

2012 Young Professional Scholarship Winner

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Presentation to IPAA WA AGM - 26 October 2012

The IPAA 2012 International Congress was held in Melbourne from 18-20 September, with more than 800 delegates attending from across Australia and the South East Asia Pacific region.

The congress titled Valuing Public Administration provided a strong focus on how we can improve public sector performance.

There were 120 speakers in 50 sessions over the 3 days with key discussions on:

- the need for change in the way the public service operates
- innovation in the sector
- policy reform and the importance for external engagement
- a public sector leadership showcase was presented; and
- the importance of engaging with the not for profit sectors was discussed.

I applied for the scholarship to broaden my understanding of the key challenges facing the public sector, to learn from academics and industry leaders from both the private and public sector. The scholarship also provided me with the opportunity to network with public sector professionals and like-minded YP's from across Australia.

Over the course of the three days the speakers challenged me to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the public service and think of ways in which I can improve service delivery within my agency by being more efficient and effective. A number of the speakers made me acutely aware of the challenges that the Australian Public Service are facing now and into the future.

Jennifer Westacott, Chief Executive of the Business Council Australia who delivered a speech *Restoring a high performance public service* was a standout for me. Ms Westacott's presentation was very timely given the budget cuts with the sector across Australia. She expressed a view that we are at a crossroads in Australia when it comes to the future of the civil service.

As a manager within a small government agency a number of points within her speech made a lasting impression on me and I will share a few of these with you:

There is a requirement to rethink service delivery and that the public sector has to be more focused and more productive;

We need clear productivity and accountability measures for the public sector as the sector spending accounts for around 25 per cent of GDP;





The importance on developing public servants with a clear professional development strategy and ensuring that managers take the time to complete the twice yearly performance development plans. I can relate to this as a manager of a team as I often I find it difficult to dedicate time to this process. Upon my return from the conference I reviewed the performance plans in place and met with my team to ensure that we were all clear on our expectations and on track to achieving the outcomes for the agency.

The importance of engaging with the third sector and building partnerships was another hot topic throughout the conference. I have been asking myself: What does the community sector need from government if its role in delivering public services is to be optimized. William D Eggers from Dollette Research provided me with some of these answers. He spoke about the creative capacity of businesses and citizens - not government budgets - that now determine the reaches of public services and societal problem solving. He used several business models from around the world within the health sector that clearly supported his research.

Throughout the program IPAA Victoria carefully scheduled lighter topics that provided a much needed relief from the often heavy conversations about reform and budget cuts in the sector across Australia.

I enjoyed the funny presentation from Armando Iannucci who is the writer and director of Thick of it and if you enjoy his work I recommend that you watch his presentation which is accessible on the IPAA Vic website.

As a cinema buff, I enjoyed the seminar by University of Dayton political science professor Michelle Pautz. The professor studied the top-100 grossing films of all time in both the U.S. and Australia for how the movies portrayed government and civil servants.

Overall Australian Civil Servants fared much better than our American counterparts. American Civil servants received a 26/46 (positive/negative) rating, and in Australian films, the rating was 34/49.

As a young professional I wanted to seize the opportunity to attend a number of the seminars that were applicable to my professional development and personal interest. As the conference offered 50 seminars over the three days I often had to make the difficult decisions to attend one seminar over three which were run consecutively.

If I can offer any advice for IPAA WA who are hosting the conference in 2014 it would be to reduce the number of seminars over the course of conference - so I don't have to make these difficult decisions again!

Thank you for the opportunity.

