

Smarter ways of working: Leading digital workforce transformation

00:00:09 - 00:00:12 Hi, I'm Jane Latimer, Principal Adviser at the New South Wales Public Service

00:00:12 - 00:00:16 Commission, I warmly welcome you to our third podcast in Smarter Ways of

00:00:16 - 00:00:21 Working theme. This is our first panel discussion podcast with Major General

00:00:21 - 00:00:25 Natasha Fox, Head of People Capability at the Australian Department of

00:00:25 - 00:00:29 Defence and Ben Neal, Partner Workforce Transformation at

00:00:29 - 00:00:33 PricewaterhouseCoopers. Throughout this fascinating discussion hear their

00:00:33 - 00:00:39 views on treating our people as strategic workforce assets, why HR needs to be

00:00:39 - 00:00:43 digitally savy, Ben's response to current thought that the office is dead

00:00:43 - 00:00:51 post COVID and Natasha's reflections on the need to grow digital empathy. Hi, I'm

00:00:51 - 00:00:54 Tanya Hammond and I have the pleasure today in speaking with both Major

00:00:54 - 00:00:59 General Natasha Fox, Head of People Capability Division, Department of

00:00:59 - 00:01:03 Defence, and Ben Neal, Partner of PWC, who'll be sharing with us their

00:01:03 - 00:01:08 insights in relation to leading digital workforce transformation. Welcome,

00:01:08 - 00:01:14 Natasha and Ben. Thank you, Tanya. Thanks, Tanya. Thanks Natasha, my

00:01:14 - 00:01:20 first question always to our podcast interviewees is our listeners would love to

00:01:20 - 00:01:25 have a little bit of background of each of you. I have been in the Army

00:01:25 - 00:01:31 for over 30 years, I joined when I was 17 and I've been employed in the Army across a

00:01:31 - 00:01:36 raft of different roles. I started life as a Logistics Officer, in our land army but

00:01:36 - 00:01:41 also in our special forces command. And then I branched into training and was

00:01:41 - 00:01:45 a military instructor for a period of time, culminating in being the
00:01:45 - 00:01:47 Commanding Officer and the Chief Instructor at the Australian Defence Force
00:01:47 - 00:01:52 Academy. And then I interspersed in between logistics and training and had
00:01:52 - 00:01:58 always been engaged in, personnel roles or HR roles, right from policy
00:01:58 - 00:02:03 development, policy implementation, through conditions of service through to
00:02:03 - 00:02:08 now, in my current role, as Head, People Capability I'm responsible for
00:02:08 - 00:02:13 strategic workforce planning, business intelligence, recruiting the future
00:02:13 - 00:02:18 Australian Defence Force but also transitioning military people from full time
00:02:18 - 00:02:24 service into either other roles within Defence, in a part time capacity or into
00:02:24 - 00:02:29 civilian life. I've got a full spectrum of what we do, and then I also have some
00:02:29 - 00:02:34 workforce management roles because I'm responsible for our SeMPRO Office,
00:02:34 - 00:02:39 which is our sexual misconduct prevention reporting office and also Defence
00:02:39 - 00:02:43 Families Australia, which is an advocacy body advocating for families and the
00:02:43 - 00:02:48 Religious Advisory Committee. So some spiritual welfare activity and as well
00:02:48 - 00:02:52 the military justice system within Defence. But I have a really broad gamut of
00:02:52 - 00:02:57 both service delivery, workforce planning and welfare support,
00:02:57 - 00:03:01 for the Australian Defence Force. Thanks, Natasha. How about yourself Ben?
Well,
00:03:01 - 00:03:06 that's a tough act to follow in terms of our beginnings, very similar, right. I also
00:03:06 - 00:03:10 joined the Army straight out of school. I went to ADFA although it was long
00:03:10 - 00:03:15 before Natasha ran the place, which is probably good for her to know, it wasn't
00:03:15 - 00:03:19 until about 15 years ago that I left the military and embarked on a career in the
00:03:19 - 00:03:24 Public Service proper, the Australian Public Service that is. So I spent about
00:03:24 - 00:03:29 a bit over 10 years working in functional HR roles in government, the full range

00:03:29 - 00:03:32 of those from everything from industrial relations to recruitment and
00:03:32 - 00:03:37 everything in between. But I really found my passion for strategic HR and in
00:03:37 - 00:03:41 particular, workforce planning and strategy. So about four years ago, I left
00:03:41 - 00:03:45 the public service to try my hand at the private sector and joined
00:03:45 - 00:03:49 PricewaterhouseCoopers or PWC, and I've been a partner there now around
00:03:49 - 00:03:55 four years. I'm now lead our HR and workforce businesses nationally, but
00:03:55 - 00:04:00 I have got a real strong focus still on government and making sure that we can
00:04:00 - 00:04:04 enable really effective and efficient government workforces. Thanks Ben, I
00:04:04 - 00:04:08 suppose thinking back over your career so far Ben, you would have seen some
00:04:08 - 00:04:13 significant changes in the role of HR practitioners and the HR function.
00:04:13 - 00:04:17 What are some insights that you can share about what you have observed? I
00:04:17 - 00:04:21 think
00:04:21 - 00:04:25 initially when I first started in HR, I think there was a real focus in
00:04:25 - 00:04:29 government, particularly in government HR on what we called back then
00:04:29 - 00:04:33 transactional excellence and it was about being really good at the things that
00:04:33 - 00:04:39 we're supposed to do to keep the lights on and make sure that individuals had
00:04:39 - 00:04:44 access to high quality HR services. I think we got to a point where you can
00:04:44 - 00:04:50 only optimise or get better at that so far. And then the shift became much more
00:04:50 - 00:04:54 around how you treat the workforce as an enterprise asset. So strategic HR in
00:04:54 - 00:04:59 the late 2000's, so between 2008 to 2010, I feel there was a bit of a shift in
00:04:59 - 00:05:04 government towards doing it individually is one thing, but how do we really
00:05:04 - 00:05:08 drive organisational outcomes from the better management of HR and that
00:05:08 - 00:05:13 require us to treat the workforce as an asset and looking at the skills and
capabilities of that workforce rather than just the services that we were

00:05:13 - 00:05:17 delivering, to keep the lights on as I said before. So I think for me that's

00:05:17 - 00:05:21 probably the seismic shift that kept me in HR, because I was only going to

00:05:21 - 00:05:24 stay so long if it was about how many people can I stick in the recruitment

00:05:24 - 00:05:30 pipe line this week, or how many, what is the error rate on Payroll, this month. It

00:05:30 - 00:05:34 was the value that you get from saying, we need to make a real shift in the

00:05:34 - 00:05:39 workforce now for what's coming down the pipe in the future and I was really

00:05:39 - 00:05:43 interested in that type of work. Thank you. What about yourself, Natasha?

00:05:43 - 00:05:49 What have you observed of the change? Defence is one of the unique

00:05:49 - 00:05:55 organisations with 100,000 person strong plus, when I count my public

00:05:55 - 00:05:55 service colleagues as well as the uniformed workforce and larger

00:05:55 - 00:06:04 when I count the broader industry workforce that we have partnered with.. For

00:06:04 - 00:06:08 public service workforce, we are in are in particular for military people we're a

00:06:08 - 00:06:13 training organisation at the heart of what we do, always planning training

00:06:13 - 00:06:17 worse case scenario and to have a level of preparedness attached to that.

00:06:17 - 00:06:22 When that's your DNA, that is what you brought up with as a military person, so

00:06:22 - 00:06:26 then you over lay that into workforce and people it's about exactly what

00:06:26 - 00:06:31 Ben said it's about people with the capability and we see that play out right now,

00:06:31 - 00:06:36 in relation to COVID19. It is not a platform approach in this current context it is

00:06:36 - 00:06:39 not about a ship at sea delivering a COVID outcome. It is about the people on

00:06:39 - 00:06:44 the ground and they are the strategic assets in relation to their skills, how they

00:06:44 - 00:06:49 think and, how they interact with communities. It's a similar shift, but we

00:06:49 - 00:06:54 have that over a long term training application, future workforce approach.

00:06:54 - 00:06:57 We plan our workforce in segments of cross forward estimates that's four years

00:06:57 - 00:07:02 then determine what we then call an objective force, which is another 5 to 10
00:07:02 - 00:07:07 beyond that and then our future force, so we are looking out at the 15- 20 mark
00:07:07 - 00:07:12 about what that workforce is and how we then have to back up into what skills
00:07:12 - 00:07:17 we need and how we are a constant workforce in transition. I get that it's the
00:07:17 - 00:07:21 pace of change now and the constant transition that's required now to make
00:07:21 - 00:07:25 sure that our workforce is prepared across that forward estimate for the
00:07:25 - 00:07:30 challenges that we are engaged in. In your introduction, you told us that part
00:07:30 - 00:07:34 of your responsibility is strategic workforce planning and that's really big and
00:07:34 - 00:07:38 obviously, you've got a lot of leaders in terms of them, you talked about
00:07:38 - 00:07:43 recruitment, and then that sort of transitions about the workforce as well, so a
00:07:43 - 00:07:47 really big job, thanks, Natasha and Ben. Natasha, I'm really curious
00:07:47 - 00:07:52 one of the things that we are all grappling with across both private and public
sector is
00:07:52 - 00:07:57 digital transformation and it's driving the work that we do now, how we work,
00:07:57 - 00:08:03 where work is done, who and what let's face it does the work. I reflect on a
00:08:03 - 00:08:08 report that was done back in 2016 and was released and published by the World
00:08:08 - 00:08:13 Economic Forum in relation to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Since then,
00:08:13 - 00:08:16 there's been a lot of speculation about the number of jobs that will be impacted
00:08:16 - 00:08:21 by digital transformation and number of entirely new jobs that will be created
00:08:21 - 00:08:25 and jobs that will remain. There is a lot of chat about that. The workforce of the
00:08:25 - 00:08:29 future how its all going to work. In the recent catch up that we had you
00:08:29 - 00:08:32 mentioned that the Department of Defence has been responding to change due
00:08:32 - 00:08:36 to digital transformation. Could you share with our listeners, just a number of
00:08:36 - 00:08:40 your experiences that you shared with me, some of the changes you've made in

00:08:40 - 00:08:45 the planning that you've done in responding to digital transformation. Let me
00:08:45 - 00:08:49 premise this by commenting around that Fourth Industrial Revolution
00:08:49 - 00:08:55 commentary, combination of cloud computing software, wider analytics that
00:08:55 - 00:09:01 data brings, our smart connected system, block chain neural networks, and
00:09:01 - 00:09:07 decision making and the ability to absorb a lot of that. And I often talk about
00:09:07 - 00:09:12 finding ways to see the system, and understand the system to make sure you
00:09:12 - 00:09:16 can pull the right levers to get the right effects that you need, all of the Fourth
00:09:16 - 00:09:20 Industrial Revolution wholly affect our work. It's about not being overwhelmed
00:09:20 - 00:09:26 by that as well and still understanding the core of what you do. But what we
00:09:26 - 00:09:34 are enabled now to do is to see, understand, predict and respond to events,
00:09:34 - 00:09:41 hopefully better, but more faster. And that pace of change is really critical
00:09:41 - 00:09:46 because people now have to be able to think in that space respond in that space
00:09:46 - 00:09:53 , so its about the skills we learn, relearn, learn relearn faster. So we've always
00:09:53 - 00:09:57 been a workforce in transition but it's that pace of transition that I mentioned
00:09:57 - 00:10:03 earlier, continual adaption is really key and the foundations of the principles of
00:10:03 - 00:10:08 HR management and how you treat people don't necessarily change. It's how
00:10:08 - 00:10:13 you treat people in that environment, the COVID environment. We always
00:10:13 - 00:10:21 had a strategic approach to how we continue to, innovate and reform, and we
00:10:21 - 00:10:24 have strategic digital innovation that we wanted to bring forwards
00:10:24 - 00:10:28 and the COVID environment that we're operating in now, has meant we've had to
00:10:28 - 00:10:33 actually do that in a more rapid environment so it's about we had to adjust
00:10:33 - 00:10:39 business processes, bring forward our digital transformation without
00:10:39 - 00:10:44 a necessary period of time to adjust, so we had to take a level of risk in the

00:10:44 - 00:10:48 current environment, and that's that react faster, that adds up to a revolution.

00:10:48 - 00:10:53 So what did we do? We went to online testing for our candidate that meant

00:10:53 - 00:11:00 our 16 recruiting centers right across Australia, recruiting upwards of around
7,000

00:11:00 - 00:11:04 people a year into a variety of roles into the Australian Defence Force that

00:11:04 - 00:11:08 nationalised our workforce, and we had to then leverage those opportunities to

00:11:08 - 00:11:13 better match our recruiters with the candidates that were applying. That's an

00:11:13 - 00:11:18 opportunity that presented in digital environment, of which we have graph

00:11:18 - 00:11:22 so our online testing means people get feedback quicker from

00:11:22 - 00:11:27 Defence in relation to job suitability. That flows through to quicker matching
with recruiters a

00:11:27 - 00:11:32 better conversation about the opportunities that you can have in Defence.

00:11:32 - 00:11:37 We've even now moved to virtual live of the selection board in the current

00:11:37 - 00:11:42 environment to ensure that young people or people right across Australia, still

00:11:42 - 00:11:47 get the opportunity for jobs in the officer corps in the Australian Defence Force

00:11:47 - 00:11:51 through virtual means. So we are preserving our workforce in a COVID

00:11:51 - 00:11:57 environment, reducing the risk of transmission, leveraging technology as it

00:11:57 - 00:12:04 presents, in a more reactive faster way. Virtual career fairs, we're exploring

00:12:04 - 00:12:08 those now, even in the transition space we are still transitioning our workforce

00:12:08 - 00:12:14 but running virtual transition conferences or seminars to get people more

00:12:14 - 00:12:18 comfortable with what they have to do, still prepare people, still engage in a

00:12:18 - 00:12:22 HR sense but we're doing it digitally. Now that present challenges in itself

00:12:22 - 00:12:27 because you've got to be able to be a digitally literate person and what does it

00:12:27 - 00:12:32 mean when you're doing it in a faster way without that, perhaps, school house

00:12:32 - 00:12:36 training that people might be used to, you have to train online so it's about

00:12:36 - 00:12:43 accepting a level of risk and learning and relearning that continual cycle to

00:12:43 - 00:12:47 deliver the service that you are delivering. So just some quick changes since

00:12:47 - 00:12:53 March, since really Covid has hit Australia in real terms. We've enlisted over

00:12:53 - 00:12:57 2,500 people into the Australian Defence Force. And of that only 20 people

00:12:57 - 00:13:02 were turned away right on the day of enlistment because they were unwell.

00:13:02 - 00:13:06 They might not have had COVID but that's part of that forced preservation.

00:13:06 - 00:13:11 Over 39,000 online tests were sent out between April and July for people to do

00:13:11 - 00:13:18 . Over 20,000 candidates have completed that testing, 15,000 candidates have

00:13:18 - 00:13:25 done a Your Opportunity Unlisted session. This is a 34% increase in that

00:13:25 - 00:13:29 candidate engagement with a career coach that we have seen because we

00:13:29 - 00:13:35 leverage this opportunity. That's some great examples of digital literacy,

00:13:35 - 00:13:40 taking a bit of chance but continuing to learn, they know that you have to keep

00:13:40 - 00:13:45 learning to deliver HR effects. It's really interesting. Ben, did you have any

00:13:45 - 00:13:50 examples or any experiences that you have observed around this space as well,

00:13:50 - 00:13:56 in terms of the digital transformation that response? Tanya for me, the changes

00:13:56 - 00:14:01 in the way our clients think about these challenges and, therefore the work we

00:14:01 - 00:14:07 do with them. So I think about digital transformation and my role in trying to

00:14:07 - 00:14:10 help an organisation navigate the workforce implications of that. That's

00:14:10 - 00:14:16 changed even in my short time in consulting. I used to do workforce planning,

00:14:16 - 00:14:20 and you would know that in the public service workforce planning used to be

00:14:20 - 00:14:24 around capacity and affordability. How many heads can I afford and I am

00:14:24 - 00:14:28 seeing that shift now, because when we used to do workforce planning around

00:14:28 - 00:14:32 a strategy change or an operating model change, the workforce implications of
00:14:32 - 00:14:35 that were predictable and relatively slow moving. But when you think about
00:14:35 - 00:14:40 the transformations that we see today in public sector organisations, they're
00:14:40 - 00:14:45 always digitally or tech enabled, and that means that workforce implications
00:14:45 - 00:14:48 flow through a lot more quickly. So when we do strategic workforce
00:14:48 - 00:14:53 planning with organisations now, yes, there's a nod to the operational in their in
budget
00:14:53 - 00:14:57 operational workforce planning. But it's so much more around, what is the
00:14:57 - 00:15:02 capability and skills transitions that need to be made over the next three years,
00:15:02 - 00:15:06 five years, ten years and in Natasha's case, even longer than that and
00:15:06 - 00:15:12 they are not always predictable, in fact, I would argue that they're not at all but
with the
00:15:12 - 00:15:17 ability to forward cast or look at a lot longer and scenario plan, you can make
00:15:17 - 00:15:21 a pretty good guess about what those might be. And I think that's probably the
00:15:21 - 00:15:25 greatest change I've seen and the only other one I'd suggest that has come about
00:15:25 - 00:15:29 in workforce planning that I think is really a nod to the way organisations
00:15:29 - 00:15:35 are dealing with this, is the dynamic nature of workforce planning. It's not
finished
00:15:35 - 00:15:38 when you deliver the plan. That's the start of it, because it's the
00:15:38 - 00:15:42 implementation of that road map, which says these are the things we're going
00:15:42 - 00:15:46 to do to address that skill and capability transition and we're going to continue
00:15:46 - 00:15:50 to pull out our three year, five years horizon and we are going to push it out
00:15:50 - 00:15:54 every year so that we make sure we stay on top of those transitions. Thanks
00:15:54 - 00:15:59 Ben, you're known as a bit of a dark artist of workforce planning and I guess
00:15:59 - 00:16:04 that's how our paths have crossed over the years, it would be really cool if you

00:16:04 - 00:16:09 could share with our listeners any tips that you have about just doing workforce
00:16:09 - 00:16:12 planning. You talked about scenarios, what other tips could you offer
00:16:12 - 00:16:19 our listeners? So the first one, I think, is understanding that whatever enterprise
00:16:19 - 00:16:23 decisions organisations make, there is almost always gonna be workforce
00:16:23 - 00:16:29 implications of those and I think organisations, not all, but many organisations
00:16:29 - 00:16:33 think about the impact on their technology or they think about the impact on
00:16:33 - 00:16:37 their process or the impact on their strategy or operating model and
00:16:37 - 00:16:42 then inadvertently deprioritise the managing the impact on the workforce
because
00:16:42 - 00:16:46 ultimately, all of those things are there to enable the people to do what it is
00:16:46 - 00:16:50 that they do in an organisation. So for me, the first one is understanding what
00:16:50 - 00:16:55 the practical workforce implications of any change are, and then actively
00:16:55 - 00:16:59 managing it. I think it, it sounds an obvious one, I mean you talk about
00:16:59 - 00:17:02 workforce planning if you think about the workforce implications, but so often
00:17:02 - 00:17:06 we sort of skim over that. The second one would be and I mentioned in the
00:17:06 - 00:17:11 previous response around scenario planning. The further you look out, the less
00:17:11 - 00:17:15 likely you are to nail it so the more important scenario planning is. I think if
00:17:15 - 00:17:20 you look out 3 to 5 years, most people with experience can say, I think I know
00:17:20 - 00:17:24 what's gonna happen here and you can get it directionally correct. But if you
00:17:24 - 00:17:29 look out 10 years, it starts to be incredibly uncertain, and you need to
00:17:29 - 00:17:35 therefore use scenarios to model out the workforce implications and then have
00:17:35 - 00:17:40 strategies based on the predictions would be for each of those scenarios. You
00:17:40 - 00:17:45 can have a left and right of arch or book end scenarios which are on the edge of
00:17:45 - 00:17:49 reality and then settle on something in the middle, and that's almost always

00:17:49 - 00:17:53 what we advocate. But just having stretched the thinking and the intellect to

00:17:53 - 00:17:58 consider things which may be left, or right of arc is a really useful exercise to

00:17:58 - 00:18:02 undertake the workforce planning. The last point I think, the point where

00:18:02 - 00:18:08 workforce planners get it wrong is not grounding the plan in the practical and

00:18:08 - 00:18:19 pragmatic. It absolutely has to be implementable. If it is an esoteric exercise

00:18:19 - 00:18:22 of workforce modelling and what could happen but you don't actually plan,

00:18:22 - 00:18:27 I will advocate strongly having a really practical road map that says, here are your

00:18:27 - 00:18:31 near term actions in the next three months, six months, twelve months, and

00:18:31 - 00:18:35 here are your longer term actions that need to be adaptable based on the

00:18:35 - 00:18:41 scenarios that you have modeled. I guess from my perspective really good Ben,

00:18:41 - 00:18:44 because it's grounded to some of those techniques in workforce planning,

00:18:44 - 00:18:49 but as you say, perhaps a little bit undercooked, undervalued. Did you have

00:18:49 - 00:18:53 any insights, Natasha, I know I'm perhaps putting on spot, but did you have

00:18:53 - 00:18:58 any insights from your perspective of workforce planning that any tips for our

00:18:58 - 00:19:05 practitioners from your perspective? I work with Ben off and on in various

00:19:05 - 00:19:11 activities and projects, and I would agree with him, 100%. I think in the

00:19:11 - 00:19:17 military and like I said, our DNA is all about planning for what next and worse

00:19:17 - 00:19:23 case planning, so we're always scenario testing within our DNA, and if you

00:19:23 - 00:19:28 know the art of just planning, you can bring that into workforce planning in

00:19:28 - 00:19:35 part as well, and try not to make it a dark art but understand that you

00:19:35 - 00:19:40 need to test your concept. So we do assumption based planning and keep testing

00:19:40 - 00:19:43 testing and testing those assumptions. And they sometimes don't materialise

00:19:43 - 00:19:49 and sometimes they're fact, but (inaudible) so what of what you're doing and

00:19:49 - 00:19:57 understanding how integrated workforce planning is and how it's used. A lot of

00:19:57 - 00:20:02 people who don't do workforce planning don't understand the value of it, and

00:20:02 - 00:20:06 therefore how do they intergrate into broader things like training, reskilling in

00:20:06 - 00:20:11 that training sample, emergent new workforce that you're designing from a

00:20:11 - 00:20:16 complete greenfield right forward. So, how you can use the strategic plan to

00:20:16 - 00:20:20 as Ben said, set that directional on where you invest your effort and, and

00:20:20 - 00:20:26 where you can take some risk because you've got really solid foundations there. I

00:20:26 - 00:20:31 would agree with Ben it's about having those principles of practical feasible

00:20:31 - 00:20:35 implemental and then any other parameters around cost etc. to implement

00:20:35 - 00:20:39 a workforce plan. What I find, a lot of people confuse a strategic

00:20:39 - 00:20:44 workforce plan with a resource plan. The resource plan is what we would

00:20:44 - 00:20:48 indicated, is a

00:20:48 - 00:20:53 practical application of as you move through in a time space scenario or

00:20:53 - 00:20:59 time epoch, getting down into that resource. So it's about understanding, planning

00:20:59 - 00:21:04 through to implementation is really key. Thanks Natasha and that's again very

00:21:04 - 00:21:08 practical, as is your response Ben as well. The strategic priority for the

00:21:08 - 00:21:13 NSW Government is to implement best practice productivity and digital

00:21:13 - 00:21:17 capability

00:21:17 - 00:21:22 in the NSW Public Sector and drive public sector diversity by 2025.

00:21:22 - 00:21:26 What are some of the key things for practitioners to consider when supporting

00:21:26 - 00:21:34 leaders,

00:21:34 - 00:21:39 teams and the organisation to achieve the required digital transformation by

00:21:39 - 00:21:44 2025. What are your thoughts Natasha there?

00:21:44 - 00:21:49 So I think about this quite regularly. I've got kids in the age of 12 and 14, and I

watch how they

00:21:34 - 00:21:42 interact in a digital sense and how they learn and I often think to myself wow we are

00:21:42 - 00:21:48 way behind the eight ball in relation to, I watch my 14 year old play Fortnite,

00:21:48 - 00:21:52 he is already connected, he's already engaging with his friends in a teaming

00:21:52 - 00:21:59 sense to deliver a Fortnite effect, build replay, etc., and when in the middle of

00:21:59 - 00:22:02 all that he doesn't know what he's doing he's on his phone, working out another

00:22:02 - 00:22:09 solution, so that is learning instantly to implement. If I take that scenario and

00:22:09 - 00:22:14 do it, push that forecast out, we've got kids coming through that are already

00:22:14 - 00:22:18 doing that. So if we want to be in 2025, it's about how do we harness what

00:22:18 - 00:22:23 they're doing now in their play environment, in their school environment, to

00:22:23 - 00:22:30 know that by 2025, we've actually got some really talented, enabled people

00:22:30 - 00:22:37 who can actually operate like that already. But it's about then, for me I go that

00:22:37 - 00:22:43 the concept of privacy is not tested with this generation because they give their

00:22:43 - 00:22:49 privacy incredibly easily, without understanding what is the implication of

00:22:49 - 00:22:54 privacy. And if that plays out in the HR domain, that's a fundamental

00:22:54 - 00:22:59 confidential people management, not necessary a strategic HR thing but it

00:22:59 - 00:23:04 could be a strategic HR implication for the future in the digital environment.

00:23:04 - 00:23:09 For me, you have to be a bit of a generalist and a bit of a specialist in the

00:23:09 - 00:23:16 futures environment. You have to understand the data absolutely about what

00:23:16 - 00:23:23 it's presenting to you. You have to then take that data, because data algorithms

00:23:23 - 00:23:29 by themselves do not implement. Actually, the story of those two items that

00:23:29 - 00:23:34 implement, and that's where you take the people space. And that's when you

00:23:34 - 00:23:39 influence with the data and algorithm from workforce into people. And that

00:23:39 - 00:23:43 is where, we need to move that future space. But we will always need people
00:23:43 - 00:23:48 management judgment, decision making, critical thinking, negotiation and a
00:23:48 - 00:23:53 lot more cognitive flexibility about harnessing opportunities, because they are
00:23:53 - 00:23:58 presenting so rapidly. So like I said, you got a 14 year old, project that into
00:23:58 - 00:24:05 2025, they will be already there. We need to be ahead of that generation to be
00:24:05 - 00:24:10 literate, more so than what our younger people are but conscious of what it is in
00:24:10 - 00:24:17 our foundations that we need to bring through, that is valued. So the privacy
00:24:17 - 00:24:22 are fixed whilst our workforce get valued in part. That's how I'm thinking
00:24:22 - 00:24:27 at the moment. That's really astute. I haven't kind of thought of it like that.
00:24:27 - 00:24:32 That's really smart, thinking about the kind of folk who are here now in that
00:24:32 - 00:24:36 projecting 10 years hence that's really interesting. What about yourself Ben,
00:24:36 - 00:24:40 anything to add? I have also got a 12 and a 14 year old who asks me questions
00:24:40 - 00:24:45 like why do you still read paper back books dad? You can get it on your iPad,
00:24:45 - 00:24:48 well because I actually like books? And I just, it's just a different generation,
00:24:48 - 00:24:53 makes you feel really old, actually. I think the whole digital savy thing is a
00:24:53 - 00:24:58 really interesting paradox. You've got customers and governments focused on
00:24:58 - 00:25:03 delivering digital channels for customers, but one of the areas where I think
00:25:03 - 00:25:09 we are well behind, is in digital HR service delivery. So, HR practitioners for
00:25:09 - 00:25:14 example, the number of times we used to say you've got to fill out a form for
00:25:14 - 00:25:20 that, instead of having a digital solution for our employees to use in
00:25:20 - 00:25:23 organisations. I think it's a real, I know some organisations are starting to do
00:25:23 - 00:25:26 it, and some are much better than others. Even in my own organisation,
00:25:26 - 00:25:31 we have got a lot of work to do in order to get the employee experience inside

00:25:31 - 00:25:36 organisations in engaging with HR, anywhere near the sophistication of the
00:25:36 - 00:25:41 customer channels that people use when accessing government services. So
00:25:41 - 00:25:45 when I think about digital reform or digital transformation inside government,
00:25:45 - 00:25:49 I think there is a heap of work to be done in our own backyard as well. It will
00:25:49 - 00:25:55 only make people more happy and engaged dealing with HR, and we'll get
00:25:55 - 00:25:59 better services if we can find a way and make them want to engage with it, in a
00:25:59 - 00:26:04 manner that's conducive to that type of interaction. I think the employee
00:26:04 - 00:26:11 experience is a really new area for HR teams and HR leaders to focus on
00:26:11 - 00:26:15 because, no one else is gonna own it and stew on it like HR will. As I said
00:26:15 - 00:26:19 before, if you manage the workforce like an enterprise asset, you want to be
00:26:19 - 00:26:23 building infrastructure and capability around making sure they have the best
00:26:23 - 00:26:27 possible experience in the organisation. If you do that, then they will return
00:26:27 - 00:26:31 that in productivity in spades I think. Yeah, that's great. Thanks Ben. And I
00:26:31 - 00:26:35 guess from yourself sort of moving into our current context and you mentioned
00:26:35 - 00:26:40 already the COVID environment, Natasha. And obviously we're still living
00:26:40 - 00:26:45 that, we're still watching that play out and it's undoubtably had a rapid and far
00:26:45 - 00:26:48 reaching impact on our ways of working what have been some of the key
00:26:48 - 00:26:51 experiences, you've already shared some of the experiences around the e-
00:26:51 - 00:26:55 recruiting in the virtualised selection panels and and those kind of things but,
00:26:55 - 00:27:00 what do you see are the things that you're gonna be taking to the future in terms
00:27:00 - 00:27:05 of changes that you see that they're going to be sustainable to the future. We
00:27:05 - 00:27:12 will absolutely keep our digital pivot that we've done because the productivity
00:27:12 - 00:27:17 alone that it and the accessibility of what it's giving to broader Australians is

00:27:17 - 00:27:24 great advantage. We have been leveraging our digital community in terms of

00:27:24 - 00:27:29 families, through webinars and reaching out much more greater in webinar

00:27:29 - 00:27:36 sense and the telecom. Part of the learning in all of that is, how do you

00:27:36 - 00:27:42 illustrate or provide digital empathy, and it's one of those learnings that you

00:27:42 - 00:27:46 think about face to face, you can empathise, but you're really in a digital

00:27:46 - 00:27:50 environment. If you're not in a webinar, you've gotta actually be paying

00:27:50 - 00:27:58 attention to the tone and the intonation of voice and trying to really work out

00:27:58 - 00:28:03 that digital empathy and even in a webinar, we still can be remote, so how do

00:28:03 - 00:28:08 you not be remote in a digital sense when you've got little boxes on the screen

00:28:08 - 00:28:13 etc..? But I think there is an art in digital empathy and what does that mean.

00:28:13 - 00:28:16 That might play out in emoji coming in from

00:28:16 - 00:28:23 some one that says I'm unhappy so that digital literacy it's not just what we use

and how we're using it actually

00:28:23 - 00:28:28 understanding the empathy inside of that environment that I think we are

00:28:28 - 00:28:33 learning now what does that mean? How are you tracking that anxiousness

00:28:33 - 00:28:38 amongst them? The mental health in an isolation sense. How you are bridging

00:28:38 - 00:28:43 that with a digital community when there's no tacit dealing, in that we can't

00:28:43 - 00:28:49 give someone a hug. So it's about embracing the future of what is a digital

00:28:49 - 00:28:52 empathy. And some understand around that and how we're teaching our

00:28:52 - 00:28:56 workforce what is digital empathy and what does it actually mean going

00:28:56 - 00:29:01 forward. So, in our community environment, in that welfare space that's what

00:29:01 - 00:29:05 we're doing. We're doing a lot more reaching out, a lot more proactive calls

00:29:05 - 00:29:10 that wouldn't necessarily have been appreciative, but in a very anxious

00:29:10 - 00:29:15 environment, even if it's a 20 minute webinar with some quick chat questions,

00:29:15 - 00:29:21 and letting people know that there are supports available, or that there's

00:29:21 - 00:29:26 connectivity available through multiple channels. And that's that digital space

00:29:26 - 00:29:30 you can't just be anchored in one. You have to have multiple and you are

00:29:30 - 00:29:36 so dispersed and being adept at those multiple channels to understand what is that

00:29:36 - 00:29:43 feeling in the work place? And we have been leveraging the telecom, the

00:29:43 - 00:29:46 multi-channel phone call, the polycom phone call. They're not 1 to 1 but 1 to

00:29:46 - 00:29:54 many calls, emails, video messaging and also the webinars quite substantially.

00:29:54 - 00:29:58 But I think we have a lot of learning to do in relation to empathy in that

00:29:58 - 00:30:03 environment. That's again really insightful and interesting. I haven't thought of

00:30:03 - 00:30:07 it like that either myself. Ben, what have you observed in terms of what are

00:30:07 - 00:30:11 you seeing in terms of the HR teams you are working with and how they're

00:30:11 - 00:30:16 responding to, COVID? So, it's a couple of things,

00:30:16 - 00:30:24 I'm doing a fair bit of work at the moment on, what a post COVID, post pandemic

00:30:24 - 00:30:28 recovery looks like and

00:30:28 - 00:30:32 some may say it's a little bit cart before the horse because we're not quite there

00:30:32 - 00:30:37 yet, but as I said earlier, you want to be planning for what stabilisation looks

00:30:37 - 00:30:41 like. I think it's fair to say there's gonna be some significant economic impacts

00:30:41 - 00:30:45 and we're speaking to organisations at that moment about what workforce

00:30:45 - 00:30:49 planning in a post COVID or cost controlled environment looks like. And if

00:30:49 - 00:30:52 you have to put downward pressure on the size of an organisation, so the

00:30:52 - 00:30:57 affordability of an organisation, but at the same time, we need to make it more

00:30:57 - 00:31:01 effective and more efficient. It's a classic workforce planning challenge, you

00:31:01 - 00:31:05 know, size down, capability up. That's a really difficult thing to do, working

00:31:05 - 00:31:09 with a number of organisations to work through that. But I also think there's

00:31:05 - 00:31:09 gonna be just some practical challenges that Natasha referred to just before
00:31:09 - 00:31:16 about the role of the office in the culture of the organisation is that there's
00:31:16 - 00:31:18 plenty of stuff out there, whether we gather at the moment that the office is
00:31:18 - 00:31:24 dead, and I don't buy into that, I think HR has a role to play in making sure
00:31:24 - 00:31:30 that employees and workforces are safe. Absolutely no doubt about that. But
00:31:30 - 00:31:36 to me, I think the office was a place you go. And I think what it might become
00:31:36 - 00:31:39 now is a place where communities come together when it's required to
00:31:39 - 00:31:43 collaborate. But we're working with organisations to understand what's the
00:31:43 - 00:31:47 happy medium? Like where, how often should you be in the workforce, for
00:31:47 - 00:31:51 what types, in the workplace, for what types of activities? What makes sense?
00:31:51 - 00:31:57 Again, as Natasha said, that all has to be enabled by a really clear relationship
00:31:57 - 00:32:01 between the employer and the employee about the expectations, what they
00:32:01 - 00:32:07 are going to deliver, how we measure that productivity technology, all of those
00:32:07 - 00:32:11 things coming together. So it's a really fascinating and emerging debate, one
00:32:11 - 00:32:15 that is keeping us pretty busy at the moment. Yeah, thanks, Ben. And HR
00:32:15 - 00:32:21 teams are fundamentally, driving a lot of the changes as well and driving in a
00:32:21 - 00:32:24 sense of, here's some of the things that we need to think about, in terms of well
00:32:24 - 00:32:29 being, in terms of the individuals and, as you mentioned, Natasha just that
00:32:29 - 00:32:33 whole digital empathy. But how do we teach people to pick that up? And I
00:32:33 - 00:32:36 guess having that conversation with our leaders around that's gonna be
00:32:36 - 00:32:41 important as well, for HR. Ben I guess one of the things that I know you
00:32:41 - 00:32:46 do a lot, you're a bit of a, I won't say nerd, but I did so it's out there. Do you have
00:32:46 - 00:32:51 any articles or individuals that you follow to maintain awareness of trends in

00:32:51 - 00:32:54 this field? Thanks, for that Tanya

00:32:54 - 00:33:05 that's very kind of you, you could have said worse than nerd. Everyone has an inner nerd, Ben. Mine not so inner now. I

00:33:05 - 00:33:10 think my number one tip is read widely. If you if you follow just one

00:33:10 - 00:33:16 influencer in the HR space, you'll get a pretty narrow view of the field.

00:33:16 - 00:33:20 Someone once told me that I should read one article per week, and if you do

00:33:20 - 00:33:24 that, you will have read 50 articles by the end of the year. And even if some of

00:33:24 - 00:33:28 it is a nonsense, you'll have just a much broader perspective of the field in

00:33:28 - 00:33:31 which we operate. And I've tried to do that, probably but I don't read 1 a week

00:33:31 - 00:33:35 anymore, but I certainly used to, so I think reading widely is really important.

00:33:35 - 00:33:40 The second one is getting involved in your peak body. Like, it's Australian

00:33:40 - 00:33:45 Human Resource Institute for me, I've got a lot out of being involved in AHRI,

00:33:45 - 00:33:50 not just because I was able to be a sponge when I was a bit more junior in the

00:33:50 - 00:33:54 field, but also in the opportunity to give back to junior HR practitioners as

00:33:54 - 00:33:59 they come through and AHRI as a community gives you that, the ability to do

00:33:59 - 00:34:03 that type of thing. But there are plenty of other communities and forums that

00:34:03 - 00:34:08 you can get involved in and the last bit that I'm really interested in now is how

00:34:08 - 00:34:13 I can contribute to the discourse and debate about HR. So whether that's on

00:34:13 - 00:34:17 platforms like LinkedIn, and being a little bit vulnerable and putting your

00:34:17 - 00:34:21 questions, and queries out there or allowing people to challenge your thought

00:34:21 - 00:34:26 leadership. I find that really invigorating. Sometimes we get it wrong, but

00:34:26 - 00:34:30 invariably that means the profession or the field is moving its understanding

00:34:30 - 00:34:34 and knowledge forward. And I think that as practitioners and as HR leaders,

00:34:34 - 00:34:38 we want to be involved in that to the extent that it's possible. Yeah, that's great

00:34:38 - 00:34:43 thanks, Ben. What about yourself Natasha? Who do read or individuals

00:34:43 - 00:34:49 do you follow in this space? I'm really, fortunately in the military. We have a lot

00:34:49 - 00:34:54 of reading over a raft of issues. The military's just released its strategic

00:34:54 - 00:34:58 narrative, so as part of all of that we're always looking at, in our, context,

00:34:58 - 00:35:04 what's influencing it and absorb quite a few discussion papers from various

00:35:04 - 00:35:10 academics about the environment but in that HR (inaudible). I often look at

00:35:10 - 00:35:18 what Brene Brown does and I've had the benefit of being in some learning

00:35:18 - 00:35:24 opportunities with some fantastic Harvard and Oxford professors as well, and

00:35:24 - 00:35:32 it's about, just as Ben said, I don't buy one I'm a sponge for a lot of it.

00:35:32 - 00:35:37 Sometimes it will be for example, Peter Varghese from the Public Service and

00:35:37 - 00:35:42 he made a comment about radical incrementalism and I quite love that, in a

00:35:42 - 00:35:47 conservative construct of what the military is, if I think about it like that,

00:35:47 - 00:35:52 radical incrementalism really resonates for me in that sense so I try to absorb

00:35:52 - 00:35:59 the multitude of actual information and commentators and influencers that

00:35:59 - 00:36:03 are out there from what they are producing including, all the academics that

00:36:03 - 00:36:06 continue to write. But you have to balance it about your business environment

00:36:06 - 00:36:11 , but also your profession and that's what I was saying I have read quite widely

00:36:11 - 00:36:16 for that strategic narrative that we've produced but we then leverage some of

00:36:16 - 00:36:20 those expert contexts through the World Economic Forum that Ben mentioned

00:36:20 - 00:36:23 in terms of the profession and the impact on the future workforce so

00:36:23 - 00:36:24 don't follow one, follow many is what I would say.

00:36:24 - 00:36:31 I believe in absorbing as much as you can what I do like are the ones that

00:36:31 - 00:36:36 provides you the micro learning opportunities, so it's not a 50 page document. It might be something really

00:36:36 - 00:36:40 quite savy in a few paragraphs that wets your appetite to go and
00:36:40 - 00:36:45 look for something else from there. So be smart about what you're absorbing as
00:36:45 - 00:36:49 well.
00:36:49 - 00:36:54 Yeah, and I think things like listening to podcasts and, I know, that Lynda
00:36:54 - 00:36:59 Gratton and a fellow called David Greene and different people are pretty
00:36:59 - 00:37:03 prolific and do interview people and you get that micro learning. And I think
00:37:03 - 00:37:08 that is what in some respects, keeps me alive and interested in this as a
00:37:08 - 00:37:13 profession to be honest. So much to learn. And I guess I've asked
00:37:13 - 00:37:17 each interviewee to finish up in terms of giving our audience one key take away.
00:37:17 - 00:37:21 And today I would like you to each think about, you know, the key take away
00:37:21 - 00:37:27 for practitioners leading digital workforce transformations. What's one
00:37:27 - 00:37:32 key take away you'd give them Natasha? So it's like that question, what would
00:37:32 - 00:37:37 you
00:37:37 - 00:37:41 tell you former self? I think you have to give yourself permission not to know
00:37:41 - 00:37:45 it all and just understand that you don't know it all and to ask questions.
00:37:45 - 00:37:49 The take away I would say you don't know everything, you never will. So ask a
00:37:49 - 00:37:53 lot
00:37:53 - 00:37:57 of questions all the time to try and learn. If you haven't picked up through the
00:37:57 - 00:38:01 flavor of what I've said it's about you just have to learn, relearn and keep
00:38:01 - 00:38:06 learning because you don't know it all and things are changing too much to be
00:38:06 - 00:38:10 expected to know it all. That's what I would say. Thanks Natasha. How about
00:38:10 - 00:38:14 yourself, Ben? I'll go back to one of my earlier answers about and it is
00:38:14 - 00:38:18 certainly an extension of what Natasha has just said, which is don't always
00:38:18 - 00:38:22 operate in your comfort zone or in areas of certainty. Because if you're
00:38:22 - 00:38:26 planning for things that are certain, then it's probably to near a term.

00:38:14 - 00:38:17 My view is, as I said earlier, is that we need to be planning further out. It needs to be

00:38:17 - 00:38:23 uncomfortable and uncertain. Only then will we be able to, sort of think about

00:38:23 - 00:38:27 the full breadth and depth of the solutions that are available to us and manage

00:38:27 - 00:38:31 digital transformations, effectively. To do that, you gotta be focused on what

00:38:31 - 00:38:35 capabilities and skills do we need in organisations in the future. What's the gap

00:38:35 - 00:38:40 between that and what we have today and then plan and build it accordingly.

00:38:40 - 00:38:45 And I think HR, as I always say, is the stewards of workforce capability have a

00:38:45 - 00:38:49 massive role to play in those big enterprise digital transformations that are

00:38:49 - 00:38:54 coming. Thank you Ben. Thank you Natasha. I'm sure the listeners will join

00:38:54 - 00:39:01 me in saying fantastic, lots of insightful comments and things that we'll be able

00:39:01 - 00:39:05 to think about as we reflect on this podcast later. Thank you so much for your

00:39:05 - 00:39:12 time. Thank you really appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you, Natasha, Ben

00:39:12 - 00:39:16 and Tanya for sharing so many great insights on HR's role in leading digital

00:39:16 - 00:39:21 workforce transformation. Like always, I encourage you to consider the key

00:39:21 - 00:39:25 messages and consider what you can do differently as a result of listening today

00:39:25 - 00:39:30 . And thank you for taking the time to listen to The Spark - shaping a world

00:39:30 - 00:39:34 class HR podcast series. Please encourage your colleagues to listen so that

00:39:34 - 00:39:39 they too have the opportunity to learn and grow from the advice, tips and

00:39:39 - 00:39:44 insights provided by our HR and business experts. See you next week.