MAN:  
Welcome.

WOMAN:  
Welcome. Welcome. Welcome.

MAN:  
Welcome. Welcome to the age of inclusion.  
(MUSIC PLAYS)

GAIL:  
My name's Gail Le Bransky and I'm the director of disability employment at the New South Wales public service commission. Thank you for joining us today for the managing and the age of inclusion webinars series. Before I commence, I'd like to acknowledge that I'm hosting and recording this webinar on the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. The Eora people was the name given to the coastal Aboriginal peoples around Sydney, and that Eora means here or from this place. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the various lands on which you all work today and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in this webinar. May I pay my respects to Elders past present and emerging and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. We recently held some disability at work forums and what we heard was that people want to be more inclusive managers and colleagues, but need more information and guidance on how. So we've created this webinar series to share some practical advice. We'll help you create a workforce where everyone feels welcomed and included. This webinar series will show you the often simple steps you can take to make a tremendous impact on the working lives of people with disability, from opening career pathways to removing blocks so they can thrive professionally. Today's session is dedicated to flex working. So we're going to talk about all the tools, knowledge, and resources currently available. Flexible and inclusive workplaces is another way managers can enable employees with disability to be more effective and productive in the workplace. I'll talk about the New South Wales Premier's priority to increase the representation of people with disability in the government sector to 5.6% people in the workforce by 2025 and the work we're doing at the public service commission to achieve that target. Then we'll hear from my public service commission colleague, Siobhan Brahe about how managers can build a flexible culture that works. Let's start by sharing a message from the New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian, along with the minister for disability services, Gareth Ward, that chose commitment to this target at the highest level of government.

GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:  
As a government we're committed to improving the lives of the people of New South Wales. We've recognised that an important part of this is having our world-class New South Wales public service that is productive, diverse, and inclusive. This means genuine inclusiveness in our workplace for all people, including for people with a disability. That's why as a government, we've set a target to more than double the number of people with disability employed in New South Wales, public service by 2025. This means more than 10,000 people employed with a disability across the New South Wales government. As the largest employer in Australia and in fact, the Southern hemisphere, we have a real opportunity to make a lasting difference by continuing to put the people at the heart of everything we do.

GARETH WARD:  
And Premier as the first minister for disabilities to have a disability I understand some of the challenges that people experience in the workplace, but we want to create an environment in our state where people feel comfortable about talking about their disability, no matter what it is, and making sure that they get the right supports so they can reach their full potential. We know that by employing people with disabilities, you gain unique experiences and insights that may change services and policies for the better. We want to encourage every person with a disability to achieve their full potential. And that's all part of what we are doing to make New South Wales a more inclusive state through reviewing our disability inclusion action plans so that we can do things better. We're also encouraging private organisations to step up by having their own disability inclusion plans, so they can set targets and encourage people through options, such as employment in their own businesses. We want New South Wales to be an even more inclusive place, but everyone needs to play a part. You too can make a contribution to disability inclusion. And we look forward to seeing the results over the next 12 months.

GAIL:  
The representation of employees with disability in the New South Wales government has been falling since 2011. In order to have a workforce which reflects the diverse community we serve this decline needs to be challenged. The Premier in her priorities for government said representation target of 5.6% by 2025. That means about 10,000 current government sector jobs will be held by people with disability by 2025. It's a big number and the change needed to bring around 2000 more people with disability into the sector every year can't be underestimated, but as the largest employer in the Southern hemisphere, we're well placed to make this change. There are currently around 40,000 recruitment opportunities every year. Currently only around 667 people with disability are successfully employed. Our work is designed to increase the odds, shifting the dial from the current recruitment rate of one in 60 to one in 20 people with disability getting one of those 40,000 jobs. The PSC can't do this alone. We rely on all of you to take action and to champion the employment of people with disability. The first thing we need to understand is that disability is not an uncommon experience at work. Around one in nine employees experience some form of disability. Too many of us associate disability with white canes and wheelchairs only, but the reality is much more diverse. Disability can be seen or unseen, and the experience of disability can range from mild to severe. It can be ever present or episodic. While disability is so commonly experienced in the community, we've got much to learn with how we consider disability in the workplace. We need to understand that the experience of disability is a very personal one. Two people with the same disability may cope with their disabilities very differently. When we work with people with disability, our primary responsibility is not only to educate ourselves broadly about the disability, but to ask the person what works for them?

The public service commission collaborated extensively with peak organisations and disability employee networks to produce a guide on sharing disability information at work. It's been created for employees and their managers to understand better what information they might share about their disability and how, and when to do it. The sharing disability at work guidance aims to increase the trust and confidence of employees with disability to share their disability status. The ultimate goal is for employees to make an informed decision about sharing this information at work, without prejudice. This guide is also available on the public service commission website. It provides an easy to understand definition of what falls under the umbrella of disability, including mental health and conditions such as dyslexia. It explains the benefits and protections to be gained from sharing disability information. It helps employees with disability understand what personal information they could share and when they may choose to do so. Information is also provided on the various formal and informal avenues for sharing. It offers clear information about who will have access to shared disability information. It also helps employees understand why disability information is captured in human capital management systems and what it's used for. I'd like now to introduce my colleague Siobhan Brahe. Siobhan is the practice lead for diversity and inclusion at the New South Wales public service commission. Siobhan and her team support the sector in achieving the Premier's policy commitment of all roles across government being flexible on an, if not, why not basis. Siobhan's team has done incredible work in building capability, policies and systems advice, and a framework for monitoring the availability of flex work across the public sector. It's thanks to their good work that has supported a large part of our sector to transition seamlessly to working from home during the pandemic. Welcome Siobhan, lovely to have you here.

SIOBHAN:  
Thank you, Gail. So I often start with a definition of flexible working. It's useful to start with this definition because we're consistently astonished in our work across the sector by how hard coded some of our defaults are about flexibility. A lot of people assume that it's working from home and I suspect the conditions we're in at the moment reinforcing that. And that it's something that only people with a good reason can ask. But what's important to understand about this policy commitment however, is that it opens it right up. It's about the where, the when, the how and the who of working across the New South Wales government sector. And we find that these things are often intertwined. So for us to be able to change the where we may know also need to question ourselves around the how we do our work, for example, to be more agile, or who, and that means swapping around some tasks in a team as a way to unlock more flexibility overall for everybody. So why is the government committed to this policy? Well, it is a policy commitment of course, but it isn't just about adhering to the policy, there's three lenses for how it contributes to the government sector. The first is productivity. We know from our own data that, that productivity data in your agency can include increased engagement, employee engagement and much lower sick leave rates, which is a huge win. We know that there's a diversity in talent lens, so it will help your diversity goals and attract and retain top talent. It's important as Gail mentioned, the Premier's priority targets around diversity representation, for us to understand different ways that we can allow for workforce participation and some of those ways will be flexible. And it's important for our health. We know that, that flexible workers, generally report much better perspectives around their own autonomy and their ability to handle work-life stress and respond to important life events. So we know that this improves considerably our ability to manage our physical and mental wellbeing. And those three factors are of course intertwined, because if you can better manage your wellbeing then you're less likely to call in sick for example, which means better coverage at work, which means that you're more likely to like, like your job. So what's the current situation at your agency? Who initiates flexibility? These are some important questions to understand because a lot of the time we can assume that, that we're very good at doing flex because the people who ask for it are often accommodated, but there's a difference between accommodating flexibility and understanding that it's a business need. So the first question is, do you accommodate people when they ask you for a flexibility arrangement? Is it a business accommodation, or is it a business need? Is it a business imperative? Do you understand as an agency that in order to attract and retain top talent, it's something that's become a business need? As a manager do you find that you're reactive or are you proactive? Do you actively suggest flexibility to your team? Do reasons matter? Now that's an interesting one that comes up a lot for people. A lot of people assume that you need to have a very good reason to ask for flexibility. Where that becomes problematic from an inclusion perspective is, then there can become a hierarchy of judgement around having a good reason which can introduce some stigma around people being allowed to access flexibility or not. Does flexibility operate as a two way street in your agency? And that's very important as well. It's not to be absolutely clear, it's not an entitlement. It is something that has to work for the business and work for the team as well as it works for the individual. And that means that any arrangement has to allow for some mutual benefit. Does performance matter?

That's another hard coded bias that, that for somebody to access flexibility they have to be a good performer. But in fact what we found across the sector is that, sometimes it's a lack of flexibility that's causing the performance issue in the first place. Is flexibility in your agency individually based or is it team based? And this is really around preparing you for further conversation. Is it something that you talk about as a team and make work as a team around, along with your other shared objectives, or is it strictly an arrangement between a manager and an individual which, as a manager makes your role a little bit harder. And who initiates the flexibility? Is it part of all of your recruitment and on boarding processes, or is it something that an employee has to ask for, often after a suitable period of time has elapsed. So we provide a lot of guidance such as conversation guides around having those sorts of conversations which I'll come to later in my presentation. So managers can encourage their team members to work flexibly and that's, that means of course that, not everybody wants to work flexibly and not everybody has to, not everybody should. But it is a conversation that should be initiated amongst the team to decide how it can work, and I'll talk a little bit later in this webinar about how we can go about doing that, and the best, the best format to take.

Now we acknowledge of course that certain employees need an adjustment to the way they work, and that can be for any multitude of reasons and of course as we've discussed, reasons don't actually matter. But the principle of everyone asks, means or everyone can ask, means that the sector is committed to finding ways to accommodate what people may need and adjusting to those needs as they change over time, because they will change over time. But at the same time we also need to be very mindful that we have business outcomes, whether they're service deliveries, customers, clients that need to be achieved. So we need to find a way to achieve those while working flexibly and that's where the two way street element comes into play. We need to find where we can increase, maintain or improve productivity engagement. People's perceptions of being willing to go above and beyond, minimise sick leave and find cost savings and these are all a very powerful business imperative. So as a manager what's your role in flexibility? So you're already responsible for driving progress in work in setting very clear outcomes that your team needs to work, to support. Your responsible for supporting your team, you're responsible for giving performance feedback to drive optimal performance outcomes and you're also responsible for role modelling behaviour that you want to see more of in your team. So what extra do you need to do for flexible working?

What extra do you need to learn? Well, the good news is that, flexible working actually requires more or less the same skills base more often than not, it's just putting a few extra structures in place, particularly at times like this where your teams work far more remotely. Most of the skills you need for work place flexibility are the same skills you already possess. So managing a team, monitoring workloads, supervising, appraising, supporting and coaching employees is really, it's the same skills base you would need anyway. The only bit extra you may need to add is, a bit of knowledge about the policy framework within your organisation. So what is and isn't possible. That will differ by agency. In some agencies there may be a larger menu of flexibility that's available, in others it's more constraint. You don't need to be a flexibility subject matter expert, however, if you're already an expert on your work and managing your team, then that will be sufficient. But how do you make it happen? And what tools are available to support you? Where can you find resources for your development? So on our PSC website, we have a significant section under flexible working, which is full of resources for managers. There's lots of practical tip sheets and guides there for managers, to help guide you through the conversations you'll need to have about the different forms of flexible work. There's a skill sets assessment there that's very helpful. You can test yourself on how good you are or how confident you feel around managing for outcomes. It's accompanied by a development guide as well which provides free resources you can use to build on those areas where you may feel less confident or want to grow stronger. There's also a team based design tool kit. So, and we'll talk a little bit more about team-based design now because, I think that's quite a, a powerful way to go about it. And there's a conversation guide on our website which can provide some guidance for you on all the important things to talk about, noting especially for employees with disability.

They do have a right to request flexible arrangements and it is one of the most common and easily fulfilled workplace adjustments. So it is the, that conversation guide. We'll talk you through how to have that conversation in a supportive way with an employee, and noting that if what they're asking for may not be possible on operational grounds, how to have a conversation about, well, maybe not this, but let's find what else we can, we can do or what other adjustment might be possible. So commonly with flexibility across the sector until now, because of course flexibility has existed in the public sector for decades. What's different however is that, up until now it's been very much an individual approach to flexibility. So conversations have begun with an individual making a request and often in a business case type format, they will have to put a proposal forward to the manager. And at the manager's discretion, they've been able to say yes or no, but unfortunately because managers haven't always been able to look across the team and how the teams work overall can be met, it can result in an inequity of outcomes. Sometimes some people have their arrangements turned down, because somebody else has got in first and said yes. Rather than designing it into the way that the team works, we as managers we look at ways to accommodate a request and try to ensure that the flexibility will not have a negative impact on the business outcomes. But, that becomes so much harder when you're doing it at scale when everybody in your team can, can ask, how do you look and anticipate the systemic wide aspects, or potential risks that could occur across your team? That's why we recommend taking a team-based approach. Now, what's different about a team-based approach? Well, it's experimental in nature. So it starts by saying what could be possible? It begins very importantly by identifying what are the business outcomes that need to be maintained or improved regardless of flexibility? So what are the productivity metrics you may have within your team, who are your customers, who your stakeholders, where the peaks and troughs of work across your organisation?

What are the team outcomes that you want to protect, what does it mean about cohesion and connection and collaboration that makes it great to work in your team that you need to look after? And then from there, we start to challenge the assumptions about the way we work, is the way we've done it in fact, the best way to keep doing it? Is that the best way to achieve outcomes or are there other possibilities? From there, you start to talk as a team about how those jobs or the work that's done could be changed up, how could it be done differently? Then, and only then do we start to talk about the flexibility that might be possible in that context and then we start to plan the type of flexibility that we might like to do on the basis that it maintains or improves outcomes for the organisation for the customers, for the team and for the individuals so it looks after their wellbeing as well. You develop and you enact a new team-based flexibility culture from there. The best way to get started is it's simple, it's very simple, just schedule a team meeting to discuss it. As a team, agree what your shared goals and responsibilities are. And we have some great templates on our website that you can use for structuring that discussion and some tip sheets on the things that you need to cover off in that conversation. Agree how you're going to know if you're achieving those metrics and then agree how often you're going to check in against them because that does become your reference point for checking the progress of the experiment you're about to embark on. Then agree who your stakeholders are internal and external, who need to be consulted and have their expectations managed. If particularly if the team is going to change their availability or particularly if it's if there's going to be different ways of working.

So consider then the peaks and troughs of the workload, have a plan B for when you may need to adjust your flexibility arrangements. So is there a particular time of the year where it becomes crucial that people be more available or available in a different way and then talk about your flexible working, what's possible in that context? Agree to trial it for a while, we recommend at least three months. And of course, you will have agreed what your success measures are and what the red flags might be. So you know what to, what everybody should speak up about if things don't work. And then it's really crucial to agree the rules of the road, some basic operating principles. These are deceptively simple little rules, but so crucial to ensuring that people's confidence isn't rattled. So have a weekly coverage plan. That coverage plan can include what the work objectives are, when the team meetings are going to be, any crossover days that you want to have in the office. And I think particularly as, those of us who are office-based start to return to offices, that becomes crucial because I think we can safely assume there will be some more working from home and establish your communication protocols. So what format of communication are you going to use, is it going to be phone, SMS, you're going to use a collaboration tool like MS Teams and make sure you let the other teams that work with you know those as well because if they're using Skype, for example, they may find it a little bit disconcerting that your team doesn't answer Skype, you're using Teams instead. So and make sure that you have some rules of the road around how much notice people will give if they need to use a different form of flexibility, how you'll let people know where they are and how much notice they'll give any changes to arrangements. So and be very clear about those rules and stick to them because that's how you build trust.

And then have very transparent conversations with your stakeholders, with your teams, with your leadership group, about working patterns and how you're going to ensure that your quality outcomes, particularly your business outcomes are going to be maintained. It's also very important to ensure that particularly where if your team is going to work quite remotely for a period of time, that you have ways of catching up with each other in those remote meetings, you have ways of connecting with each other and ways of documenting conversations. It can mean that you need to introduce into your team meetings a level of structure that you wouldn't typically have for an internal meeting, but you would have for an external meeting, for example. So, agendas, recording some of the outcomes of the meeting, using a collaboration tool, like MS Teams can be quite useful for tagging people to ensure that everyone understands their action items. One of the risks we do find with people working externally is it's very easy for them to get out of the communication loop. So you will need to be a little more thoughtful around those sorts of things particularly if you have people who are part time or job share, and could miss key communications otherwise.

It's also really important that everyone agree that they don't use the flexible arrangements as an excuse to cancel meetings or not participate, that they're active participants in making sure that it works. And agree how often you're going to review it. It's a dynamic thing, not a static thing, conditions may change. A lot of the pilots that we worked with the sector and the experiments we designed with them would never have taken into account the conditions that we find ourselves in now. No one in their right mind would have designed an experiment where the whole office de-camped working from home five days per week, but that's the situation that we find ourselves in. We've been really pleased and proud how effectively the sector's been able to do that and protect service delivery outcomes. But now, with the check-ins agree how and when you're going to provide feedback to each other on team working relationships and how well the team is working and maintaining connection and cohesion. It's really important because people do bring very different perspectives to how much connection they need. For some people, they love having check-ins every day, other people loathe it, just want to be left alone and be hermits for a while, find have the team design that plan because that's really important. And the other crucial hygiene factor is performance plans. So make sure that everyone's performance plans align with the business team and individual outcomes that you've designed and you're going to check in against and have regular and meaningful conversations about performance and how work is going to provide an opportunity to continuously improve in the context of flexible working.

That can include conversations about changing your personal circumstances, it can include technology barriers, and it can include impacts on the team if one person isn't perhaps as available as they need to be and that's rattling the confidence of the people who are working closely with them on projects. So there is as I mentioned before, a good deal of support available for having all of that. We have a tool kit on our website, which is fantastic. It takes you through a step by step guide of how to design that experiment with your own team, with lots of tip sheets and templates to structure those conversations. There's also as I referred to before the the manager conversation guide as well for any one on one conversations you need to have. And that can be very important as well. Both of those include also ways to monitor the flexibility arrangements you have in your team and how to check if they're working. So flexibility is, of course, a very common form of workplace adjustment as I mentioned before. And much of the time, it's pretty straightforward, you, particularly in office space roles, it may be as simple as altering start and finish times to help with medication management, or it could be having a conversation about those days when someone needs as part of their wellbeing to work elsewhere, whether that's in the office, or whether it's at home or whether it's at an alternate location or third party location. But sometimes it can require a much more structural role to the role, structural change to the role and its task mix, or it may mean cutting back on the number of days, but still getting the work done overall. So you can do this in response to a request as a manager and you should, or, and we really recommend this, when you're taking a new role to market or you have a vacant role, you can proactively look at the way that the role is structured. Have a look at the role description itself, make sure that it's still current, that it's still accurate and then consider what you might be able to change about the where, the when the how or even the who of that role.

What's really essential about it, about that role, or is it just in there because it's always been in there? Can you think about things a little bit differently, you may consider something to be an essential requirement to the role like a driver's licence, but in fact, could that be done quite differently, does it really require that one person to drive to those different locations or is there a tech-based solution? If you receive an application from a candidate who has shared that they have a disability, of course you can talk to them and you would talk to them about any specific adjustments. But we're also now developing a tool that helps you to redesign a role in a way that retains a good mix of challenges and career opportunities but balances the needs of the individual with the need to get the work done. It's a very simple Excel based tool that analyses the role, the core components of the role and then leads you through a series of decisions about what tasks can change and how, what the new role will look like, what its load is if it needs to switch to part time, and how work removed could be done differently. It's accompanied by a conversation guide on what you should discuss with the employee, how you can be a supportive manager while still focused on the need for equity and balance within the team.

And also how to go about implementing the changes and checking in with the employee, with the team, with your clients to see how it's going. So what's your role in this? So your role in this is to be the best role model that you can be for working flexibly, both in the way that you use it in your role as a manager. So how you discuss and champion your own flexibility, how you look after your own wellbeing as a manager and the expectations that you place on your team. It's also around the way that you, around the way that you approach it with sector wide connections with your stakeholders. Now we have a raft of resources available on our website as I mentioned. So please do jump on, ask us any questions that you have, or email us at flexible.work ing@psc.newsouthwales.gov.au for any questions, or you can ask your HR team. We also have... we've opened up a LinkedIn group for managers as well, which you'll see now on the slide, the address, and please jump on there and share, share your experience, or share your questions with other managers across the sector. We have about 400 people on that LinkedIn group sharing solutions, both during the current coronavirus pandemic, but also the new normal that we'll find ourselves in as we gradually return to our workplaces. Thank you.

GAIL:  
Thanks Siobhan, I'm sure our listeners will feel a lot better equipped to provide flexible solutions for their staff. Before we open the lines to chat, I do have one question for you and it relates to how your team's responded to supporting people with disability during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

SIOBHAN:  
Thanks Gail. So what we have done, I mentioned before the role adjustment tool that will shortly be available. We're also, we have also done what we call a short form or a short-term role adjustment tool to support people during COVID-19. And what that's based on is acknowledging that for a lot of people, their participation may be curtailed in their role in its current form for health reasons, because they may be a particularly vulnerable or because there's certain components of their role they can't do, they can't have contact with members of the public, and it may be necessary for them to sit down with their manager and have a conversation about that role. The reason it's different to a long-term adjustment tool is because it's more focused on getting through this next period with the assumption that they will gradually return to the full scope of their role, as opposed to a permanent adjustment. That said, the experimentation that people do over this period may turn out to be fantastic long-term anyway. So that role adjustment tool is already on our website and we encourage people to look at it and there's tip sheets there, both for managers and for employees to have a conversation about what might need to be parked as a component of their role at the moment, what can be shared with another colleague or swapped with another colleague or what they might just simply need to throw overboard in the short-term, in order to be able to manage the conditions that they find themselves in, if that's possible, assuming of course business outcomes...

GAIL:  
And do you have any particular examples of success?

SIOBHAN:  
Not yet, no, but we've certainly had some fantastic feedback from the sector on how useful it is. I think primarily because it's really hard for managers to know what a three day week role look, looks like. And we hear all too often from employees, particularly those returning to work, from long-term injury or parental leave, that they're often handed their five day a week role. So, I think these tools...

GAIL:  
In three days.

SIOBHAN:  
In three days, exactly and so with the feedback, the early feedback we've had is a, it's been a very useful tool in promoting some more discipline and structure around that thinking.

GAIL:  
That's great and that brings us to the end of our webinar today. I wanna thank you for giving your time today. It's a really important step in joining The Age of Inclusion. We have about 15 minutes for any questions or comments you wanna ask Siobhan or myself. So please feel free to type your questions and we'll respond to them shortly. Also wanna thank Siobhan for coming and talking to us today. I hope you found her presentation as interesting as I did. If you'd like to get in touch, to find out more about the presentations, please do so by following the links displayed on the slide.

GAIL:  
Well, good afternoon everyone. And we've got time for questions from our audience. And one of the first questions to come through is, what if my manager says to me, I don't like my team working from home. Siobhan what do you have to say about that question?

SIOBHAN:  
So I recommend having a conversation with the manager to explore those misgivings. I think managers often have some very valid, some very real and sometimes very hard earned misgivings, but to be clear, the policy commitment, it has a bias in favour of seeing what they can make work. So if working from home doesn't suit the nature of the role itself, then let's explore what other options might be available. If there are safeguards or scaffolds that need to be in place to ensure that work is done productively and effectively, then let's explore what those might be and how we put those in place. We recommend every team put in place, some rules of the road around working from home and they're hugely valuable because it agrees the standards that everyone's going to maintain or improve. Usually once those scaffolds are in place, we've seen a lot of managers that have profound misgivings about flexible work, finding happily to their, to their surprise, that they had nothing that they needed to be too concerned about. But, but to be clear for managers, there is the policy commitment is if not, why not? So they would need to provide more evidence or more facts around working from home rather than, rather than disliking it.

GAIL:  
And Siobhan do you think the current, corona or COVID-19 crisis and the transition to remote digital working has really impacted on manager's attitudes around working from home? Do you think things have changed?

SIOBHAN:  
Yes, absolutely, I think the genie is well and truly out of the bottle and it won't go back in and I think many managers have been very pleasantly surprised by how their team has maintained business continuity. And now looking beyond that to say, OK, let's think beyond maintaining business continuity to let's think what a new BAU might look like. What's a new normal look like? And what opportunities does that offer for us? We've spoken to a number of different agencies, different roles that where managers had never thought, and the teams themselves had never thought that those roles could be done remotely. And those teams have responded superbly during the crisis. In fact, they've often found they've been able to improve their service by just approaching the way they plan and arrange that work in a different way and productivity's improve significantly. So I think there, I think there will be some tougher questions asked by agency leaders over these period around if not, why not? Because now everybody understands what's possible. And for those agencies that have already found working from home to be very effective for them now, it's almost taking it to the next level, it's around, what can we, what can we do to plan and arrange work in much more innovative ways? What can we do around work and job design, to unlock, unlock even more flexibility for people?

GAIL:  
Yes, it's certainly required us to, to pivot not only our thinking, but also the ways of working. Do you think there's still misunderstandings, both among managers and team members, about the fairness of some working... flexible working conditions?

SIOBHAN:  
There are, they do maintain... they continue to be some hard coded biases we see across the sector, particularly around flexibility in frontline roles. Everyone's anchor bias remains very much that flexibility equals either flex time or working from home. And if you can't access either of those, therefore you can't access flexibility. We've hosted a number of workshops and pilots where people have walked into the room, convinced that they'd never be able to do flexibility and or access flexibility. What we found every time, is once you engage that entire team in having a conversation about flexibility, often the solutions are sitting right there in front of them. They're cost neutral and they're highly efficient. It's just no one's ever sat down and asked those people. So there's been some fantastic options that were always there and always available even within the current technological or industrial constraints. So there, there continue to be some misunderstandings about flexibility, it's not for frontline, that some people just can't use flexibility, that you need a very good reason to use it, that you have to be on a certain type of employment arrangement, that you can only access it for a fixed period of time, i.e until your youngest child goes to school under this policy commitment, none of those things are true. There's just what works, so anybody can ask for any reason, but the arrangement has to maintain or improve service delivery for the business. It has to maintain team outcomes and it has to maintain individual outcomes and engaging the entire team in the conversation is always the best way to resolve that.

GAIL:  
Thanks Siobhan and I think the next question is probably directed to me. We've been asked, are there going to be any definitive statements we need to include in role descriptions to promote or target roles for potential talent with disability? And I think it's a great question, but I think there's two, two parts of the answer. Firstly, role descriptions really need to focus on the inherent capabilities of the role rather than adding in things that might make it more challenging for a person with disability or create barriers. But where we really target potential talent with disability is in the way we advertise roles, we need to signal to potential talent that the organisation is open to hiring people with disability. And a simple way of doing that is perhaps letting people know in the, in the job advertisement that if they need any adjustments during the recruitment process this is a number to contact and that person shouldn't necessarily be the hiring manager because some people may feel that making the approach directly to the hiring manager will disadvantage them in the recruitment process. PSC has just completed some work to update the, I work for New South Wales job page and included in that will be a special page for information page for people with disability and stage two of that will allow you to advertise targeted or identified roles in that space. So what better encouragement to take on candidates with disability? So we have another question in relation to role descriptions, other than removing things in the essential requirements that would limit people with disability applying for a role, are there things that could be included in a role description that would encourage people with disabilities to apply for these roles? Siobhan what would you say there in relation to job design and flexibility and how you might build that into a role description?

SIOBHAN:  
I think with flexibility and role design, what we, again what we recommend is that the manager sit down with the person, if they're being asked for a role adjustment or alternately spend some time with their HR business partner to see if they're constructing a new role or taking a new role to market to see if there's anything in there that they could adjust. Primarily, it's really around, when we talk about role design, we talk about taking the existing set of tasks and then thinking differently about the where, the when, the how or the who of those tasks. So we have, we are about to publish on our website, a new role adjustment tool. So it's a very simple Excel based tool that people can use where they can log the different tasks and then have a conversation with the people who understand the role best to consider different ways to adjust that, similar to what you mentioned before with role descriptions. It is very much about trying to understand what is genuinely inherently has to be done that way. And what do we just assume we've always done that way, but in fact, we might be able to change up, what can technology now enable? What in fact might be handled better by a different team or a different person? It's, it's been interesting in our work across the sector, how often just asking those very simple questions, unlocks a completely different conversation and you can see people go off and go away and come up with some radically different solutions to things that they may not have thought were possible. And as we mentioned with corona virus that conversation's now happening more than ever.

GAIL:  
Are we at a stage where we might have some, some case studies of how role descriptions have been adjusted in response to different individual needs?

SIOBHAN:  
Because our tool is just out. We haven't had them now, but we are collecting a lot of anecdotes, which we hope to turn into case studies from the pilots that we've run across the sector. And they've been promoted primarily or produced primarily as a result of corona virus, but it's been around very simple things, responding to a raft of different needs. And it's been either trying to adjust roles to promote workshare if somebody needs to stay home and can no longer complete a particular aspect of their role due to a medical vulnerability or it's been because people have had caring arrangements, complex caring arrangements, which means that instead of working three full days, they need to spread three days across five. It's amazing what people have been able to unlock. So our plan is to continue to capture more and more of those as we hear about them and start to promote the solutions that are possible. But I really recommend that everyone tap into the networks within their agencies as well. The stories that we're hearing already exist a hundred times, it's just not well known across the agencies. So within all of the government sector agencies in scope for this for this policy commitment, there's so many stories that are already there.

GAIL:  
So what have you seen to be a key principle or message in seeing a whole of government culture shift and mindset to supporting flexible work arrangements. And I guess in particular, because you know, when we think about flexible work, we often only think of it in terms of back end administrative staff. Do you think there is a ground shift in terms of allowing that flexibility for frontline customer service staff as well?

SIOBHAN:  
Hmm. One of the most interesting things I've noticed, the change, the step change that has occurred was that when we first started out talking to the sector about flexible work, we did a case study with the Reserve Bank of Australia. And we were lucky enough to interview the deputy governor. And that case study is on our website and he spoke very strongly about business continuity planning. And at that point, we hadn't heard anyone in the public sector talk about business continuity, flexible work was only ever spoken of through a lens of accommodating employee requests, so business accommodation. What we're hearing now unequivocally from leadership is a recognition that it's moved from a business accommodation to a business continuity. So there where the Reserve Bank was, and it's rapidly becoming a business need. Now, what that means in terms of how flexible arrangements are handled, is there being, is it starting to be designed into ways of working? So it's no longer something where an employee has to stick their head over the parapet and ask a manager they hope that they have good rapport with that manager. That manager is able to say yes or no, depending on business impact. It's, or personal preference at times as well unfortunately. It's now become a bit of a recognised business need. There are just too many business benefits arising from offering flexibility in terms of meeting our sector diversity goals in terms of managing or optimising office space costs in terms of how much commuting has an impact on people's employment decisions these days. All of that has really come to the surface in an unprecedented way during the corona virus pandemic. And I think there's now a very solid recognition that the ability to offer services in a seamless way to improve those services and to re-calibrate and optimise cost spaces is something that sector leaders are, it's a regular part of their vocabulary now, in a way we hadn't necessarily heard before.

GAIL:  
These are great and insightful questions, and I would encourage our audience to keep them coming in. Please click the blue hand icon above the video player in order to ask your questions via the chat function. We do have another question. Are all New South Wales public service agencies required to implement an if not, why not policy and approach? I'm assuming that is referencing recruitment advertisements, if so, will there be communications or conversations at the leadership executive level across agencies to influence agency leadership, to actively promote the development of appropriate, flexible work policies and processes and encourage their implementation by managers with their teams?

SIOBHAN:  
So, absolutely not only our all New South Wales public servants agencies in scope, all New South Wales government sector agencies are in scope. So that was at last count around 84 agencies I believe, that they will need to adhere to the policy commitment. Now that policy commitment is tracked and measured and monitored. We report up through several senior governance arrangements across the sector. So agencies are asked to report on their progress and communicate their progress and implementation. We've also had for the last two years, a significant program of work in support to help agencies with that. And that has included communications, guides, best practice policy approaches to help agencies update their flexible work policies and tools like change guides and implementation guides to encourage agencies to take up their implementation. For managers there's also been direct support in capability uplift. So helping managers with managing flexible teams, it doesn't come naturally. And I think particularly in a post COVID environment where there's more of a hybrid approach to people being in multiple areas, it requires a little bit of planning, but all of those resources are freely available on our website for managers and we encourage them to access them along with the role adjustment tools that we have. And also the, the worked example that exists for role adjustments for managers as well.

GAIL:  
OK, a member of the audience has asked a related question and that has this policy commitment been able to be built into any form of legislation or enterprise bargain agreement? Now, I might before I throw this to you, Siobhan, I might commence with just a brief indication of what that means for people with disability and the Disability Discrimination Act. Certainly, if an employee has disclosed disability or shared disability status in the workplace and has asked for an adjustment and that adjustment could be in terms of where and when they work, so hence fitting into flexible work arrangement, there is a legal obligation to provide that under the Disability Discrimination Act which is Commonwealth Law and is also reinforced in New South Wales legislation through the New South Wales Anti Discrimination Act. But Siobhan what about, you know, just the broader notion of access to flexible work in the New South Wales public sector?

SIOBHAN:  
Yeah, absolutely and the only thing that I would add to your comment about the Disability Discrimination Act is that the test for declining a reasonable adjustment is extremely high. So, it's something that managers should actively explore. Flexible working is one of the easiest and usually the most cost neutral adjustments available. For more broader than that, when we started out looking at flexible work, we found that rather than there being a requirement in state-based employment legislation, in fact there is absolutely nothing in any of the state-based legislation that prohibits flexible working. So there's something that's there and available for most people in some form, there's no one size fits all for flexibility depending on their their operating context but there's no one size fits none, either. Now within some of the industrial frameworks, for some of the flexible work agreements that agencies have negotiated at the local level, some forms of flex may not be possible. So for example, compressed hours where people can do five days worth of work in four days. Some industrial agreements do not allow for that, but it's something that's certainly been acknowledged by the sector, as something that potentially needs to be reconsidered moving forward.

GAIL:  
A member of the audience has asked me that I talked in the webinar about the diverse experiences of disability, what advice would you give to managers who want to understand disability awareness? Certainly take the time to learn more, the PSC has produced and is available on its website some baseline disability awareness training which has been made mandatory in some agencies and other agencies just let people know that it's available. That will, I guess, lift your awareness of disability to the first stage. I think that there are also fairly significant toolkits available in the information hub around initially the hiring managers toolkit which will take you through how to be an inclusive recruiter. And from next week, I think we will also have guidance on how to develop an inclusive workplace and most particularly a detailed guide on how to provide appropriate career development and performance management for people with disability which will take you through things like how to help a person with disability build career networks, mentoring, equal access to training but more importantly, make you aware that the performance expectations and the performance management of people with disability is pretty similar to most of your other employees. The real critical element of that is that the goal setting and the role description is appropriate to their needs and that we're able to separate out issues of performance from workplace adjustments that are required. So with the appropriate scaffolding around them, people with disabilities should be able to achieve their goals, just like any other employee and managing them is really about managing individual needs and recognising their differences, but importantly, working to their strengths. And if we do that, we're really behaving in a way that as leaders and managers, we should be behaving towards all of our workers, not really singling them out, particularly because they have a disability. I'll move on to our next question and this is probably the last question that we'll get to today. Recruitment in government has always been based on merit process. This message is always clear, the best applicant for the role. A person with disability might not be able to perform the role as well as others in an interview due to their individual circumstances. This could have a huge impact on outcomes of the recruitment. How can we make sure that everyone, including someone with disability gets a fair go? Look, I think that there's two angles to that question, one of which is around how and what, how might we disrupt the current recruitment practice and we've recently demonstrated how one might do this with our tailored talent program which was designed to match government needs to fill positions in data analytics and cybersecurity, for example, and other ICT roles which are generally hard to fill with the skills of people with autism. The assessment process, rather than the usual process of having a role description, seeing who's in the market, interviewing and then making an appointment was completely disrupted. We sought out employers, hiring managers across New South Wales government agencies that were looking to hire these skills. We worked with an agency called Specialists Turn to set up, not an interview process, which can be particularly well, it's intimidating for everyone, but it's particularly intimidating for a person with autism. And instead of that, did a three week assessment process and then through that process, 11 people were shortlisted and offered roles in four or five New South Wales government agencies. Great success for each of the people involved in that program were quite open about the fact that they wouldn't have those jobs if they went through a normal competitive recruitment process. The other side of it if you're not having the opportunity to deliver disruptive recruitment in that way is to ensure that you're really open about access to adjustments and alternative assessments. Now, everyone is able to do that use relying on rule 26 of the government sector Employment Act and more information is available on that on the PSC website. What that does is it allows you to assess the capabilities of a person with disability and also other vulnerable or disadvantaged cohorts using an alternative assessment process as long as you are able to assess the merit of candidates in a comparative way.

OK, that is the end of the questions. I also want to thank you for your time in joining us this afternoon and to thank my co, co-presenter Siobhan for her wonderful insights. There is an evaluation that you will be redirected to as soon as we go offline. And I would request that you give us three minutes of your time to complete the webinar and to let us know what your thoughts were. Thank you all and welcome to The Age of Inclusion.