's episode, how we can attract, retain, and reduce attrition in today's new talent game. As we await the results of the APS 2023 Census, the [June 2022 APS Census](#) revealed that a third of APS employees were unhappy with their working conditions, with 70% wanting to leave within the next two years. And from conversations we had with the public sector professionals across Australia, it became clear that

there was a strong correlation between employee experience and retention, with leaders noting that they needed to look for ways to bridge the gap between employee expectations and employer needs.

[McKinsey and Company](#) produced a compelling view into Australian public sector employees late last year, and the report found that the top five work related factors for talent leaving the public sector were:

1. A lack of career development,
2. A lack of meaningful work,
3. Uncaring leadership,
4. Inadequate compensation, and,
5. Workplace inflexibility.

On the flip side, the five key factors for employees staying in their jobs were:

1. Workplace flexibility,
2. Meaningful work,
3. Adequate compensation,
4. Career development, and finally,
5. Geographic ties.

So how can we keep our top performing talent, attract new talent, and meet future workforce needs? Here to help us discuss these important questions is Tina McAllister. Tina is the Acting Director for People and Culture at the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in the Queensland Government. Tina has over 15 years of its senior experience managing talent and employee experience across the Department of Transport and Main Roads, and the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services. Thank you so much for joining us today on the podcast, Tina.

TINA MCALLISTER: Oh, you're welcome, Andy. It's really good to be here. Thank you.

ANDY CORBETT: Good, good. All right, let's get into it, then, shall we? So, my first question, Tina, is this concept of the great attrition. And as you know, there's lots of research and discussion around the great attrition, especially within the Australian Public Service. In your extensive experience working with talent for the Queensland Government, what do you think it is that employees want?

TINA MCALLISTER: I think, Andy, there's lots of points of data that inform us what people want. There's been discussions about employee opinion surveys and they provide us with insights in that regard. I suppose the thing is that process is crucial and it is only as effective to the point of how well the questionnaire is designed. If we look at the Queensland public sector results from last year, what we hear, and it's an ongoing one, is red tape is an issue, people actually want to feel safe in the workplace, and they're also wanting flexibility. So, I think those are the things that are crucial to attracting and engaging employees moving forward.

The other thing that my team recently led an employee value proposition project and that afforded us the ability to have really one-to-one conversations with a significant number of employees and there were also a number of focus groups held. And so you get that qualitative piece of information coming through about what employees want, which is quite different to, I suppose, a survey process. And what we heard is, and particularly for Gen Z, they're wanting to work for an organisation that has purpose that they feel connected to and to make a contribution. If we look at our long held theories about what motivates people, it's that they want to feel connected to what they're doing and that touches into that intrinsic point within us about, well, I'm doing this because it actually gives me a sense of purpose and I'm doing it just for the sake of that it actually makes me feel good. Connecting in with that purpose, I think that's a big piece to building an attractive employee proposition as well. The other piece that came through is around quality leadership. And I suppose what we know is people feel inspired by leaders who are interested in them. So it's that ongoing connection, again, connection to purpose. And I think it's incumbent upon leaders to actually articulate that and support that understanding in their teams about how the work that they're doing contributes to broader purpose.

ANDY CORBETT: That's great. You mentioned before around the idea of doing one-on-one interviews and the power of the qualitative research and the qualitative understanding as to how employees feel and what they value. For those people who just feel a survey is good enough, what would you say to them? What would you say are there challenges and risks of just taking an approach which is just survey-only, rather than actually having these in depth conversations on a one-on-one basis to really understand the nuance, I suppose, of some of those values that people have and their needs and what they want from their job.

TINA MCALLISTER: I think Andy, I also want to be clear that there is a place for surveys and undertaking, you know, employee value proposition project is actually quite labour intensive and there needs to be, I suppose, an organisational commitment to that investment and it's not something that you do ongoing. I think this is where the role of the manager comes in so that quantitative piece can come in in the day-to-day work. It's the relationship that the team member has with their manager, supervisor, or leader that can actually bring that out. We all want a sense of affiliation, of relatedness and also to have autonomy. And the other piece that people are wanting is flexibility. And I think flexibility speaks to providing people more autonomy in their lives.

In terms of a commitment to that, I appreciate that not all organisations' might be in a position to do an employee value proposition project. I will say there's significant value in doing it though, particularly in contributing to developing an attraction strategy and understanding what keeps your people with you because you want to do more of that, and I would say that a point in time it would be helpful for organisations' to do that maybe every two to three years, that process. And also just as important, is to develop managers and leaders to have an engaging, people-centric style of leadership, so that they're learning on the ground every day what motivates their people, what work they're interested in. People are retained through doing interesting work.

ANDY CORBETT: Absolutely. I think, as you say, it's not always feasible for everyone to do it. But obviously there's a lot of value, if you can, to go that step further and have those one-on-one conversations. And it's something that doesn't need to be happening all the time. But it's good to

have to refresh that and really sort of understand the depths of detail required to truly understand what it is that your employees want, because, if you don't know what your employees want, then you don't really know then how to actually address those needs. And I think, as we know, people are like, the greatest asset of any organisation. So I think it's really important personally to go that step further and go beyond the survey, if it is feasible to do so.

TINA MCALLISTER: Yeah, absolutely. And that two-prong approach. You could have a dedicated project; employee value proposition discovery, and then developing your leaders to actually continue that on a day-to-day basis to build that culture of engagement with employees.

ANDY CORBETT: Yeah, that's great. That question was really around understanding what our employees want, and you picked up some really great examples there of the key things that they're looking for. I guess the next question now is how do we actually then meet those needs? And in our last podcast series, we spoke with [David Powell](#) about the concept of a contribution agreement between employees and employers. And just to explain the concept, what this was looking at was customers from outside an organisation and people that employees serve inside the organisation. So then determining how the employee will contribute to their organisation's success and vision, and then, in turn, how the organisation will contribute to the employee's capabilities.

So, Tina, what are your thoughts on this type of contract or agreement? And my second question is, do you feel like the APS, Australian Public Service, is moving towards more of a two-way collaborative agreement with employees?

TINA MCALLISTER: Andy I can speak to the Queensland public sector, and certainly in the Queensland public sector, we are, we've actually just had a new [Public Sector Act](#) come into play this year, in March it was released. We had already been going in the direction of what we term positive performance management, which is about those ongoing discussions, which is about ascertaining from employees, where their interests lie and what development they need to achieve that, and also in the context of what the sector needs to deliver. And I suppose what we need to remember first and foremost is we are here to serve. We are here to serve the community and the public and that work all needs to be delivered within the frameworks of integrity, ethics, and our codes of conduct. I mean, that really is how we do our work, underpinned by those principles and behaviours. But certainly the Queensland Public Service is moving towards it.

We haven't called it a contribution agreement, but it certainly aligns to those principles that David spoke about. I think, you know, when we look at that, it's actually founded on very good psychological principles of organisational behaviour and human engagement. To have a high performing team, you need to understand what motivates your people. To understand what motivates your people, you need to have regular conversations. And as a leader, it's about recognising your team's strengths and interest and where you can direct projects towards those people to bring the best out in them and to give them a sense of self-efficacy that they're contributing well. And they're feeling rewarded by their work just by the pure engagement of it because it sings their tune, it helps them walk the beat of their own drum within a public sector context. So it's about the skill of the manager and leader, I think. And I suppose what we see is there's always room for us to improve in how we engage our people.

ANDY CORBETT: Yeah, that's great. Where do you think there might be the biggest room for improvement, do you think?

TINA MCALLISTER: I think for people who and this is age-old Andy, I'm not going to be saying anything that seasoned HR practitioners don't know already. It's that universal piece around technical experts being promoted to leadership roles. And I suppose providing an opportunity for those people to understand the value of being a people-centric leader in the context of their technical expertise. I think that's where the sweet spot is. If we could do that, I think we would be a high performing public sector.

ANDY CORBETT: Yeah, excellent.

TINA MCALLISTER: But not sort of a new thing. I think a lot of HR peeps would probably be nodding their heads at that one.

ANDY CORBETT: Yeah, absolutely. In the intro to this particular episode, I quoted [McKinsey research](#) which was all around the talent in the Australian Public Service. And within that research, workplace flexibility was the top factor for why talent stayed in the public sector. And workplace inflexibility was also the fifth factor in why employees left the public sector. So as we move out of COVID conditions, that set most of us working remotely at home and, you know, how should we manage employee expectations around working from the office versus working from home?

TINA MCALLISTER: That's a really good question, Andy. And I think you know, prior to COVID, at least, the Queensland public sector was very advanced with respect to flexibility. We had telecommuting as far back as 2005, and we also have other flexible work arrangements. We have leave at half pay, we've got part time work arrangements, we've got flex time, and I think other jurisdictions also have those things. Now, post COVID, the private sector has caught up with us. So it's important for us to highlight the additional pieces to flexibility beyond telecommuting, because there are many within the public sector.

In terms of the balance of people wanting to work from home, more often than not, I suppose one of the things that the Queensland public sector has done is they've brought in, an organised sector framework, FlexConnect. And what it's really looking at is balancing all the needs between teams, individuals, customers, leaders and organisations', just to create the best flexible option, flexible enough to create a happy medium. I suppose what that speaks to is it's a give and take situation. And I think it's also about listening to the particular employee in what their needs are and then working with that within the team context and the service delivery or business unit's deliverables context. I think for some people, particularly if they tend to be more introverted, that the workplace can actually create a lot of distractions for them.

And I suppose what we also saw is productivity increased phenomenally throughout COVID. So I think it's also important to bear that in mind, and to work within the framework that's available to us and having a framework is helpful. And as I was saying before, having those managers work with their people to define what is best for individual, team, business unit and organisation. I think there will be a greater call for more and more flexibility though moving forward and it's something that the sector will need to grapple with.

ANDY CORBETT: Yeah. It's definitely not easy, is it?

TINA MCALLISTER: No, it's not. It's a complex equation.

ANDY CORBETT: Yeah, that's great. Thanks, Tina. It's certainly something that a lot of the people that we work with are certainly trying to balance. And I think it really heavily depends on a number of different factors. There's no one approach, there's no blanket approach to this at all, is there?

TINA MCALLISTER: I think that's actually spot on, Andy. There is no blanket approach and it's about applying situational thinking within a framework to support employees as best we can while meeting our obligations as a public service.

ANDY CORBETT: That's great. We are approaching the end of the episode now, Tina, but before we let you go today, I just wanted to ask you one more question, and that question is related to this idea of internal mobility in the Australian Public Service. So pointing back to some more research here, so [LinkedIn's 2023 Workplace Learning Report](#) provided an insight into how employees at the two-year mark who had made an internal move were 75% more likely to stay with their company than those who hadn't. So does internal mobility play a role in retaining employees? And if it does, how do you plan and allow for it with your employees?

TINA MCALLISTER: Yeah, I think that's really interesting data and it makes sense to me that circa that two-year mark and a change at that juncture would support retention because I suppose a change in role, not always, but in a lot of cases reinvigorates us. There's new learning, there's new connections, an increased network and it's beneficial to the person in their career development and to the organisation. So, it was good data to see and it makes sense to me intrinsically that rings true.

At DAF (Department of Agriculture and Fisheries), we certainly support internal mobility through a number of different mechanisms including those traditional mechanisms that other jurisdictions would also appreciate with secondment and things like that. We're also, like I mentioned before that positive performance management process and learning what our team members' aspirations are can give us the insights that we need to support that mobility across the organisation. So you know, I know this particular person is interested in doing this type of work but I think broader than that it's about setting up systems within an organisation that allow for the development of sprint teams for example.

And one of the things that we're going to be moving forward with at DAF within our learning management system, we have a module that's yet to be developed that we'll call Knowledge Bank or Evidence Bank and what that will do will allow people to include in that learning management system their skills, their experience. And so when there's a short-term deliverable that needs to be delivered upon and we need to pull a team together that managers will be able to search that system to be then able to pull a sprint team together. So we see that as a way of developing people allowing them to make broader connections across the organisation.

The other thing that we have is within our Grad program, we have rotations, so that also supports our new grads and early career entrants to develop a network across DAF and to also develop

different schools across their rotations, and then sector-wide, there has been in the past and certainly some consideration for having talent mobility across the senior executives to do interchanges and things like that, which probably other jurisdictions have undertaken already as well. But certainly there's a place for mobility and I do see that it contributes to retention. Its supports revitalisation of people's interest and passion and being able to contribute in a more expanded way, whether it be a secondment, or a new role, or whatever it might be.

ANDY CORBETT: Yeah, excellent. Love that answer. Thanks, Tina. And unfortunately, we have now come to the end of the episode, but just want to say thank you very much for coming on the podcast, Tina. I really appreciate that, making the time out of your busy day to do that, and wonderful insights there, which I'm sure all our listeners, will really benefit from. So, a huge thank you to you today for coming on, and it'd be great to have you on again in a future series.

TINA MCALLISTER: Thanks so much, Andy.

ANDY CORBETT: We hope you enjoyed listening to Tina today and found her insights valuable. A full transcript of this episode is available to download from our website, which is www.corbettprice.com.au/podcast, that's www.corbettprice.com.au/podcast . Join us next week as we are joined by Pia Andrews to discuss our final transformational change of adopting new technologies responsibly. Thanks for listening. Goodbye.