



**Australian Government**  
**Australian Public Service Commission**

**Peter Woolcott AO**

**Closing remarks**

**APS Leadership: Rising to the Road Ahead**

Tuesday 6 September 2022, 9:00AM

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Thank you Carmel.

I would like to thank our audience today – it has been an excellent discussion and your questions have prompted some thoughtful responses.

It affirms Glyn's reflections at the start – that leadership is about people, respect and building teams, and less about straight lines of authority.

The Secretaries Charter of Leadership Behaviours recognises that how we go about our work, and how we work with others, is as important as what we do.

I was taken by Nat James' comments about impact – it's a nice term – which encompasses not only the concrete outcomes of what you have achieved, but also the myriad of less tangible consequences on your staff and your stakeholders that might flow from your actions.

Now our APS Values continue to set the expectations of impartiality, integrity and accountability for the APS' organisational culture, and are critical in the context of our democracy and governance.

The Charter takes this further, describing the behaviours required of a modern and dynamic public service culture. One that is collaborative, rather than siloed; one that invests in people; respects diversity; and creates an environment where ideas can be contested.

David has spoken today about how the Charter was developed. He, and former Secretary Simon Atkinson, took an idea that was a central part of the cultural renaissance pushed by both the Thodey Review, and the more recent Hierarchy and Classification Review. And they

worked it through Secretaries and through the Secretaries Board in a remarkably short time frame – given the complexity and profoundness of what was being proposed.

The Charter is now launched and what we do from here is important.

Through the work of our talent councils and the data we have collected on our senior leadership cohort - we know that APS leaders are highly motivated and excellent at managing complexity and scale. They deliver. They are also resilient because in large part they haven't received a lot of support from the system – and we are working on this.

However, we are also aware of the behaviours that we need to develop. APS leaders need to get better at enabling and empowering others. This takes time and effort in a world where we are time poor and often under pressure to deliver results.

The Charter rightly zeroes in on this, and other behaviours, to ensure a less hierarchical and more joined up public service.

For as Secretaries, we have a legislated role as stewards of the APS – to ensure its future strength.

Through the Charter, we are asking each of you to hold us to account.

We are also asking you to consider how you can live up to these behaviours.

For we all have a role in creating an APS that is dynamic and respectful, that works with integrity, and collaborates and empowers its people.

So today's event has been an excellent opportunity to reflect on the importance of leadership behaviours.

*[As mentioned by David]* How the charter is used and embedded will look different across each department and agency, given our diverse roles and workforces.

Already I am pleased to hear about the manner in which Departments have begun building the behaviours into the way they work including:

- incorporating the charter in performance frameworks
- opening up discussions about leadership within agencies - we have seen some excellent examples of agencies creating videos of their senior leaders highlighting how they will embody the behaviours in the Charter and
- building the behaviours into leadership and management courses.

There is a role for all of us in embedding and modelling the behaviours of the charter.

I encourage you to reflect on the Charter, and talk within your teams about how each of you can embody these behaviours in our day to day work.

At the end of the day, leadership is an action – not a position. Understand that and you are a fair way down the road.

In conclusion, thank you Nat, David and Glyn for your time today. And thank you Carmel for your contribution in hosting such an important discussion.

Please join us now for morning tea.

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