

Recipient of the IPAA WA 2022 National Conference Young Professional Scholarship, **Christel Barthelemy**, reviews her attendance at the 2022 IPAA National Conference.

Summary of my experience at the IPAA 2022 National Conference in Canberra IPAA WA 2022 as the recipient of the Young Professional Scholarship.

I was privileged to attend the National IPAA Conference 2022 in Canberra from the 12-14 October, titled '*Adapt: Australia in a Changing World*' as the 2022 National Conference Young Professional Scholarship Recipient. As an Australian national having only recently returned to live in Australia, it was my first time in the country's beautiful capital.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, the conference looked ahead to what Australia's future might hold. Australia operates in an increasingly interconnected, dynamic, uncharted world that requires states and public sector to evolve constantly in the face of change. Central themes to this 3-day conference were trust, emerging technologies, ethics, megatrends and how they may come to influence the public sector. Embracing the theme of technology, the conference used a polling app for the audience to submit questions and engage with the conference content.

On the first day, the introductory speech was delivered by Future Crunch and encouraged the audience to explore the realm of possibilities for Australia's future, uninhibited, by embracing an amateur mindset. They described such a mindset as having strong opinions but holding them lightly. The speakers evoked many different concepts such as the adaptability quotient or Moravec paradox to encourage listeners to open their minds to the keynotes that would follow.

Dr Allan Rosenbaum spoke on the '*Public administration in the Land of the Free*' and the challenges that exist that hinder the maintenance of democracy. Defining the terms and metrics of trust in government should be according to him, one of the highest priorities of the public administration. He recommended more contextual research on the public administration role and function to better deliver for their stakeholders, better known as the Australian population.

Danielle Wood, CEO of the Grattan Institute spoke of her concerns regarding increasing intergenerational inequalities in her keynote speech, '*Intergenerational inequality in the post-pandemic world*.' In the next 30 years, Australia is to witness the largest wealth transfers ever experienced. She expects that it will severely impact wealth inequalities, housing affordability and cause budget pressures for the delivery of aged care services. With current policies favouring tax offsets for older populations, the cost of these tax benefits may have to be shouldered by the young professionals of today. As a young professional myself, I felt compelled to learn more about this topic and delve into the national tax policy. Her speech concluded on request for the government and public sector to reform current tax legislation.

In his keynote speech '*How the AEC is defending democracy in a changing world*,' Commissioner Tom Rogers explained why "elections are about the loser" and how it related to the AEC's mission of defending democracy. The role of the commission is to deliver a statistically valid election and to have

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the ability to manage expectations in the advent of electoral disappointment. Commissioner Rogers noted that this places social media at the centre of the AEC's mission because it is where people express their opinions and reveal their expectations. Additionally, it means that an inherent stake of elections is to make sure that the candidate that loses respects and accepts electoral results. Tom Rogers highlighted the high level of trust that Australians bestow on the AEC. This trust requires the intersection of operations, security, and information to deliver a trusted election result. It was intriguing to get a behind the scenes testimony of working at the AEC.

The Panel Discussion, '*No nation is an island, entire of itself...*,' Cameron Mitchell and Greg Moriarty spoke about Australia within its geopolitical environment. They highlighted four global trends: globally observed levels of government distrust, structural shifts, the prioritisation of national security that is pushing for the convergence of security and business and a return of statist mindset by most countries.

In her speech, '*The science that's shaping our future*,' Dr Cathy Foley AO PSM outlined three different types of sciences that may considerably impact Australia future: biotechnological science, quantum technology and digital technology. She spoke about embracing the use of technologies and placing Australia in the centre of these technological advances by funding, attracting scientists and researchers as well as strategically implementing these technologies in public administration. To make these implementations possible Dr Cathy Foley invited the audience to reflect on whether the public sector has the right structures for these creative innovations.

The second panel discussion '*Building resilience globally, institutionally and locally*' by John Bradley, secretary of the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning, Dr Guy DeBelle, Chief financial officer at Fortescue Future Industries, Susanna Hasenoehrl, SAP's senior Vice President and head of Sustainability Asia Pacific and Japan and Dr Stuart Minchinree, general CEO of the largest intergovernmental organisation in the Pacific, the Pacific Community, SPC. This distinguished panel of speakers dwelled on the topic of resilience, constant crisis, and the energy transition.

The second day of the conference commenced with a keynote on 'Data, digital and disadvantage,' by Matt Comyn, CEO of Commonwealth Bank of Australia, and Jenny Wilkinson PSM, Secretary from the Department of Finance. Recent developments with COVID-19 brought on new partnerships to use data to connect the right people with the right claim among other stakes. This discussion raised the fascinating question of whether private sector or government know more about people with the MC Leigh Sales urging speakers to answer this question.

Professor Marcia Langton AO spoke on "Reconciliation and national resilience" to outline a best practice methodology of codesign with indigenous groups. She spoke on her research experience of studying Indigenous climate change adaptation in the Kimberly region and presented a framework of nine principles for a co-design report.

Peter Woolcott AO, Australian Public Service Commissioner addressed the topic of 'Soft power and the public service' based on his experience as a senior diplomat around the world. From his point of view, soft power is based off managing stakeholders. He regards himself as a steward of the system and sees stakeholder engagement as a practice based on listening and understanding.

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The panel discussion on government trust '*Keeping the 'us' in trust*' by Megan Barry, Margaret Crawford, Dr Gordon de Brouwer PSM and Adam Fennessy PSM presented trust as a focal point of public administration. Dr Gordon de Brouwer notably stated that disadvantaged people have ingrained distrust for the public sector and saw this fact as an opportunity for listening and understanding of stakeholder needs.

A key moment of the conference was the delivery of Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher's speech on 'An Ambitious and Enduring APS Reform Plan.' Considering that this is a reform that will impact the sector as a whole, one could not help but notice the audience lean in a little more for this keynote address. Exposing both the state of affairs of the current public sector and means to improve it, Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher outlined the government's ambitious plan to make the public sector the best employer in Australia once again.

Exploring how the workplace is ever evolving, the panel discussion '*Big ideas about a better future of work*,' had Dr Jane Gunn, KPMG Australia, Nicole McMahon, Group Owner for Government, Telstra and Steven Worrall, CEO Microsoft Australia speak on flexible work, work environments and mental health. Steven Woorall commenced the discussion by noting that "having a great job is such a predisposition to a good mental health predicament." This ensued with an explorative conversation on the capacity to adapt, the difference between gender responsibility and flexible work. It was insightful to hear that Microsoft Australia has adopted a hot desk policy for their entire company to promote horizontal relations within the company.

The final talk of day two was 'Public service lessons from the Land of the Long White Cloud' by Hannah Cameron from New Zealand's public service. She shared New Zealand's experience of reform and how their public service is hoping to navigate and adapt in the future. Having begun the reform in 2020, with the Public Service Act, New Zealand offered some foresight of what the Australian public service might experience.

On the third and final day of the National IPAA Conference, I attended three masterclasses on major themes of the conference. These masterclasses were delivered in small groups and were extremely informative.

The first masterclass that I attended, '*Misinformation - trust, ethics, and credibility issues (in the era of fake news)*,' was facilitated by Simone Abbott, programme director for IPAA ACT. The speakers were Anthony Coles, First Assistant Secretary, Counter Foreign Interference Coordination Centre from the Department of Home Affairs and Matt Haigh, Assistant Commissioner from the Election Integrity, and Communications Branch at the Australian Electoral Commission. The masterclass defined misinformation and disinformation and went deeper into the AEC's ground-breaking experience in debunking fake news around elections. It was fascinating to see that the AEC is one of the first government bodies in the world to strategically set the records straight and respond to misinformation through the *Disinformation register*.

The second masterclass was titled the 'Implications of geopolitical influences on Australian policymakers.' Convenors Jo Evans, a Deputy Secretary in the newly formed Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water, Barry Sterland, senior consultant at KPMG and David Hazlehurst spoke on climate change and mitigating risk factors of significant environment changes. They discussed risk analysis and influential research that is driving decision-making.

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The masterclass 'The dark side of leadership traits' had Georgie Harman, CEO of Beyond Blue, Dr Gordon de Brouwer PSM, the Secretary of Public Service Reform, and Martin Hehir, the Deputy Secretary at the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations discussing the downfalls of certain leadership styles and ways to promote a health positive workplace in the public sector. This masterclass brainstormed mitigating strategies to help an employee with mental health concerns and how to promote flexible work. It was an eye-opening discussion on the many approaches to have on leadership and how the workplace is primarily a place to come together as a staff team.

Key messages from the Conference:

- Government trust is a major priority of the public sector.
- Set the target to apply the best practice and acknowledge where there is space for improvement.
- Be open to change, automation, and the use of new technologies: Digitalisation and use of AI (mention quantum science)
- The pandemic has had the positive impact of promoting cooperation between the public and private sector with the use of datasets and data. Although it may be a short-lived cooperation, it highlights the depth of knowledge and practicality of these datasets.
- The AEC's keynotes speakers all reiterated a similar message from their experience with engaging with Australians: engage with communities where they already are. I believe this advice that be applied in other domains and other sectors.
- Many speakers spoke highly of using science, data, and facts to determine policy.
- The public sector must work harder to create codesign framework to be inclusive and work with indigenous communities.
- The idea of *megatrends* will be structuring the actions and plans of the public sector with seven key issues that CSIRO have identified as major stakes for the future of Australia.

Four key takeaways from the Conference:

- Public and private sector need to adapt to new and emerging technologies. This extends logically to staff as well.
- Although technologies are game-changing, the public sector cannot operate with maintaining a relationship of trust with Australians. Addressing high levels of distrust – although a global trend – are imperative for the APS.
- The speech delivered by Hon Minister Katy Gallagher Structural set-in pace a ground-breaking national public-sector reform that is to unfold in the coming years.
- Australia is currently prioritising its own national security over other interests.

To conclude on my experience at the National IPAA Conference 2022, I would like to note that unlike all previous National Conference Young Professional Scholars, I do not work in the public sector but for a non-governmental organisation. In that sense, my experience is imbued with this lens of an outsider looking in on the Australian public sector, both as a French and Australian citizen but also as someone from a different sector. As a proud IPAA member who has completed policy training with the leading provider for the WA public sector, it was an absolute honour to attend this event.