



Australian Government
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Leadership in immigration

Old Parliament House
Parkes, ACT

29 September 2011

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Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to be with you today. Before I begin, I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on today, the Ngunnawal people. I wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this region. I would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

It has been said of the Department of Immigration:

‘This work is not glamorous but it is necessary. Public opinion is rarely kind to the department. Those with intentions to migrate who are not approved see us as heartless and frustrating bureaucrats...[others]...as part of a movement to subvert [our] way of life by admitting people of the ‘wrong kind’. The reality is that the department [gives]...effect to [wishes of Parliament and Executive] for the orderly and protected development of the Australian community.’

people our business

This was said in 1979 by the then Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, LWB Engledow. While many things have not changed since Engledow's times, some have!

Today I would like to discuss with you some of my perspectives on leadership in the immigration portfolio. I give my perspectives not only as the current Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, but also as someone who has spent most of my working life in the immigration portfolio.

I have now spent over 26 years in the department, so I declare a strong bias towards the management of an immigration program in Australia's national interest, the management of a system that delivers results for the Australian community and for our clients, and a system that ensures that Australia upholds our international obligations.

I also speak to you as the President of the Institute of Public Administration Australia in the ACT, and would like to use this opportunity to encourage you to support IPAA as the professional body for public servants.

Of course, prior to my time with the Australian Public Service I lived a very different life in Toowoomba, in my home state of Queensland. While I aspired to a public sector career even back then, I still have to pinch myself some days as a reminder that I am the secretary of a department of state.

I'd like to discuss three departmental 'case studies' with you today, and some themes that flow from these that relate to our role as public sector leaders.

The first case study involves the widespread departmental reforms that I led shortly after being appointed secretary in July 2005. The second case study is of a process that is still underway in the department known as our *Transformation*.

Both are closely linked. The second initiative has been built on the foundations of the first – without making the cultural and leadership capacity changes in 2005 the client services, policy services and business services transformation changes that began in 2009 would not have been possible.

The third case study is how we are positioning ourselves for current and future challenges, in particular the ongoing pressures in relation to irregular maritime arrivals and immigration detention, and the broader issue of increasing global people movement.

About the department

First, let me give you some context and a sense of the scale and breadth of what my department does.

Our job as a department is to help build our modern Australian nation – we do that through managing the movement of people in and out of our country, and through the settlement of people here for our inclusive, yet diverse society.

What began as a department in July 1945 with 24 public servants has grown to a global organisation with more than 8000 people across 80 offices around the world. Since the establishment of the department 66 years ago, we have facilitated the migration of more than seven million people and the conferral of citizenship upon more than four million people.

In the current financial year the department will administer a permanent migration program of 185 000, we will issue more than four million visas, facilitate around 30

million crossings of the Australian border by passengers and crew, and welcome around 14 000 refugees and humanitarian entrants. Around 120 000 people who have migrated here will take the final step in their journey and join us as Australian citizens in the coming year – that is over 2000 new Australians every single week!

We have been extremely well-served by our migration programs. Economically, our migration program has been, and continues to be, a backbone to many of our industries. People migrate to succeed, not to fail. But we are also a compassionate country, one that has a long tradition of accepting and resettling refugees. Since 1945 we have taken more than 700 000 refugees.

We have responsibility for key aspects of border security policy and operations, visa compliance, law enforcement functions and immigration detention. We administer policy for migration and temporary visas; refugee and humanitarian entry; for settlement; Australian citizenship; and policies to enrich our multicultural society.

We work with other government departments and agencies, foreign governments, international organisations, the business sector, the not-for-profit sector, community organisations, commercial service providers, the media, academic institutions, the courts, and millions of individuals.

Our decisions, and indeed our programs, can be the subject of great public interest and also generate discussion in the Parliament, the media and in the community. On a daily basis you can read articles commenting on our business in some form or another—sometimes positively!

However, unlike the public scrutiny accorded to cases that go wrong, which is of course proper, what is not commonly recognised are the thousands of positive interventions made by officers in my department every year in assisting people. It is

one of my privileges as Secretary of the department that I get to see first hand how positively our officers operate, often in difficult or testing circumstances.

The department has over the years of course learnt a lot, including some painful lessons. Sadly, mistakes have sometimes occurred. Some have had a profound impact on people's lives. Our administration of this very complex area of public policy involves millions of decisions each and every year. We are human, and sometimes the department has got things wrong.

This brings me to my first case study.

Changes to the department in 2005

At the time of my appointment as Secretary in 2005, the department had been heavily criticised in a number of government commissioned reports. I am sure that you will all recall the tragic mistakes involving Cornelia Rau, Vivian Alvarez Solon and others. The reports recommended that significant change was required in the department. Government demanded it.

In communicating the need for change in a range of areas across the department, it was essential that I also recognised the excellent work of the department for a number of years.

The key drivers for change were empowering people, promoting leadership, and most importantly about creating a culture of openness—a culture of communication. On this foundation future success could be built. Our motto of 'People our Business' was designed to constantly remind all staff of the very essence of our role. This triangle, which was also developed at the time, has been a key tool for communication about our key themes as a department. They include:

- fair and reasonable dealings with clients

- well developed and support staff
- an open and accountable organisation.

These themes are supported by our values around humanity, evidence-based work, and high performance of staff. Our focus, now more than ever, is that the integrity with which we do all of this is paramount.

These themes are as relevant today as they were in 2005.

There were many reforms that needed implementation which would substantially change the way we operated as a department. They involved widespread changes to our operational environment, our technology and systems, our leadership, and to our organisational behaviour and culture.

A failure in our leadership was one of the key concerns raised by one of the reports, and was also an area of concern raised in an all-staff survey that I commissioned. Staff thought that their leaders did not provide a clear sense of direction, did not interact adequately with staff, and did not involve them in decision-making.

It was clear that improving the department's leadership capacity would improve our ability to change. Good leaders embrace change, and achieve results with their teams.

We developed a leadership model with a series of capabilities that I expected all leaders to demonstrate. These included:

- providing vision and meaningful direction
- operating consistently with the things we value
- communicating constantly and meaningfully – in other words, truly 'engaging'

- creating an environment for success
- functioning as team players
- persisting to achieve good outcomes.

Discussing the changes, however, was one thing. Planning and implementing them was another. To address this we developed a departmental plan. It was important in developing this to ensure that it was relevant to each area, each office, and each staff member across the department, whether they were in our national office, a state office or at an overseas post.

At once it was a departmental plan, but also an individual plan for everyone in the department.

We have since produced, and worked to, departmental annual strategic plans. In that time other departmental planning processes have been linked directly to our departmental plan.

This process, a planning process, is now the norm—rather than exception.

To drive this forward we identified our internal and external communication as areas that required immediate attention and reform.

To do this, as a department we set about:

- restoring respectful relations with our stakeholders, advocates, critics and the media
- rebuilding internal morale through publicising the many things the department was doing well, and
- communicating the comprehensive business change program underway to staff, the media and other stakeholders.

The strategy was to establish a capacity within the department that would address communications across the board, reconnecting with internal and external stakeholders. We knew we could not underestimate the scope of the task ahead.

It's very hard to have effective external relationships if internal communication is not also pulling the organisation together, and so we've put as much effort into our internal messaging and information sharing, as we have into our external work.

For staff to feel engaged, it's important to promote a common sense of purpose and belonging. We do this using various communication tools, such as:

- face-to-face meetings between senior leaders and staff whenever and wherever possible
- regular and ongoing all staff messages
- leadership messages to senior staff
- a departmental newsletter, which has recently become an online web based document
- strategic communication, and
- regular access to senior staff through regular videos and broadcast programs discussing issues important to staff.

These tools are not only used for ongoing communication, they are also used as drivers of change.

At the time, the former Ombudsman's Ten Lessons report highlighted the importance of having good leadership, systems and behaviours in organisations engaged in public administration. The review of our progress by Elizabeth Proust AO in 2008 found a great deal had been achieved with departmental reform and recommended the department move:

‘...to focus on building and maintaining a high performance culture; one which would ensure that the lessons from these various reports continue to be learnt.’

Her report also noted that:

‘...While this evaluation makes it clear there is more to be done, it must be stressed how much has been achieved in three years. I pay tribute to the people in DIAC and elsewhere who acknowledged the extensive shortcomings in the system of detention and other aspects of their department, and who have worked diligently to rectify those shortcomings ...that so much has been achieved to rectify the wrongs identified by Palmer and Comrie while all this has occurred is significant indeed...’

Reform, however, is never static. It is a constantly evolving process anticipating new paradigms in public administration and organisational cultures. Fundamental to driving change is that it must also be guided by a values-based culture.

2009 – Building stronger migration, visa and citizenship services

This brings me to my second case study. In late 2009 my department began its *Transformation*.

By 2009 we had strong external and internal validation that we had significantly achieved our goals of 2005. But we were conscious of the challenges the department faces moving into the future.

Data shows that over the next five to ten years increasing numbers of people will travel to Australia from more ‘high risk’ locations. With the ease of international travel and advances in technology, there are already increased threats of terrorism

and trans-national crime, including credit, identity and document fraud and people trafficking.

With much of what the department does being centred on manual and paper-based approaches, our cost structure was relatively high. It lacked the flexibility to deal with a changing risk environment, and falling budget appropriations. The world is rapidly changing around us, as are client expectations about service delivery.

Change was again needed, and it was clear that my department had to transform the way it operated. The strong capability of the department to communicate that was established in 2005 would assist senior leaders in yet again moving the transformation forward. Simply put, we aim to be the best immigration service in the world—a key part of Australia’s economic, security and social infrastructure.

We focussed on the strategic changes that would realise the greatest benefit. We based the transformation on three main elements:

- an organisational design that enables high performance and innovation
- improving our organisational capabilities to foster excellence and encourage innovation
- a strategic approach to client services, visa framework design and internal business support services.

One of the key changes was moving from delivering our services along geographic lines to delivering our services along global management lines

Our 13 or so global managers are responsible for the delivery and performance of a particular visa line, regardless of where the visa application is received and processed. The change to the global manager structure was made to maximise integrity, efficiency, accountability and to improve accuracy and consistency in decision making.

At the same time we also developed and implemented a simpler organisational structure with clearer lines of accountability which is designed to better focus our core functions and better position us as a client service delivery organisation. We now consist of four groups, each led by a deputy secretary. These are:

- Policy and Program Management Group, which focuses on the ongoing development and enhancement of solid government policy and programs
- Client Services Group, which focuses on the delivery of our programs
- Business Services Group, which supports the rest of the organisation to undertake its business
- Immigration Detention Services Group, which given the increasing scope and responsibility associated with this work, focuses on managing detention services.

Finally we also established a Risk, Fraud and Integrity Division, or RFID, within the Business Services Group with the aim of providing specialised risk and fraud services across the department's business functions. The division consists of a diverse range of integrity and risk-related areas that had previously been dispersed throughout the department. RFID brought all these related areas together with the aim of centralising, enhancing and streamlining risk and integrity-related functions.

RFID supports the department in addressing the challenges posed by a rapidly changing environment by producing solutions that enhance and strengthen the integrity of Australia's border, migration, detention and citizenship programs.

This underscores a simple lesson—that innovation can occur at all levels of an organisation, so long as the organisation's structure allows it to be identified. Leaders must also be flexible, open and creative in their approach to create an environment where innovation is both fostered and rewarded.

While the transformation process is a long term strategy, the successes we have had so far are pleasing. Much of this is due to our successful management of the change process, which was allowed to be owned by staff.

The challenges of irregular maritime arrivals and immigration detention

Finally today, I would like to briefly discuss with you some of the recent and emerging challenges we face as a department.

The world is progressively opening up to greater migration flows. There are presently 215 million people living outside their country of birth. By 2050 that figure is expected to approximately double, with increasing flows into the developed world.

Those countries that have the capacity to regulate and manage increased flows – and those with the right institutions and the right governance arrangements – are the ones that will benefit from it

Within this environment we must be mindful of the very significant issue of displaced persons. According to the UNHCR, at the end of 2010 there were over 43 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, the highest number in 15 years.

The gravity of this situation is significant. A large number of these persons were of the total number of displaced persons, 15.4 million were refugees, 27.5 million were internally displaced persons and 837 500 were asylum seekers. Of these displaced persons, almost 4 million refugees were in the Asia Pacific region at that time.

In the Asia-Pacific region, a number of countries are host to refugees, in some cases many thousands, and provide protection in practice, although are not parties to the Refugees Convention.

Governments continue to work towards achieving a balance between managing border security concerns with protection issues. However, inconsistency in approaches to reception and durable solutions has created an environment in which the people smuggling trade flourishes.

Over the last two years or so we have experienced a significant number of irregular maritime arrivals. Australia has experienced irregular maritime arrivals for more than 30 years, in several major waves, and the department is drawing on our long experience in this area in responding to and providing policy advice in relation to the current situation.

Within this environment the endorsement of the regional cooperation framework at the Bali Process meeting in March this year was a milestone in addressing the issues of people smuggling and displacement affecting many countries in the region.

The conference recognised that a regional approach is required to address the challenges of people smuggling, and to discourage asylum seekers from the sort of life-threatening sea journeys in overcrowded boats that we have recently tragically seen.

The framework is based on a set of core principles which include that wherever possible, asylum seekers should have access to consistent assessment processes; this may include a regional assessment centre or centres; those found to be refugees should be provided with a durable solution; and those found not to be in need of protection should be returned to their countries of origin.

No doubt you will be aware of the subsequent people transfer arrangement signed with Malaysia, and the recent ruling by the High Court on this matter.

Issues such as these directly affect my department and present significant challenges not only for the present but also into the future.

Of course the department does substantially more than manage irregular maritime arrivals. Maintaining our focus on our broader and larger programs remains a priority—while this is our ‘business as usual’, it also poses significant challenges as well.

Many would be aware of recent changes to our skilled migration program, and also the recently announced changes to our student visa program in light of the review by the Hon Michael Knight AO.

Our key themes will continue to support us respond to these challenges. To address these pressures, I have sought to invest in our core corporate services that support the work that many of our operational and policy staff undertake.

This in effect has strengthened our backbone to be ready for future challenges. These areas include our risk management as I noted earlier, and more recently our human resource and financial management areas.

Our significant investment in human resource management includes our focus on leadership capability with the development of a new leadership framework to better inform our leadership strategies and programs. In this way we strive to positively influence the culture of the department, to better meet our business needs and to prepare for the future.

We are implementing a formal succession planning process to better understand the aspirations and strength of senior leadership potential within our current EL2 group, recognising many in this group are future SES officers within the department and the Australian Public Service.

We also recognise the need for a greater emphasis on planning, especially given the current fiscal environment. This has translated into the development of a new planning framework that connects planning processes across the department with the goal of improving organisational alignment and financial performance.

This is a holistic model which links strategic and operational planning with financial planning.

In light of the ongoing pressures in relation to IMAs and immigration detention that I noted earlier, the department has also sought to address the unpredictable area of resourcing in this area.

To meet this surge in demand for staff we have utilised a number of approaches to inject flexibility into our workforce skillset and mobility, and active workforce planning.

We have strengthened our financial services in an increasingly tight fiscal environment. We aim to do more—better—with less.

Innovation in our processes has been an important part of our successful reforms. We have recently established a Transformation Innovation Fund.

Notwithstanding the potential paradoxical perception, during a time of fiscal constraint there is an increasing need to invest in innovative ideas that will provide a positive financial return.

The fund calls for innovative ideas that required an upfront investment to unlock future harvestable savings.

We will rely on the success of these projects to assist us in meeting our future financial challenges. These investments will position our department to meet challenges of the future.

Conclusion

Colleagues, to conclude there are obviously some common leadership themes in the case studies I have discussed today. These include:

- resilience
- clear vision
- values based organisation
- communication - engagement
- innovation
- persistent focus
- teamwork
- openness/respect
- commitment
- adaptiveness
- managing 'business as usual' as well as 'crises'.

Most importantly it is the need for senior officers to show leadership—to achieve results by working with their teams.

I take pride in standing with the staff of my department, and indeed with everyone in this room and the people that you lead everyday undertaking public service, and serving the government of the day.

We often exercise wide and significant powers. We advise on policies and their implementation. We are here to improve the lives of all Australians, now and into the decades ahead. This is an extraordinary privilege.

It is our great responsibility to undertake our work with care, with impartiality, for it to be based on facts and evidence, without bias or improper motive.

We are all accountable for what we do, and it is essential that we are accountable both through internal and external checks and balances.

I am often reminded of the immortal words of Theodore Roosevelt in his famous speech, *Citizenship in a Republic*, delivered at the Sorbonne on 23 April 1910:

‘...It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat...’

Colleagues, thank you for being with me, in the arena.