

Recipient of the IPAA WA 2021 National Conference Young Professional Scholarship, **Michelle Bye**, reviews her attendance at the 2021 IPAA National Conference.

I was fortunate enough to attend the 2021 IPAA National Conference from 29 – 30 November 2021 as the recipient of the 2021 IPAA WA Young Professional Scholarship. The Conference, titled 'Riding the wave of service transformation', analysed a year of tumultuous change in which governments were front and centre. The conference was affected directly by the pandemic as it was rescheduled from mid-October to late-November and with constant border closures, I was able to attend virtually, from my office in Perth.

As the pandemic took hold in early 2020, the Conference examined how communities looked to their governments to protect their health and provide for their economic security.

Around the globe, governments accelerated the delivery of digital contactless services, data analytics was elevated with greater sharing and use of real-time data to inform policy, collaboration across organisations and sectors occurred more quickly for greater community impact, and in countries where the health pandemic was better managed, the public's trust in government rose to levels not seen for decades.

The question posed to us was: in this hyperconnected world, can governments keep up with the rapid changes in technology and the ever-rising demands from communities for highly personalized 24/7 services?

How well positioned are Australian public sectors to ride this wave of extraordinary change and further advance service transformation for communities and democratic governance?

I was grateful for the opportunity to hear from leading professionals on Conference themes.

The Conference opening session included a moving welcome to country, address from **Dr Gordon de Brouwer PSM**, IPAA National President and an address from **Chris Peck**, Executive General Manager, Public Services Australia, SAP.

Dr de Brouwer summarised this well with 'What a year for service transformation', recognising what we've been through over the past 18 – 24 months and stating that 'public service is such a wonderful vocation' which helped bring all attendees back to our purpose and the bigger picture.

Chris Peck told attendees SAP's support of IPAA is an opportunity for them to better understand government, giving them an opportunity to join discussions and debates.

'Service transformation – the future is here' by **Jamila Gordon**, CEO and Founder, Lumachain explored the state of play in service transformation and future direction in using technology and data to transform service and to improve the human condition. Lumachain light the way for a trusted food supply chain, ensuring food and worker safety.

Key messages included:

- Be the best version of yourself and have big dreams. They will not only make you survive, but they will make you thrive.
- “Have bigger dreams and own your magic”
- There is so much online and enrol in an online course that you can complete in your own time. Experimenting and learning by doing.
- Mindset and principles that you take into your work: understand what you’re doing and why – what is your goal? How can you communicate this with everyone so they’re on the same page. Then, break it down into smaller milestones.
- When you are positive, everyone is drawn to you.
- If you’re not making mistakes, you’re not trying hard enough.
- Be what you want to see in the world.

Jamila’s recommendation for government was for us to speed up grants, turn it around in two to three weeks instead of six months and to increase funding to start-ups.

Four key takeaways:

- Build your resilience
 - Get comfortable being uncomfortable
- Recharge and reenergise
 - Have a morning ritual
 - Build short breaks into your day
- Lean in to your strengths
 - Strengths take you to amazing places
 - Don’t worry about your weaknesses
- Be positive
 - Notice good moments and be grateful for them!

The inclusion of 5-minute stretch breaks throughout the Conference program were a good way to recognise the need for a quick wellness break.

‘Designing joined-up digital ecosystems for service transformation’ presented by **Dr. Alex Antic**, Data and Analytics Leader, Advisor, Strategist, **Professor Melissa de Zwart**, Professor (Digital Technology, Security and Governance), **Jeff Bleich** Centre, Flinders University and **Peter Williams**, Chief Edge Officer, Deloitte explored the requirements for coherent whole-of-system technology, security, data and analytics to transform service at scale.

Key messages included:

- The Government can’t regulate something it doesn’t know, knowledge is key.
- AI is being used more commonly, however there are potential issues around privacy and ethics.
- It’s certainly good that social media provides us with connections, but be aware that it can also disconnect us.
- We need to be wary of de-masking people, it could ruin lives.

- Optimal reality allows organisations to perform multiple ‘what if’ scenarios and should be embraced.

‘The customer experience of service transformation’ presented by **Andrew Spina**, Acting Chief Customer and Digital Officer, Queensland Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy and **Julie Hockey**, National Manager, Face to Face Service Design, Face to Face Transformation, Services Australia focused on how we can harness the digital behaviour of customers while meeting concerns about privacy and security for services are personalised, responsive, anticipatory, convenient, reliable and fast?

Julie Hockey talked about service delivery being a focus and priority for the government. Julie advised that Services Australia are embracing face to face and digital appointments (phone, video & F2F) and have implemented video chat services and self-serve kiosks. Julie explained the person-first, process-second focus to Services Australia and suggested that this was a prime example of service transformation.

Andrew Spina talked about a strong common purpose within government with many multi-agency / disciplinary teams who have delivered COVID digital services. Andrew urged attendees to have a flexible approach to delivering a solution where we must increasingly adapt and transform. Andrew recognised that government needed to determine the most effective way to invest in digital technology and that we must focus on enabling all Australians to be able to use technology. Andrew acknowledged that collaboration with other agencies and across government is key to our success and that using the term customer feels more human, when compared to citizens.

The **Garran Oration** saw **Distinguished Professor Genevieve Bell AO**, Director of the 3A Institute (3Ai) and Florence Violet McKenzie Chair, Australian National University take the (virtual) stage to deliver her oration excerpt.

Distinguished Professor Bell revealed that in this particular moment, we have an opportunity to do more. She advised that “something in the act of making the future that feels generative”. What pieces of the future would we already find if we looked around? One of the inescapable pieces of the future is the complex systems as fundamental aspects of our daily lives. The School of Cybernetics opened at ANU in January 2021 and cybernetics was the main focus of the oration as Distinguished Professor Bell reflected on the past and looked to the future. Offering her perspective, approaching systems as the building blocks for success.

Key messages included:

- The value of iterative communication – unfolding over weeks and years which builds community and gives room for growth.
- Productive discomfort – always a work in progress.
- Strength and grace – it’s a framework, not a prescription. Focus on getting to a broader context.

Distinguished Professor Bell talked about needing as many voices and as many points of view as possible and acknowledged that this is a moment for government to step in and step up. This is an invitation and a challenge. Much like Garran’s teachings: I believe that whatever we do we need to move and adapt.

Dr. David Rock, Co-founder and Chief Executive Officer, NeuroLeadership Institute spoke about **Service transformation – people, leadership and culture**. Dr Rock explained that digital transformation is all about people – customers, clients and end users along with those who build, shape, enable and support the services. Dr Rock advised that language changes perception – it helps you see and interact with other wise invisible domains

Key messages included:

- There are three levels of threat:
 - Level 1 – productive, manageable threat
 - Level 2 – frazzled, distracted mind
 - Level 3 – Overwhelming threat
- There are three core needs that are not being met when minds are under threat:
 - Certainty
 - Autonomy
 - Relatedness

Dr Rock was surprised at how well everyone transitioned into lockdown and working from home but acknowledged that we're all at the end of our tether.

Connection and collaboration for service transformation came next: as digital technologies reshape lives and institutions; we explore connection and collaboration across agencies and sectors and with communities and citizens for realizing a fully inclusive digital economy.

Greg Duncan, General Manager Identity, Payments and Financial Services (Acting), Australia Post revealed that the organisation had undergone significant transformation over the past 18 – 24 months to move into a digital space to meet customer's needs. For example, there were 5.5 million postal ballots in WA at the recent state election.

Dr. David Gruen, Australian Statistician, Australian Bureau of Statistics urged leaders to foster willing cooperation. Dr Gruen detailed how the ABS make interactions with the ABS easier – including enhancing digital technology, collaborating with experts and consulting with clients and the community. For example, the access of single touch payroll enables ABS to survey 10,000,000 Australians every pay. Dr Gruen left us with the message that we need to aspire to genuinely work with partners across all industries.

The closing session was **Delivering joined-up service transformation** which was a panel discussion with the Australasia public service commissioners considering posing the question – When will service transformation become business as usual?

Kate Hillman, EY Oceania People, Place and Culture Leader, People Advisory Services QLD moderated the panel discussion alongside 4 Australasian Public Service Commissioners:

- Adam Fennessey - Victoria
- Damian West - Australian Capital Territory
- Kathrina Lo - New South Wales
- Vicki Telfer - Northern Territory

The panel discussed the idea of pivoting quickly, engaging stakeholders early on and the benefit of disruption being that we move forward in leaps and bounds.

Examples of the panel's ideas were how hybrid and flexible working arrangements have been expediated. Flexible working arrangements support better inclusion and diversity outcomes. The panel reflected on how the Government's risk appetite has changed drastically over the pandemic period.

The Panel shared their thoughts on how necessity is the mother of invention and how working closely with the private sector to engage and learn from them to discover new ways of working can deliver better outcomes for the public. More iterative approaches have been taken, showing a strong link between employee engagement and customer experience.

The panel agreed that reaching out to other states to collaborate should be encouraged and that sharing between jurisdictions has been fantastic to see over this period.

Key takeaways included:

- Get the basics right around communication and cohesion of teams.
- Operate with collaboration and agility in the forefront of your mind.
- We shouldn't wait for the next big crisis for our next manifestation.
- Work where you get your best outcomes.
- Learn about workplace dressing, this does not need to be a jacket and tie each day. Dress for your day.
- Purposeful work attendance, i.e.: mentoring.
- Being able to work from home has been liberating for people with disabilities.
- We're all dealing with the same issues across the country, there is no need to reinvent the wheel.

I would like to sincerely thank IPAA WA and its members for supporting me to attend the 2021 IPAA National Conference. It was a wonderful professional development opportunity and provided many insights that I will apply to my work. I encourage all eligible young professionals to apply for the IPAA WA Young Professional Scholarship in 2022 where (hopefully) we can all attend in person.