

Changing role of HR: Partnering with the business to identify, develop and execute workforce strategies

00:00:07 - 00:00:11 Hi, and welcome to our next episode of the changing world of
00:00:11 - 00:00:16 HR podcast theme. I'm Jane Latimer from the NSW Public Service Commission
and
00:00:16 - 00:00:20 am really pleased today to introduce Scott Hansen, Director General Primary
00:00:20 - 00:00:26 Industries. Listen to the valuable insights Scott shares about what the business
00:00:26 - 00:00:31 needs and expects from HR and what effective partnering looks like, and how
00:00:31 - 00:00:34 essential it is for HR to build a genuine knowledge and
00:00:34 - 00:00:40 understanding of the business by spending time in the work environment to see
first hand how
00:00:40 - 00:00:46 people do their work, and gain insights into their perspectives and goals.
00:00:46 - 00:00:52 As DPI has always had a dispersed workforce, Scott also shares great tips on
00:00:52 - 00:00:54 how to manage performance and the importance of setting a clear and shared
00:00:54 - 00:00:59 understanding of what needs to be achieved. Enjoy this episode from a business
00:00:59 - 00:01:06 leader's perspective. Hi, I'm Tanya Hammond, CEO of Tailored HR Solutions,
00:01:06 - 00:01:10 and I have the pleasure today of speaking with Scott Hanson, Director General
00:01:10 - 00:01:13 of New South Wales Department of Primary Industry, who will be sharing
00:01:13 - 00:01:17 with us his insights in relation to the changing role of HR, partnering with the
00:01:17 - 00:01:22 business to identify, develop and execute the workforce strategies. Welcome,
00:01:22 - 00:01:26 Scott. If you could provide us with the short overview of your background and
00:01:26 - 00:01:30 your current role. I've been basically born and bred into the primary industries
00:01:30 - 00:01:35 sector. I grew up on a farm up in Queensland and for the last 25 years have

00:01:35 - 00:01:41 been in executive roles, either within the industry or within government, and

00:01:41 - 00:01:45 for the last six years as a public servant within the New South Wales Public

00:01:45 - 00:01:49 Service heading up the Department of Primary Industries, which currently is a

00:01:49 - 00:01:53 part of the Department of Regional New South Wales cluster. Okay, thanks,

00:01:53 - 00:01:57 Scott, and I guess in those leadership roles within the public and private sector

00:01:57 - 00:02:01 , you've no doubt observed some changes in the role of HR. What's been the

00:02:01 - 00:02:05 biggest change you've watched over the last few years,

00:02:05 - 00:02:09 Well it's been interesting. For me, these changes have actually coincided with my

00:02:09 - 00:02:13 development and evolution as a leader across primary industries and that

00:02:13 - 00:02:17 evolution across both public sector and private sector businesses. The biggest

00:02:17 - 00:02:22 change has been that HR used to be seen as part of a corporate service that was

00:02:22 - 00:02:27 provided to really be the end of a chain to deal with procedural issues like

00:02:27 - 00:02:32 recruitment, industrial relations matters and so forth. Where the biggest

00:02:32 - 00:02:37 change certainly over the last 10 years has been our HR business partners are

00:02:37 - 00:02:43 actually more counsel and more general counsel to executive leaders, then

00:02:43 - 00:02:49 necessarily transactional. They provide far more of a strategic advisory service

00:02:49 - 00:02:53 to the business and to leaders, and that advice is often far broader than just

00:02:53 - 00:02:57 purely what would have previously have been defined as the HR function.

00:02:57 - 00:03:02 From your perspective, what's the most valuable service that you now receive

00:03:02 - 00:03:05 from your HR business partner, and why? The trick and the secret that I've

00:03:05 - 00:03:09 learnt in terms of being able to maximise the value you get out of your HR

00:03:09 - 00:03:15 business partner is their only ever as useful to you, is what you give them in

00:03:15 - 00:03:19 terms of context and the why question in terms of why are we looking to do

00:03:19 - 00:03:24 things? What? Why are we here? What is it that we're set up and established
00:03:24 - 00:03:28 to do? We've certainly built a stronger relationship with our HR business
00:03:28 - 00:03:33 partners over recent years, we've come to see that the more that they're an
00:03:33 - 00:03:38 intrinsic part of everyday business decisions and the more they're part of the
00:03:38 - 00:03:43 executive discussions around future funding activities, our priorities, our
00:03:43 - 00:03:48 plans and our strategic directions, the better the advice that they can provide us
00:03:48 - 00:03:51 about the workforce that we currently have, the workforce we need into the
00:03:51 - 00:03:56 future and the steps, the best transition from one to the other. That's valuable
00:03:56 - 00:03:59 insight. What does it look like when you're working then effectively with your
00:03:59 - 00:04:04 HR business partner? Can you give me an example or two? Obviously, this
00:04:04 - 00:04:09 period of time it's been really valuable for us to have HR business partners
00:04:09 - 00:04:13 that have been close to the business. In Primary Industries we've been dealing
now
00:04:13 - 00:04:18 with consecutive years of drought across all of New South Wales, which has
00:04:18 - 00:04:23 really been impacting not only on a number of our large tracts of our key
00:04:23 - 00:04:27 stakeholder groups within Prime Industries, but a lot of our staff are regionally
00:04:27 - 00:04:31 based. In fact, the vast majority of our staff live and work in amongst the
00:04:31 - 00:04:35 regions. They themselves, they're sort of constantly absorbing the stress and
00:04:35 - 00:04:39 the pressures that drought builds up on rural communities over time. Now,
00:04:39 - 00:04:45 this isn't just about failed crops and paddocks with no feeding for livestock,
00:04:45 - 00:04:50 it's been about towns running out of water. It's been about those houses, those
00:04:50 - 00:04:54 communities that aren't on a communal water system, but have got their own
00:04:54 - 00:04:58 tanks, their own water collection systems, their own bores. Those have been
00:04:58 - 00:05:02 running out. So there's been a lot of additional built up stress and pressure, not

00:05:02 - 00:05:07 only on our industry, who have in turn expected more from our staff, but also
00:05:07 - 00:05:11 on our staff living in amongst that pressure on a daily basis. We've benefited
00:05:11 - 00:05:14 from the fact that we had our HR business partner sitting at every one of our
00:05:14 - 00:05:20 executive team meetings, being aware of the slow build up of this pressure that
00:05:20 - 00:05:25 started with the need for us to rapidly escalate assistance programmes out onto
00:05:25 - 00:05:28 the ground. So we were tasking many staff to take up additional
00:05:28 - 00:05:33 responsibilities, additional roles to help get assistance out the door as quickly
00:05:33 - 00:05:37 as possible to support farmers and to support rural communities as we possibly
00:05:37 - 00:05:43 could. That rolled then to a summer where we had a combination of that low
00:05:43 - 00:05:48 flows in river systems, combined with extreme temperatures, creating some
00:05:48 - 00:05:53 significant fish death events out in our western rivers, particularly in the
00:05:53 - 00:05:57 Barwon-Darling system. Staff having to respond to that, having to deal with
00:05:57 - 00:06:02 community concerns and pressure about fish deaths within their local river
00:06:02 - 00:06:07 systems. We rolled out of that almost straight into bushfires, and that took up
00:06:07 - 00:06:11 a large part of the year. Again, our staff living in amongst these communities,
00:06:11 - 00:06:15 a number of them volunteer firefighters themselves, a number of them with
00:06:15 - 00:06:20 properties and direct threat from fires. So that slow burn of all these things
00:06:20 - 00:06:24 sort of coming together. It was the fact that we had our HR business partner
sitting
00:06:24 - 00:06:28 there at the table, collecting all of these stories, aware of what was going on
00:06:28 - 00:06:32 across all of the aspects of our business over a period time, that lead them to
00:06:32 - 00:06:38 sort of put their hand up at one point in time and say hey, I think we won't start
00:06:38 - 00:06:43 to run the risk of vicarious trauma accumulating amongst our staff. Let's have
00:06:43 - 00:06:46 a look at how we develop a targeted programme to provide some expert

00:06:46 - 00:06:52 counselling and some expert relief and advice to those staff who bean dealing
00:06:52 - 00:06:57 at the front end of some really tragic stories and drought, really tragic stories
00:06:57 - 00:07:02 with fish deaths and really tragic stories on fire, so that we can make sure that
00:07:02 - 00:07:05 they're able to help themselves so they can keep helping others. Now that's not
00:07:05 - 00:07:10 the kind of insight someone would have gained if they had turned up for a once
00:07:10 - 00:07:15 a quarter, one hour slot on an executive timetable to talk about HR issues. It
00:07:15 - 00:07:19 only comes from seeing and being there and experiencing what the business is
00:07:19 - 00:07:25 going through over a extended period of time to sort of pick it up as a looming
00:07:25 - 00:07:30 risk and propose a solution for us. That's a really good point Scott, because
00:07:30 - 00:07:34 what you're saying then is your business partner genuinely understands the
00:07:34 - 00:07:39 business. I think often I'm ah so what does it mean to understand the business?
00:07:39 - 00:07:43 What you've described to us there is exactly that, they understand the business
00:07:43 - 00:07:48 and what the workforce is going through, which is really important. To do that
00:07:48 - 00:07:52 effectively, obviously, you need to think about the capabilities that effective
00:07:52 - 00:07:57 HR business partners have. What do you reckon would be top five? Be able to
00:07:57 - 00:08:01 work effectively with your leadership team, what are the key capabilities they
00:08:01 - 00:08:06 need? I can honestly say, in the last 4 or 5 years we've had nothing but
00:08:06 - 00:08:11 extremely successful HR business partners as part of our rotation. So we've
00:08:11 - 00:08:14 been very lucky in that we've seen the very best of the capabilities that come
00:08:14 - 00:08:20 through. There's a couple of really core capabilities that we see. The first one
00:08:20 - 00:08:24 is their really open to learning their really, they come in and they just want to
00:08:24 - 00:08:27 absorb as much information as they can. They want to know about our
00:08:27 - 00:08:32 business as much as possible. They want to delve down below the top level of

00:08:32 - 00:08:35 what we do to understand the wider we're doing.. What's the motivator?

00:08:35 - 00:08:40 What's the driver of our staff? It's very easy. We make the same mistake when

00:08:40 - 00:08:44 we talk about industries at times we generalise and we imagine that it's a

00:08:44 - 00:08:48 homogeneous grouping that the same way we do it with public servants and

00:08:48 - 00:08:52 even within the public service we do it in talking about departments or clusters

00:08:52 - 00:08:58 or agencies, but we have such a diverse range of staff that work within

00:08:58 - 00:09:02 Department of Primary Industries. We at our core are a knowledge business,

00:09:02 - 00:09:06 so we have some of the smartest and brightest scientists on the planet who are

00:09:06 - 00:09:12 really internationally renowned in their fields of expertise that work with us,

00:09:12 - 00:09:16 and they in turn work with some really talented people who are technical

00:09:16 - 00:09:22 assistants, who help drive research projects who are out collecting data and

00:09:22 - 00:09:27 measurements. It doesn't matter what time of day, whether it's a weekend or

00:09:27 - 00:09:33 whether it's a weekday, when research projects need data collected for the

00:09:33 - 00:09:37 measure and analyse outcomes, the work just needs to be done. Understanding

00:09:37 - 00:09:41 some of those drivers not just the what we do but why we do it. It is really

00:09:41 - 00:09:45 important. So we need people who are open to that learning who really want to

00:09:45 - 00:09:49 know and want to absorb as much about our business as possible. They need to

00:09:49 - 00:09:55 be able to be able to relate to everyone from our six week temporary staff that

00:09:55 - 00:09:59 we put on to be able to help process, drought transport subsidies, all the way

00:09:59 - 00:10:03 through to staff who have been here for 35 years and are trying to think about

00:10:03 - 00:10:06 what a successful succession plan looks like for them as they exit the business.

00:10:06 - 00:10:10 They need to be relatable to all those people, they need to be able to win

00:10:10 - 00:10:13 people's confidence and trust. They need to be able to demonstrate through

00:10:13 - 00:10:19 their empathy that they're there to help provide solutions not necessarily to
00:10:19 - 00:10:23 come with cookie cutter solutions, but to be open to tailored solutions for each
00:10:23 - 00:10:28 of those individual cases. The more they do that, the greater bit they gain
00:10:28 - 00:10:32 across the business and that in turn creates the greater, open, frank and
00:10:32 - 00:10:37 transparent conversations that will be had with them, that really just means that
00:10:37 - 00:10:41 they keep adding to the value that they bring to the executive. Because for the
00:10:41 - 00:10:45 course of a year of that being absorbed in the business, being open and
00:10:45 - 00:10:49 empathetic to the staff that we have, understanding the why they're doing what
00:10:49 - 00:10:52 they're doing. They become an invaluable part of the executive team, not just
00:10:52 - 00:10:58 for me but for all of the leaders in our business. They become a go to point
00:10:58 - 00:11:01 to ask questions about the workforce capability, to ask questions about the
00:11:01 - 00:11:05 direction that some of the teams are heading to try to work out where the
00:11:05 - 00:11:10 greatest leverage points to try to keep driving higher engagement scores across
00:11:10 - 00:11:14 our teams and across our workforce that we could possibly do. Now they
00:11:14 - 00:11:19 become a key source of information for that. Fantastic Scott and lots of
00:11:19 - 00:11:23 good insights there in terms of obviously understanding the business. You talked
00:11:23 - 00:11:27 earlier about the importance of not looking at the workforce as a homogeneous
00:11:27 - 00:11:31 whole. It's a whole bunch of individuals that are really important that make up
00:11:31 - 00:11:36 the team. Thinking about that from a team perspective, how do you ensure that
00:11:36 - 00:11:40 teams working in the HR space really understand the business? You mentioned
00:11:40 - 00:11:44 coming to your meetings and sitting in those meetings and being part of it.
00:11:44 - 00:11:49 One of the things that you do to ensure that their across the performance of
00:11:49 - 00:11:54 your business, of productivity, that healthy org culture, it's a big question. But

00:11:54 - 00:11:58 what other things do you do other than the meetings Scott? So to cover things,
00:11:58 - 00:12:01 I think the first thing is, nothing quite helps. You get to understand a
00:12:01 - 00:12:06 workforce and the staff than actually spending a day in their shoes as regularly
00:12:06 - 00:12:10 as you can to sort of get out there on the ground or to get into the labs or to get
00:12:10 - 00:12:15 onto the boats with our compliance officers to understand the challenges they
00:12:15 - 00:12:19 face. To get them in their unguarded moments around what they love about
00:12:19 - 00:12:24 their jobs, what they don't love about their jobs. Spending time actually in
00:12:24 - 00:12:28 their workplace, in their environment, working alongside or observing them
00:12:28 - 00:12:33 and undertaking their day to day tasks and activities is critical if you really
00:12:33 - 00:12:37 want to build an understanding of what that very complex, very diverse
00:12:37 - 00:12:43 workforce is actually one of the challenges and ambitions that they face..
00:12:43 - 00:12:47 A successful HR business partner makes time to do that, actually tries to get on
00:12:47 - 00:12:52 that level of understanding, because otherwise what we can end up with is
00:12:52 - 00:12:55 high level aggregated scores coming out of surveys, really valuable surveys
00:12:55 - 00:13:00 like the People Matters employment survey they'd give us a high level picture.
00:13:00 - 00:13:04 But again, many of those high level pictures, especially at our executive table
00:13:04 - 00:13:09 level, are really just the average numbers from individual scores from 2000
00:13:09 - 00:13:14 individual's thoughts. Now it's really dangerous to believe you can just make
00:13:14 - 00:13:18 assumptions about what things are happening in amongst the workforce and
00:13:18 - 00:13:21 what kind of things do we need to be planning for, what things do we need to
00:13:21 - 00:13:25 be improving or what things can we say we're almost there on that we can take
00:13:25 - 00:13:30 a focus off for a period of time. If you just look at those numbers, getting way
00:13:30 - 00:13:34 down into those numbers as much as possible, spending time down at the

00:13:34 - 00:13:38 individual team level to understand why a team might have scored something

00:13:38 - 00:13:43 the way it did, understanding why they feel incredible scores with regards to

00:13:43 - 00:13:48 engagement with work. We're very lucky, we have a workforce who turn up to

00:13:48 - 00:13:51 work every day because they love what they do, it's about how we make

00:13:51 - 00:13:56 everything else that goes around their job as good as possible for them to make

00:13:56 - 00:14:00 them as passionate about not just their job, their team, but their broader

00:14:00 - 00:14:06 branch, there broader community and the broader department and cluster.

00:14:06 - 00:14:11 That's typically where we find we need to get down to walking in their shoes to

00:14:11 - 00:14:14 understand what that engagement looks like with the rest of the business. One

00:14:14 - 00:14:19 of the things that frustrated them that won't be big enough for them to raise up

00:14:19 - 00:14:23 via line management on a regular basis, but you spend a day with them, and

00:14:23 - 00:14:27 you'll soon find out what those things are. If you find those out and you can

00:14:27 - 00:14:33 put in place direct actions to help them, not only does it help alleviate some of

00:14:33 - 00:14:38 their bugbears, but it also builds that level of trust that they know that they can

00:14:38 - 00:14:41 continue to raise issues and that management will do something about them.

00:14:41 - 00:14:45 That includes they continue to build trust with the HR are business

00:14:45 - 00:14:49 partners who are involved in those discussions to help them find solutions. That's

00:14:49 - 00:14:53 really

00:14:49 - 00:14:53 insightful, Scott and then you started to touch on something that I'm sure our

00:14:53 - 00:14:58 listeners are really curious about is that evidence and insights that you value

00:14:58 - 00:15:01 the most. You talked about the people matters and obviously, that engagement

00:15:01 - 00:15:07 score. What other workforce evidence do you use to make decisions that you

00:15:07 - 00:15:11 find really useful as a leader that HR provides you with? Well we get a monthly

00:15:11 - 00:15:17 snapshot of key pieces of data that are provided to us from our HR business

00:15:17 - 00:15:21 partners. That gives me a snapshot of everything from what recruitment
00:15:21 - 00:15:24 activity is under way, what's happening with leave balances, what's happening
00:15:24 - 00:15:28 with sick leave balances. It gives me reports about whether there's many
00:15:28 - 00:15:34 actions that are being undertaken to remedy any workplace health and safety
00:15:34 - 00:15:38 risks that are being identified and brought forward. It shows me where we
00:15:38 - 00:15:43 have gaps in terms of recruitment or vacancies that are yet to be filled or
00:15:43 - 00:15:48 unable to be filled, and all these bits of information are useful in a monthly
00:15:48 - 00:15:52 conversation with the HR business partner about tell me what you think that
00:15:52 - 00:15:56 number means in terms of a higher percentage of current vacancies within one
00:15:56 - 00:16:01 team. What's your insight and intel off the ground, being able to ask that of
00:16:01 - 00:16:05 my managers at the same time. And quite often the stories will be perfectly
00:16:05 - 00:16:10 aligned, so our HR business partner and their enquiries down through their
00:16:10 - 00:16:15 business partner colleagues looking after various parts of our business will
00:16:15 - 00:16:19 bring back up the same information. It'll bring forward some things like
00:16:19 - 00:16:24 recruiting for these kind of roles in this space, of this location at this point of
00:16:24 - 00:16:28 time is really tough, really tight market, and so it allows us to have a
00:16:28 - 00:16:31 conversation about well, do they really need to be based in that location? Can
00:16:31 - 00:16:35 they be able to do this job from wherever we can have a footprint and
00:16:35 - 00:16:39 whenever we have the capability of someone working from. Can we inhabit so
00:16:39 - 00:16:43 that they're completely agile? We can be completely agnostic about location,
00:16:43 - 00:16:47 those kind of pieces of data that get brought together on a monthly basis for us.
00:16:47 - 00:16:52 It's more about the prompt for a conversation and helps us target into where a
00:16:52 - 00:16:56 conversation needs to be had, that helps us pull together some solutions and

00:16:56 - 00:17:00 some ideas as to how we might approach things differently to make sure we're
00:17:00 - 00:17:04 continuing to build and cultivate the workforce that we need not only for today,
00:17:04 - 00:17:08 but for the future. One of the strategic priorities for the New South Wales
00:17:08 - 00:17:13 government is to implement best practise productivity in digital capability
00:17:13 - 00:17:18 across the NSW public sector to drive public sector diversity by 2025. It's a
00:17:18 - 00:17:23 fairly audacious goal. What are the key workforce strategies that your business
00:17:23 - 00:17:26 partner is supporting you with to execute on that priority within your
00:17:26 - 00:17:33 organisation? It's disruptors like Covid and, to be honest, disruptors like fire
00:17:33 - 00:17:37 before we got to covert, we had a period there towards the end of last year,
00:17:37 - 00:17:40 certainly over the Christmas period and coming into the start of this year,
00:17:40 - 00:17:46 where we had significant disruption to our sites, our locations and our
00:17:46 - 00:17:52 businesses across the state, which really led us at that stage to start saying to
00:17:52 - 00:17:56 staff: you don't need to be travelling, you don't need to be a putting yourself at
00:17:56 - 00:18:01 risk. If you do your job from home, do it from home. And we almost started
00:18:01 - 00:18:06 that digital transformation for our business of less reliant on a central
00:18:06 - 00:18:11 aggregation point for our staff and less reliant on the need for a blue cord
00:18:11 - 00:18:14 coming out of a wall that they needed to plug into to be able to access our
00:18:14 - 00:18:19 systems, to really further equipping them to do the job from wherever it was
00:18:19 - 00:18:23 that they were. Now as I say we've been lucky on this because of the nature of
00:18:23 - 00:18:28 our our staff and the spread of them across the state, we have a really robust
00:18:28 - 00:18:34 series of systems and tools that enable them to work from either our research
00:18:34 - 00:18:39 stations out on the properties of our external stakeholder partners or from our
00:18:39 - 00:18:43 offices and touchdown points across the state as they need to. But there's

00:18:43 - 00:18:48 nothing quite like a significant disruption of both the fire and now Covid to
00:18:48 - 00:18:51 really shake that up and to really move that around. We actually see this is a
00:18:51 - 00:18:56 tremendous opportunity. We are a decentralised agency with a workforce that
00:18:56 - 00:19:00 is spread across the state, we are participating in some trials at the moment to
00:19:00 - 00:19:05 try to increase even greater the flexibility of our workforce and the classic for
00:19:05 - 00:19:09 them to do the job they need to do in the hours that best suit them over the
00:19:09 - 00:19:13 course of a week, to deliver the outcomes that we require. We have
00:19:13 - 00:19:19 traditionally always had to work around some of the constraints that we would
00:19:19 - 00:19:23 otherwise have faced. We have researchers working in the oyster industry, for
00:19:23 - 00:19:26 example, that need to be able to time their work around low tides and high
00:19:26 - 00:19:30 tides to be able to access oyster beds and to be able to do the research they
00:19:30 - 00:19:35 need to do. We have shark scientists who go out on the water at night to be able
00:19:35 - 00:19:40 to capture bull sharks in Sydney Harbour, tag them and release them as part of
00:19:40 - 00:19:43 population monitoring programmes. So, you know, we've always had a very
00:19:43 - 00:19:46 flexible workforce, that have worked the hours that they needed to do to get
00:19:46 - 00:19:50 the jobs done that they needed to get done. In this day and age, we're just
00:19:50 - 00:19:56 making sure that we not only provide the digital tools to enable that to be
00:19:56 - 00:20:00 geographically as well as time based, but also we're picking up on the fact that
00:20:00 - 00:20:04 , well, a lot of people who have had extended period of time of looking after
00:20:04 - 00:20:08 children at home and home schooling during this period of disruption, who
00:20:08 - 00:20:15 have found it easier to switch back on after hours, after traditional hours to get
00:20:15 - 00:20:19 some hours of work done of a night time after the children have gone to bed.
00:20:19 - 00:20:23 But being able to spend the time when the kids were needing their assistance,

00:20:23 - 00:20:28 where schoolwork or with online learning to be able to focus during that period
00:20:28 - 00:20:32 of time on the kids instead. We don't want to lose some of these great
00:20:32 - 00:20:35 advantages that have come out of this, some of the positive pieces that have
00:20:35 - 00:20:39 come out of the disruptions. We've been working with our HR business
00:20:39 - 00:20:43 partners to try to collect those insights from across our staff. What are the
00:20:43 - 00:20:47 things they want us to keep out of this period disruption? They've found really
00:20:47 - 00:20:50 valuable and worthwhile either on a work life balance front, or on an
00:20:50 - 00:20:54 engagement with stakeholder front, and one of things that they really want us
00:20:54 - 00:20:58 to fix as quickly as possible out of this disruption as well that if we're going to
00:20:58 - 00:21:03 continue to provide a workplace into the future, that attracts the very best, the
00:21:03 - 00:21:09 very brightest, one of the things we need to make sure we're doing well to not
00:21:09 - 00:21:13 only encourage them but to provide such a flexible workplace using the new
00:21:13 - 00:21:17 digital tools and solutions we have available to us that we're agnostic about
00:21:17 - 00:21:21 location and hopefully agnostic about the hours in which they need to do it
00:21:21 - 00:21:24 over the course of a week. That's really interesting Scott, because I was going
00:21:24 - 00:21:30 to ask you a bit more around the role that HR has played in supporting us
00:21:30 - 00:21:34 through Covid. You've touched on that already. What future role do you think
00:21:34 - 00:21:39 that HR's going to have in enabling you to respond to this ongoing disruption?
00:21:39 - 00:21:43 This, I think they call it VUCA world, volatile and certain complex and
00:21:43 - 00:21:48 ambiguous context. If you bring a couple of things I've already spoken about
00:21:48 - 00:21:52 together, so right from the very start we established in the first instance, we're
00:21:52 - 00:21:56 establishing a daily look of all of our senior leadership team to be able to run
00:21:56 - 00:22:01 through and each of our agendas are only 15 to 20 minutes in length, but they

00:22:01 - 00:22:05 were focused first and foremost on any staffing issues, then on any business
00:22:05 - 00:22:10 continuity issues, and then on any industry issues that needed to be addressed.
00:22:10 - 00:22:13 In the early days when we were doing this on a daily basis as we were
00:22:13 - 00:22:17 gathering the intel from across our staff, across our industry and across our
00:22:17 - 00:22:21 businesses, looking for where there was both risks and opportunities, our HR
00:22:21 - 00:22:26 business partners, they were doing the same, but doing it outside of our
00:22:26 - 00:22:30 somewhat narrow field of scope. They were looking across the remainder of
00:22:30 - 00:22:34 the public service. They were reaching out to colleagues in other clusters in
00:22:34 - 00:22:38 other departments. They were reaching out to find out information of bits and
00:22:38 - 00:22:42 pieces that we might not have readily available or readily in front of us to help
00:22:42 - 00:22:47 shape up our advice and our interaction back with both their external
00:22:47 - 00:22:51 stakeholders and our staff. Right from day one, they were an incredibly
00:22:51 - 00:22:57 valuable source of information, and not because of what they gained from out
00:22:57 - 00:23:00 of our business, but what they were gaining by knowing our business well and
00:23:00 - 00:23:07 knowing therefore, what questions to ask of the HR professionals across the
00:23:07 - 00:23:10 public service who were having daily conversations as well about what needed
00:23:10 - 00:23:14 to be done and how it needed to be done. Yeah, and then being able to bring
00:23:14 - 00:23:18 tailored questions to get answers that they could bring directly back to us every
00:23:18 - 00:23:22 day was incredibly valuable. As our time progressed, and we moved to three
00:23:22 - 00:23:26 times a week and we're still at three times a week. Every time we think how
00:23:26 - 00:23:30 we can relax it, something happens that sort of brings that necessity trust to
00:23:30 - 00:23:34 continue to touch base as a leadership group and to continue to talk about
00:23:34 - 00:23:37 what's happening with staff, what's happening with our workplaces and our

00:23:37 - 00:23:41 business continuity. The relationships and what the HR business partners has
00:23:41 - 00:23:45 evolved as well were in those early days. They were trying to get us tailored
00:23:45 - 00:23:49 answers to the complex questions that we'd have. Questions like, how do we
00:23:49 - 00:23:55 do the one person for square metre, per four square metre? We were looking
00:23:55 - 00:24:00 at compliance officers on fishing boats, out at sea, doing compliance on
00:24:00 - 00:24:05 recreational fishing. It was just physically impossible and unsafe for us to only
00:24:05 - 00:24:08 have one staff member on one of those boats out and see doing compliance
00:24:08 - 00:24:12 activities. Quite specific questions that we had that they were able to find us
00:24:12 - 00:24:16 answers for. It's moved right to the other end of the spectrum now, which is
00:24:16 - 00:24:20 helping us collect this information about, so what are the bits that actually staff
00:24:20 - 00:24:24 are enjoying out of this disrupted environment? One of the bits that they're
00:24:24 - 00:24:27 actually finding their were productive with, that they're finally getting more
00:24:27 - 00:24:31 enjoyment with, one of the early bits of feedback we've had is somehow staff
00:24:31 - 00:24:35 are actually a finding that they're having far more frequent conversations with
00:24:35 - 00:24:39 their managers because those conversations aren't being dedicated, aren't being
00:24:39 - 00:24:43 predicated on when the two of them happen to be in the office at the same time
00:24:43 - 00:24:49 . They're actually scheduling daily calls or weekly calls via Teams or Zoom to
00:24:49 - 00:24:53 be able to have those conversations. And as such they're finding far greater
00:24:53 - 00:24:58 access to their managers and to their leaders, far greater access to some their
00:24:58 - 00:25:03 team colleagues Because whilst it was available to use these technologies
00:25:03 - 00:25:07 previously, it wasn't anywhere near as commonly thought of in terms of a way
00:25:07 - 00:25:11 of connecting. How do we make sure we keep that? How do we keep that
00:25:11 - 00:25:16 connected feeling that they are getting from their frequent Teams conversations

00:25:16 - 00:25:20 and not lose it when we start putting people back into officers? How do we

00:25:20 - 00:25:23 reconfigure our offices while they're vacant at the moment to make sure that

00:25:23 - 00:25:28 when teams do come back in, they come back into an office space that is more

00:25:28 - 00:25:33 suitable to touch down and to sort of a point of engagement rather than a here's

00:25:33 - 00:25:39 a cubicle in which you sit. We've got a great opportunity with DPI in that we're

00:25:39 - 00:25:45 currently in the process of cleaning up and moving out of our current head

00:25:45 - 00:25:50 office in Kite street in Orange, into a new head office a couple of blocks away

00:25:50 - 00:25:55 . Now it's going to be a new head office with no officers, and it's all open plan

00:25:55 - 00:26:02 , agile working arrangements, which you couldn't have asked for a better

00:26:02 - 00:26:07 segway into that kind of working arrangement out of a 30 year period of offices

00:26:07 - 00:26:14 and walls and closed doors. Then to have the Covid interruption, which has

00:26:14 - 00:26:18 actually forced everyone to work in a much more agile environment, forced

00:26:18 - 00:26:23 people to actually work from any location that they can find where they can get

00:26:23 - 00:26:27 good Internet access and a quiet space to be able to think through. We're

00:26:27 - 00:26:31 working with our HR business partners about in this move into our new

00:26:31 - 00:26:35 building for and you know it's not all of our staff, but it is about 600 of our

00:26:35 - 00:26:39 two and a half thousand staff. How do we make sure we capture the best of

00:26:39 - 00:26:43 what this last period has brought, as well as how we make sure that we pick up

00:26:43 - 00:26:48 and address some of the concerns that staff have had over this last period.

00:26:48 - 00:26:52 Which is an important point I should make, that was very glass half full in

00:26:52 - 00:26:56 terms of thinking about the opportunities that have come out of the disruption.

00:26:56 - 00:26:59 You know, one of the great things our HR business partner was able to bring to

00:26:59 - 00:27:07 the table a couple of months ago now was just their ability to know some of the

00:27:07 - 00:27:11 people and personalities within our business because of their delving down into
00:27:11 - 00:27:16 the business, to getting to know the how and the why people do things. They
00:27:16 - 00:27:22 quickly identified a cohort within our group that were isolated at home, that felt
00:27:22 - 00:27:26 isolated at home and that needed that camaraderie of an office environment for
00:27:26 - 00:27:32 them to actually enjoy their work engagement. They didn't get the same sense
00:27:32 - 00:27:36 of joy sitting in front of the computer. And even in front of video, they needed
00:27:36 - 00:27:42 that human interaction on a daily basis to sort of really motivate them and
00:27:42 - 00:27:47 encourage them to sort of keep turning up. We were able to identify that cohort
00:27:47 - 00:27:51 amongst the teams and to put in place Covid safe work solutions for them, so
00:27:51 - 00:27:56 that we still had teams operating. We had a lot of our team in our research
00:27:56 - 00:28:01 stations and in our labs continuing to turn up on a daily basis. We were quick
00:28:01 - 00:28:07 to get these labs and our workplaces Covid safe, audited and approved to to
00:28:07 - 00:28:12 get the green ticks on the desks and the red crosses on some desks but to enable
00:28:12 - 00:28:17 those staff that need to come back in to be able to do so and to be able to sort of
00:28:17 - 00:28:21 track that to make sure that they were getting that human interaction that they
00:28:21 - 00:28:26 needed to be able to help both with their mental health as well as their
00:28:26 - 00:28:30 engagement with work. I think what you've shared with us, obviously are the
00:28:30 - 00:28:34 opportunities and the learnings in terms of the concerns, I hadn't discussed this
00:28:34 - 00:28:40 with you earlier Scott. Curious about just that whole managing of performance
00:28:40 - 00:28:44 of individuals working. It sounds like you've got a lot of experience working
00:28:44 - 00:28:48 with remote employees. What would be some tips in terms of advising our
00:28:48 - 00:28:52 listeners about how to coach managers in terms of managing the performance
00:28:52 - 00:28:57 of remote staff? A really good question in this current environment, we've

00:28:57 - 00:29:01 always had a dispersed workforce so we've had some sort of prior learning in
00:29:01 - 00:29:06 this space. I guess the key tip is, all starts with having clear expectations about
00:29:06 - 00:29:11 what the outcomes that we're working towards are. Without that, it's hard to
00:29:11 - 00:29:16 either measure performance or to help set directional activities for staff to
00:29:16 - 00:29:20 undertake. If it's not clear about what we're trying to achieve, and I mean
00:29:20 - 00:29:24 down to a really clear we're looking for this outcome by this date, and this
00:29:24 - 00:29:28 time. These are the operating parameters in which we need to work now. In
00:29:28 - 00:29:31 some cases, that will be these are the financial operating parameters we need
00:29:31 - 00:29:35 to work. In others it will be these are the political dimensions that we need to
00:29:35 - 00:29:39 be working with, but being clear about both what it is we're trying to achieve,
00:29:39 - 00:29:43 the timeframe in which that needs to be done, the operating procedures, as
00:29:43 - 00:29:48 well as then what's the expectation about reporting back on milestones. So
00:29:48 - 00:29:53 setting up those conversations early, really critical to be able to come up with
00:29:53 - 00:29:58 a good process for performance management in a dispersed and agile
00:29:58 - 00:30:04 environment. Being able to have those clear expectations about outcomes and
00:30:04 - 00:30:08 the delivery dates, the milestones required to check in what's expected with
00:30:08 - 00:30:12 regards to reporting. All of these then lead to really clear and easy
00:30:12 - 00:30:16 conversations in terms of performance management. It's easy to sort of have
00:30:16 - 00:30:20 agreed steps of stages of which you sit down, where you're able to assess
00:30:20 - 00:30:24 performance against what has been agreed and set up in the first instance, an
00:30:24 - 00:30:27 honest conversation about if we're off track, why are we off track. What are
00:30:27 - 00:30:31 the externalities or the internalities that are sort of driving us that way? What
00:30:31 - 00:30:35 are the things we can do about that? What sort of alternative approaches that

00:30:35 - 00:30:39 might deliver us the same outcome in a reduced time frame if we've lost time in
00:30:39 - 00:30:44 terms of decision making, what's the best way to deliver the same outcome or
00:30:44 - 00:30:48 an outcome that will deliver the same benefits? If it's about a budget constraint
00:30:48 - 00:30:53 or a budget issue that's arisen, these are all the conversations that can flow,
00:30:53 - 00:30:57 but they all need to start with a really clear and shared understanding of what it
00:30:57 - 00:31:01 is you're trying to achieve, the milestones and the time frames in which that
00:31:01 - 00:31:06 needs to be achieved by. That's really insightful too Scott because I think I've
00:31:06 - 00:31:10 been reading a lot about the complexity of that performance management
00:31:10 - 00:31:14 because there's many organisations that aren't as lucky as yourself in terms of
00:31:14 - 00:31:18 having been able to do that because you've got a lot of remote workers, and
00:31:18 - 00:31:23 that's really very valuable. A lot of the authors, really curious and our listeners
00:31:23 - 00:31:27 I'm sure will be interested in finding out how you kind of remain abreast of this
00:31:27 - 00:31:32 field, partnering with the business in HR and working with developing
00:31:32 - 00:31:36 workforce strategies. How do you remain abreast of theory, what's going on
00:31:36 - 00:31:43 out there, the people that you follow? Probably the most undervalued section
00:31:43 - 00:31:49 on the annual performance development plans is a section about personal
00:31:49 - 00:31:53 development. It's quite often the very last square or the very last field that gets
00:31:53 - 00:31:58 filled in on those performance development plans is usually the last and tail
00:31:58 - 00:32:01 end of the conversation in the sort of hour and a half you might have with a
00:32:01 - 00:32:07 staff member. But that peace around forcing not only myself but me
00:32:07 - 00:32:13 encouraging my staff to continue to sort of utilise the opportunity to learn, to
00:32:13 - 00:32:18 continue to sort of be connected to management approaches, learnings on an
00:32:18 - 00:32:23 annual basis because things move so quickly these days in terms of tools and

00:32:23 - 00:32:27 techniques, but new research that shows you different approaches delivering
00:32:27 - 00:32:32 different outcomes. What I've undertaken to do with my direct reports is every
00:32:32 - 00:32:38 second of the performance discussions that we have actually flips around and
00:32:38 - 00:32:43 starts just talking about the professional development of the staff member.
00:32:43 - 00:32:47 What are the, either the coaching them, mentoring, the courses, the
00:32:47 - 00:32:53 subscriptions, the seminars that they're going to participate in to continue to
00:32:53 - 00:33:00 sharpen the saw for them so that they can continue to drive that same practise
00:33:00 - 00:33:05 down throughout our staff. Now I've got to say, because of the because of the
00:33:05 - 00:33:11 nature of our teams a lot of these things, we actually have an inherent
00:33:11 - 00:33:17 advantage with. About remote performance management, a large cohort of our
00:33:17 - 00:33:22 staff in DPI are actually funded by industry to deliver research outcomes over
00:33:22 - 00:33:27 four or five year timeframes in terms of research projects. That's an industry
00:33:27 - 00:33:31 normally and nationally, sometimes an international industry selling out in a
00:33:31 - 00:33:35 contract, what knowledge they would like created by our teams over what
00:33:35 - 00:33:40 period of time and for what investment they make. It had this almost inherent
00:33:40 - 00:33:44 underlying platform that many of our teams have been operating for many
00:33:44 - 00:33:51 years off really clear, concise contractual arrangements with external funders,
00:33:51 - 00:33:56 that when we then flipped that into the internal conversation, they see
00:33:56 - 00:33:59 automatically the alignment and they say, yeah, well, here's what I'm looking
00:33:59 - 00:34:03 to deliver, this is the time frame, these are the milestones, and at each of those
00:34:03 - 00:34:06 milestone conversations, we can have a chat about whether we're on line to
00:34:06 - 00:34:11 deliver or not. And the why, either what they can do to assist getting it back on
00:34:11 - 00:34:15 track or what I can do to assist in helping them get back on track. A, we have

00:34:15 - 00:34:20 that, that sort of works for us. But secondly, because their knowledge workers
00:34:20 - 00:34:25 , they know that they continue to add value in their roles only when they
00:34:25 - 00:34:31 continue to have knowledge that's relevant, new and contemporary to the
00:34:31 - 00:34:34 stakeholders and the industries they're working with. Without that, they no
00:34:34 - 00:34:38 longer win the funding they no longer win the contracts to do the work to
00:34:38 - 00:34:43 generate new knowledge, so they have a ready thirst for continuing to
00:34:43 - 00:34:49 participate in seminars, in science conferences. We have a large cohort of our
00:34:49 - 00:34:54 staff who regularly are included in international science projects and therefore
00:34:54 - 00:34:59 travel internationally, not only to deliver their knowledge, but to work with
00:34:59 - 00:35:04 their peers from around the globe in developing new knowledge that they didn't
00:35:04 - 00:35:09 bring back to Australia and back to New South Wales for direct application
00:35:09 - 00:35:13 back into our business and into New South Wales businesses. So we have a
00:35:13 - 00:35:18 really strong cohort about continuing to stay contemporary and up to date with
00:35:18 - 00:35:23 what's happening in each of our respective fields. Because of that, it's an easy
00:35:23 - 00:35:28 sell from the management team down about the need to keep in contact and to
00:35:28 - 00:35:33 keep connected. The hours that we spend in cars these days are made a hell of a
00:35:33 - 00:35:39 lot easier by the quality of the podcasts that are available to sort of help
00:35:39 - 00:35:44 summarise and keep you up to date with a whole range of either new tools,
00:35:44 - 00:35:50 new techniques or new research that helps continue to shape and sharpen your
00:35:50 - 00:35:54 management approach. And what are one or two podcasts that you really
00:35:54 - 00:36:00 listened to and enjoy? I find myself trapped into two libraries at the moment in
00:36:00 - 00:36:05 my rotation. The first one is the HBR idea casts. So Harvard Business review
00:36:05 - 00:36:10 idea cast, which I find gives you a 30 minute to an hour and 20 sort of

00:36:10 - 00:36:16 snapshot of some new management approach or business approach that enables

00:36:16 - 00:36:21 an interview with the researchers involved, the author's involved in new

00:36:21 - 00:36:26 publications, and will often then trigger me to actually go and look more into

00:36:26 - 00:36:30 either their work or their book to sort of delve down a bit deeper. When I'm

00:36:30 - 00:36:36 wanting to expand beyond just the how do I best go about managing and

00:36:36 - 00:36:41 leading the organisation into the what are the bits that are happening around the

00:36:41 - 00:36:45 world that I'm not seeing that we should be thinking about. I find Ted talks

00:36:45 - 00:36:50 are a incredible source of both inspiration, as well as making me think completely

00:36:50 - 00:36:56 outside the box in terms of what's happening around the globe. Just last night

00:36:56 - 00:37:00 in the process of driving back from Sydney to Orange, I thought there's surely

00:37:00 - 00:37:04 no value in me listening to a Ted talk on agriculture, given the fact I've spent

00:37:04 - 00:37:09 40 something years in it. But there was a Ted talk there on vertical indoor

00:37:09 - 00:37:13 agriculture and talking about warehouses now that are developing in

00:37:13 - 00:37:20 industrialised cities that have 14 storeys of vegetable production completely

00:37:20 - 00:37:25 indoors. And not requiring soil but feeding all the nutrients they need into the

00:37:25 - 00:37:32 plants by irrigation systems, utilising bespoke energy systems to drive

00:37:32 - 00:37:37 fluorescent bulbs that have been specifically targeted to the light cycle that the

00:37:37 - 00:37:42 plant individual plants need to maximise production, make them basically

00:37:42 - 00:37:48 believe that it's daylight 24 hours a day and peak production time. You start to

00:37:48 - 00:37:51 get some of these ideas about what else is happening out there, and you start to

00:37:51 - 00:37:55 think then about so what is possible in this overall balance of what we're trying

00:37:55 - 00:38:00 to achieve? It sets you up for interesting conversations with your staff over the

00:38:00 - 00:38:05 days that follow. That's really useful. If you could give the audience one key

00:38:05 - 00:38:10 takeaway about what advice you'd share around building a trusted and effective
00:38:10 - 00:38:15 partnership with yourself and your leaders, what would that be? For me, alot
00:38:15 - 00:38:22 of this comes down to an openness and honesty, both around the shared
00:38:22 - 00:38:27 ambitions about what it is we're trying to achieve. It's very hard to encourage
00:38:27 - 00:38:31 leaders to go back out and lead their teams and, in turn asked their leaders
00:38:31 - 00:38:37 within their teams to go and lead their teams in a direction if they don't believe
00:38:37 - 00:38:41 in that direction. And so, a starting premise for me with any leadership team
00:38:41 - 00:38:47 I've had, is that commonality of purpose that we're able to arrive at. Finding
00:38:47 - 00:38:53 what it is that is the intrinsic piece in everyone's core beliefs and values, the
00:38:53 - 00:38:59 reasons why they've got to where they've got to in their management careers, in
00:38:59 - 00:39:05 their executive careers, in this part of government. Finding that common piece
00:39:05 - 00:39:09 around why do we want to keep turning up every day, and why do we want to
00:39:09 - 00:39:15 keep doing the very best we can. Being able to craft that then into the narrative
00:39:15 - 00:39:21 of the what is our purpose and why are we here? You get that right, and it's
00:39:21 - 00:39:25 really empowering for a team. You combine that then with transparency and
00:39:25 - 00:39:31 honesty about the risks, the opportunities, the good times and the bad times,
00:39:31 - 00:39:35 when things aren't going to work the way we hoped they would, being honest
00:39:35 - 00:39:39 and open about it up front rather trying to paper it over, cover it over and just
00:39:39 - 00:39:45 hope that no one notices. Being open in conversations at an executive level to
00:39:45 - 00:39:53 create a safe space for your colleagues to question either assumptions that have
00:39:53 - 00:39:58 been made or decisions that are being made as to whether they really are the
00:39:58 - 00:40:02 best way of utilising incredible human resource we have as well as the
00:40:02 - 00:40:05 financial resource we have to achieve the outcomes. You get those things right

00:40:05 - 00:40:10 , you create that common purpose and vision. You create an environment in
00:40:10 - 00:40:17 which it's a safe space for people to be able to be open and frank about
00:40:17 - 00:40:22 challenges and issues as well as opportunities that they see. And you're a long
00:40:22 - 00:40:26 way there, to sort of having a really effective leadership team.
00:40:26 - 00:40:30 Great answer Scott, thank you. And I'm sure the listeners will agree with me very
00:40:30 - 00:40:34 interesting answers and interview with you today and thank you very much for
00:40:34 - 00:40:40 your time. Thanks Scott and Tanya an exceptional interview. So great to get
00:40:40 - 00:40:44 original perspective in today's episode. Scott's view of flipping the
00:40:44 - 00:40:48 performance development conversation to start with professional development
00:40:48 - 00:40:53 is interesting. I'm wondering if any of our HR colleagues are encouraging this
00:40:53 - 00:40:58 in their agencies, and what your feedback might be. Please share any of your
00:40:58 - 00:41:03 thoughts on our HR ComPrac LinkedIn page. See you next week.