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COLLABORATION CIRCLE: SHAPING FIRST NATIONS INITIATIVES IN THE APS

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DAVID PEMBROKE: Hello, everyone, and welcome to Work with Purpose, a podcast about the Australian public sector and how it serves the Australian people. My name is David Pembroke. Thanks for joining me.

As we begin, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting today, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, and pay my respects to their elders, past, present, and emerging, and acknowledge the ongoing contribution they make to the life of our city and this region. I'd also like to acknowledge the custodians of all the lands from where anybody listening to this podcast is joining us from.

Now, effective engagement with First Nations people to ensure better recruitment, retention, and advancement is a priority of Australian government public sector reform. The government has set a target of increasing the number of First Nations leaders in the senior executive service from 54 to 100 by the middle of next year, and to increase the employment of First Nations people to 5% at all levels of the APS workforce by 2030.

Now, building cultural capability, cultural safety, and eliminating racism in government Constitution is a commitment of the national agreement on closing the gap, and there is a vast amount of work being done across the APS as it relates to improving the understanding of and engagement with Australia's First Nations people. Well, as it comes to the APS, one such program is the Collab Circles, which is designed to ensure that the experience of First Nations public servants is understood by the senior leaders of the APS in the SES, and those discussions can then inform whole of service initiatives. Now, a pilot of Collab Circles ran from February to June of 2024, and it focused on the review of the current cultural awareness training programs across the APS.

Now joining me to discuss Collab Circles and other matters, are three of our most senior APS representatives. Our most senior First Nations representatives. Sam Jeffries is a proud Mooraworri/Wiradjuri man from Brewarrina in New South Wales, and he has spent most of his working life in and across Western New South Wales. Sam has dedicated 40 years working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs starting out in the public service in the early 1980s. He is now at the Australian Public Service Commission as First Assistant Commissioner in the inaugural First Nations systems lead role, and his job is to drive policy thinking under APS reform, building cultural

capability of the APS, and to gain a genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Sam, welcome to Work with Purpose.

Julie Hansen identifies as a Torres Strait Aboriginal woman. She has not been to country but lives within her mob in Logan City in Brisbane. Julie's public service is currently at the Department of Defence, but she has worked at both the Australian Tax Office and the Department of Veterans Affairs. And while at the DVA, she worked in diversity and inclusion, becoming heavily involved in indigenous recruitment, the Indigenous Staff Network, and DVA's Reconciliation action plan. Julie, welcome to you.

JULIE HANSEN: Thank you.

DAVID PEMBROKE: And finally, to Stella Renagi, who has worked in the public and private sector for over 10 years, including roles in service delivery, compliance, human resource strategy, development and policy design. And Stella is currently a Business Strategy Manager in the Australian Taxation Office where she develops implements and reports on the agency's reconciliation commitments, and Stella works with the business to deliver services and strategies to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Welcome to you, Stella.

So Sam, if I might start with you and this Collab Circles program, just take us through the thinking about the Collab circles and where it started and what you're hoping to achieve through the program.

SAM JEFFRIES: Thanks, David, and thanks for the opportunity to come and talk about what's a pretty exciting initiative in and across the APS. So this started in mid-last year, the COO Committee, which is the Chief Operations Officer's Committee, which is a significant governance mechanism within the governance of the public service, wanted to look at what was the effort in relation to First Nations or Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander employment across the public service both in a recruitment, attraction, retention, cultural capability, etc., that kind of stuff. And so what they did was to look at what was the current effort across the APS. And what came back was 160 initiatives across 41 agencies that looked at quite a number of initiatives, quite a number of duplication in that they had a look at that to try and work out what was working the best, but they couldn't agree on getting what was something that was working the best, primarily because it's not measured, it's not

evaluated for its effectiveness, and nothing could be clearly defined as working effectively.

So from that initial exercise, and there was a couple of a TIGER Committee that was put together by First Nation staff and co-committee members, which then came to the point of establishing a Collaboration Circle. That's the name that's been turned for the structural arrangement. And I picked up that responsibility when I came into my role in late last year in November to action that arrangement and pull that process together, and we went about that in the Australian Public Service Commission. We worked collaboratively with National Indigenous Australians Agency to look at that information that was pulled together in the common operating picture by the COO Committee and the COO Tiger Committee to think about how we were going to approach this. How did we populate the membership of that?

Because it was a pilot, I made a call to not to waste the time that we had on that to bring people together. So we identified key people, we put our heads together, identified key people that we thought across the public service at all levels, genders, jurisdictional, etc, to try and get the right balance to make a contribution towards this. And once we pulled that together, we then wrote back to all the agencies and get them to provide us assessments of cultural awareness training. From the common operating picture, we could see that a lot of agencies were putting a lot of effort into that and we wanted to understand what that meant. So some of the smaller agencies had some of the more comprehensive cultural awareness trainings. Some agencies, big agencies like TACS and others were very comprehensive, as well, in providing a swathe of programs, activities, etc, to try and build the cultural capability of their workforce. So quite interesting in that sense.

DAVID PEMBROKE: But it sounds like it was more personality-led than policy and process-led.

SAM JEFFRIES: We're trying to get an understanding of the effectiveness of that so we could clearly look at what was delivered in-house, what was purchased, what was delivered by cultural immersion projects, etc. So we wanted to gauge the difference and the propensity for agencies to engage in building cultural awareness so that we could understand what that was and what does it mean across the public service.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So just as you set out on this journey of this pilot program as the architect, really, of the program, what did you hope that you were going to achieve by the end of it?

SAM JEFFRIES: Well, one of the most important things, it doesn't matter what we're looking at. I think the structure itself was important to get that right. And so we were bringing together senior public servants at the COO level, their deputy secretaries or band threes, depending on if they hold a DEPSEC role in their agency, and of course APS staff at all levels, but down as APS five and six on the collaboration circle, we wanted to make sure that what we got in the room was people to not to be too afraid to have the conversation that they're too afraid to have, and also to get the senior executives to be more open and be more aware of getting onto the table and engaging with staff about these critical issues.

And so what I did to make the process work, in my view, was to collapse the hierarchy in the room so that no one represented their agency, no one was representing or being there around their title, but to be representing the APS. And it was in the interest of the APS that everybody was sitting around the table, regardless of what agency you come from and what title you held. The only person in the room that had a title was me and the chair of the forum. So everybody else was in equal status around the table and it really brought on some in-depth and high-level technical conversation, which was really incredible to see.

And it went through a whole process of meetings, got recommendations, and it's been accepted now from the COO Committee as a permanent mechanism in 2025, and not just a pilot. So it will now become part of the structural arrangements in the governance of the public service where we will have First Nations staff having input into the COO Committee deliberations when they're talking about First Nations employment training and recruitment, et cetera, whatever in the public service.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So Julie and Stella, you were both involved, as well. Julie, perhaps to you first, your experience of being involved in this Collab Circle.

JULIE HANSEN: It's been fantastic to be able to sit in a room and work cooperatively with other mob from all different walks of life and experience and hear their ideas and gain insights from what they know. Because we do a pre-brief and we all just get to sit around and talk through the topics

and tease out what we think, everyone gets to contribute, and every person who contributes, and it's amazing, they end up, they say, "Well, this is what I think." And then you get these threads of ideas to explore, and it ends up expanding into, well, yeah, this is working, this is good. But then when you bring the COO members in, I've considered it such a privilege to be able to be in this dynamic where the Chatham house rules, and this equilibrium has enabled such free dialogue.

Personally, I'm a people watcher, so I love to see the lights come on, especially with the COOs and the last meeting particularly. And you go, something will be said, and they go, "Hang on a minute. I thought we were doing that." "Hang on, what does that mean?" I have to give them their dues, they've really gone strength to strength with being in this room and hearing conversation and going, "Yeah, let's explore that." There's bravery in that. I applaud the fact that they're open to innovation, they're open to new ideas and exploring what other people think.

DAVID PEMBROKE: And they're busy people, aren't they? So the fact that there's the time given and the priority given to this very important issue is must be encouraging.

JULIE HANSEN: Oh, very. Very encouraging. It is the exercise and outcome of the intent to be able to forge new and better or improved and better. Yeah, it's good.

DAVID PEMBROKE: And for you, Stella?

STELLA RENAGI: For me, I guess similar to some of the sentiments Sam talked about around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's voices being heard and considered as part of APS business as usual, things like our highest committee through the COO. I guess for me, also, the exposure through COO across the public service provided a different view of, perhaps, the objectives across government for Aboriginal and Torres Islander people, not just for employment, but the services that we provide to our community.

I also really feel culturally safe in an environment to express some of the challenges and the opportunities, but also flesh out some of those unintentional consequences of our good intentions as government. Also, building that collective understanding of how we can work together as one APS to deliver better services that align to closing the gap.

The other part for me was the cross-cultural exchange and immersion that really built the COO's capability in perhaps realising beyond what their reality might be day to day, as senior executives, and some of the more grassroots challenges that we're seeing as not only staff, but as recipients of some of these services.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So when you were obviously invited to participate and you would've had a certain number of preconceptions about what you thought was going to happen, and then it happened, what were some of the things that surprised you, perhaps, about participating?

STELLA RENAGI: I work in the Reconciliation Action Plan space, and I called Sam after the first meeting and said to him, "This is not for me. I don't want to sit around a table and talk about this. I want to see real action." And Sam talked to me about the model of collaboration and listening and understanding, and the impact that this model will have on our people. Sam talked about the benefits of speaking directly to the COO in a really open and authentic environment, and I thought, okay, Sam's one of us. I'm always inclined to advocate for our people in the most positive way and in every form I can, but I really questioned whether or not we were going to achieve what we thought, or maybe, the preconception of what we thought.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Yeah, what you thought.

And what about you, Sam, as probably the wise head in the room. Did you know that you were going to take everyone on this journey of this first meeting will be bumpy?

SAM JEFFRIES: Yeah, you have those kind of thoughts in your process, but I have a view, David, that nothing's impossible. It's just that something take a little bit longer to do than others. And I always, that's carried me through my career for a long time. So you start a process and then you think about where it can be improved. And we did that over the five meetings and it's not as though we were doing anything wrong, it was just about how we started an open conversation, how we prosecuted the issue, how we then put together a proposed position and a way forward, and then get the agreement at the end of it. That was the working process through that the whole way. So it is a normal part of getting business done.

So going into that, and one of the things I've been through many different iterations of getting diversity to agree in a room. So you've got to try and think, somehow, what are the things that you need to do to

bring the cohesion around the table and how do you make sure that the interjecting or the conflicting things don't come on the table? That was my job as a chair of the forum, was to ensure that we bought in a whole range of things, got some alignment, and then we took it to a position that we all agreed on.

DAVID PEMBROKE: How important was it that the pilot was around the cultural awareness training programs across the APS? How important was it that there was a focus, that there was something that you could really concentrate on?

SAM JEFFRIES: It's an interesting part because this is, it's probably going to go beyond the cultural capability.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Well, that's, yeah.

SAM JEFFRIES: So it's about all things employment and recruitment for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people in the public service.

So the next part, now we are looking at retention. So we've made our position clear on around the cultural awareness stuff and we've got agreement, the recommendations have been agreed on that. The next part in that journey is to find what is a foundational cultural awareness training. Now that it may not necessarily be a single program that everyone does, it might be a combination of three or four different ones. We've got to factor in the learning aspects of people with disabilities and et cetera, those kinds of things. So not all things might work for people who are, so we've got to bring a variety. So once we've got the foundational understanding of how to build cultural capability in our workforce, it'll be we want to expand that and measure that across it.

If I was a public service commissioner for a day or the Secretary of Prime Minister and Cabinet, I'd want to know what the APS was engaging in, and then measure it year-on-year-out to understand how much or what is the percentage of the public service engaging in, in a purposeful way to build their cultural capability to work better with Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander people, and then also get an understanding of the effectiveness of that. So that's the stuff that we've got agreement with the Coo committee, and they'll do all of this work within their agencies to do that.

So we're on the next subject now, which is about retention. Getting people into the public service is one part, keeping them is the other

side of the things now. So we've got to think about now, what are the key things that we are looking at? Why is there exiting? We need to understand why. We need to find ways of capturing that evidence so that we can understand that so we can better provide the right support services and the right incentive for people to say, stay one, in the public service, or stay in their agency.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Well, Julie, certainly the targets are quite ambitious, aren't they? 5% at all levels across the APS by 2030. As someone who's participated in these conversations, what do you see as the biggest obstacles to achieving that goal?

JULIE HANSEN: I've always been a big believer in engagement and connecting with people. Day to day, I am a Work Health and Safety Practitioner, so people is always centre. Certainly, when I communicate with mob, I've been very, very blessed to be able to meet so many people, and they become brothers and sisters, aunties and uncles. And so for me, it's about the connection, and I think that's where the key is with the retention is being able to generally connect with people and understand what it is and how it is that we enable them so that they move past signing the dotted line and accepting the offer to actually becoming part of the APS culture and being motivated to stay, and how are they motivated to stay and what motivates them.

In the last session, there was a lot of shared information about people's experience from coaching and mentoring and understanding that when people first come into the APS, it might be about remuneration, but then as it evolves, especially for us, it becomes about how are we adding value to our mob and how are we leading and sharing and integrating what we're learning? And when you hear that there is someone who's got three generation First Nations now in the APS, I applaud that. It is a very, the APS is a dynamic place to work and there's lots of opportunity. Being able to convey that and support people in being successful and enabling them in that, that's the connectivity to people, I think, about.

DAVID PEMBROKE: But the thing about the APS, also, isn't it, is that it's not a monoculture. In every organisation, every branch, everywhere, there are different cultures, and so how can it be patient enough and trustworthy enough to build the confidence to not only attract, but retain First Nations people in this important work that they need to do inside the public service.

JULIE HANSEN: Well, that's the fun that we've had from the initial meetings is exploring the concepts and defining retention and what the intent and how we're and what we see as the key deliverables in that, and then tying it into and exploring what initiatives people have already got in place and how we build from that. That's foundational.

I will say it's hard to give you a succinct answer because we're at beginning of that journey, but if I reflect probably back on what we did with the cultural awareness, I was astounded, actually, at where we started and where we ended up, and doing the survey of the different APS and what they offered, what they didn't offer, who they offered it to, how and when and why, the insights that we gained from that information, that actually informed the conversation. We picked out what was evidently working, what wasn't, what was a good idea, what was a new approach, and considerations from that, and that led to the recommendations.

So right now it's early stages in the retention conversation, but they're great conversations. Even the conversations from the COOs were, yeah, we need to map this, we need to, and so this particular topic, I think's exciting, it's certainly got me paying attention.

DAVID PEMBROKE: And for you, Stella?

STELLA RENAGI: For me, perhaps the institutions and the culture that we breed in the public service, it's really important as leaders not to employ for like-for-like. We look at someone and we identify with them because of who they are as a person, but I think we need to be open to differences and celebrate those differences in order for us to build a public service that reflects the community that we serve. And it's a really serious situation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people because we are a minority in our own country, and there have been some significant impacts over history, and we are working to move beyond that as a people, as a country, and I'm really excited to see where we go, but it takes action and it will require our leaders to be really informed about where we are going as a public service and how we deliver these services to the community in a really inclusive way but also the people that deliver those services, understanding their obligations so that representation at all levels by all different people across our society are represented.

DAVID PEMBROKE: But trust is going to sit at the heart of all of this, isn't it? And then the patience and the time required to build that trust, to devolve that type of culture across the APS, it's going to take time, isn't it?

STELLA RENAGI: Absolutely. However, we are in 2024, and I think for me, as a younger person, but also a citizen of this country, we are looking for governments to be agile and flexible to meet the needs of citizens, and we all have a responsibility to do that, and of responsibility to meet the government's agenda. So it will take time and there's many layers to that, but like Sam say, nothing is impossible, and collectively, we can make a greater difference.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So Sam, how does this particular effort, this particular focus, this particular approach around this collab circle, differ to some of the other approaches around other indigenous initiatives that are taking place across the APS, and have done for over many years?

SAM JEFFRIES: Well, I think it goes to the heart of what the APS is about. It's an employer of choice, basically, and you really want to cement that position for the public service to be an employer of choice. It's probably the biggest employment mechanism in the country that is a reflection of the population. It's probably the best example that we've got. So we're trying to, I think across government, we're trying to recruit into the public service to meet a forever changing cultural background in an Australian society.

So what's important for me in this part is that this is the first time that we've got a mechanism at such a high level in the public service, and it is influencing the decision making of the COO Committee. That takes some doing that really takes some doing, and we've got to think about this. And the second thing is, is to convince them and to give them confidence that to have this in a more permanent basis, primarily what you will find across government is that they stand up these mechanisms for a particular period of time or a particular subject. They run it, they get what they want out of, and then they stand it down. This one we are wanting, we are saying no, the COO Committee will forever be making the decisions around the employment arrangements across the public service. They will be the ones that are contributing the high level, sign off on anything that's recruitment, the employment service or whatever it might be into the public service, and we want to be able to influence that.

And so the Collaboration Circle gives us that real opportunity to be able to do that. We've actually convinced some of the COO members to be part of that so that when they go in, they're not just thinking about their role as a COO member on the COO Committee, they're also taking to the table their membership of the Collaboration Circle, as well.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So why did this work so well?

SAM JEFFRIES: I think it's because the buy-in that we got from First Nations staff, the buy-in that we got immediately from that. Look, and generally-

DAVID PEMBROKE: Maybe not quite immediately.

SAM JEFFRIES: Well, things start off slow. They do. Going into the second part, I've had a very similar conversation with the person sitting on my right here, as well, kind of thing.

JULIE HANSEN: Yeah, I'm too busy.

SAM JEFFRIES: The second meeting, you were out there.

JULIE HANSEN: Yeah, yeah. No, no, no. I'm the second pilot. I rang him and I said, "Do you know how much work I've got on? I mean, I just can't do it." And then I tried to make arrangements for a proxy, and then that didn't happen, and I went, this is too important to step back from. I am just going to make the time.

STELLA RENAGI: But I think it comes down to what you said around trust. Julie and I both trust Sam, we understand his experience as an Aboriginal leader in our community. It's important for us to support what we are doing across government. And the agenda that Sam talks about is really powerful. And I think Julie and I can relate to what he's saying, and we believe in where he's driving this, and so thankful for the investment, I guess, from the public service, but also those senior executives.

SAM JEFFRIES: Yeah. David, I think trust is so important across so many factors. It is the currency. It's not dollars and cents. Trust is the currency, and it is the thing that convinces structures, processes, people, decision making, whatever, is the thing that drives those things to go forward. Or if it doesn't exist, it goes in, it goes the opposite direction. But we've seen around the world, for an example, and I'm just going off track a little bit to try and give you an understanding of what I'm talking about. When we had the crisis of terrorism in the world, trust

was the only thing that was enabling relationships to be developed. It wasn't trade, it wasn't any of those. It was trust. How could you trust another country or another group or whatever, because of the whole thing that was happening. Our safety in the world has come down somewhat, and I think that that's had a lot to do with the levels of trust that have been put on the table to enable the relationships to be built.

Trust and relationships. Trust forms the relationship. Everything we do if we want to succeed, every success that we've had, particularly in my role, and I think relationships form a real contributor to that, and relationships are forming out of the trust element. To me, it's the only currency.

DAVID PEMBROKE: But then how do you translate that and not make it person dependent? So if Sam is not there anymore, how do you keep it going?

SAM JEFFRIES: You've got to build it into the mechanism. So you're right, it's a problem that we have in a lot of systems where we build a whole lot of reliance around a single person.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Yeah, personalities.

SAM JEFFRIES: And you can't do that. You can't afford to do that when you put so much into that. So you've got to build the redundancy into the system so that it can withstand the changes and continue to produce the results. And that's why I think we were, I was pretty clear on making sure that the collaboration was going to be there, regardless of what happens around it. A lot of us will maybe change agencies, or our priorities will change and we can't contribute to it no longer, but we create the opportunity for somebody else to become part of it. The mechanism is still there. That's what we want; to be able to build that redundancy around that, and not necessarily the people. We've got lots and lots and lots of good people across the pub. Any 20 people that we've got involved now, even COO members could be doing this because we've built the right process and mechanism around the structure.

DAVID PEMBROKE: That's great.

JULIE HANSEN: I will be that person, Sam, for someone else. Have you heard of the Collaboration Circle? You should participate. This is what you'll get out of it. So I think it comes to that trust point, but that continuum of establishing a process and a model that succeeds the test of time, but you have those participants who go on to do other things, but also

mentor and support others who are going through those same Collaboration Circle pilots in the future.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Okay. Stella, this is a good start. Promising start. You can feel the optimism and the accomplishment, really, it feels real. Five years down the track, what do you want to see this evolve into? What would you like to see it grow into?

STELLA RENAGI: Well, ideally, and I don't know if Julie or Sam agree, but hopefully this becomes business as usual. We'll have Aboriginal and Torres Strait under representation throughout the public service, and perhaps the Collaboration Circle model is no longer needed because we're doing what we should be doing and we're meeting the requirements of government with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander informed voice when we're delivering services and retention recruitment throughout. So these things become, perhaps, things that we celebrate rather than we talk about how we need to improve or the challenges.

DAVID PEMBROKE: For you, Sam, five years down the track?

SAM JEFFRIES: Exactly. Stella's nailed it around business as usual. We do the positive discrimination aspects to correct a problem, and then you want to be able to ameliorate that problem then by bringing it into normality, and that's what I hope the structure and process has.

The other thing I think is that it might expand, in the meantime, to get there. What we did explore, as well, is circles, plural. Of course, it doesn't necessarily have to be contained to just one structure. It can possibly turn into a couple or three or four or a few, whatever.

DAVID PEMBROKE: And what about picking out other areas of whole of government.

SAM JEFFRIES: Picking out other areas, and particularly targeting expertise across the public service to focus on those particular issues, and we-

DAVID PEMBROKE: Could you give me an example of that?

SAM JEFFRIES: Well, it could be, again, it could be, we might go further in the retention for an example where we've got particular experts who understand what it means to bring somebody into a role, into a job, and then what's the important parts of what's the support processes you bring to that and do that around? Just using that as an example. But you could do that as far as attraction goes, you could do that as

far as SES orientation, all of these, we add that common operating picture with 160 different initiatives. So throw your dart and hit any one of them and away you go kind of thing.

So we shouldn't, if you looked at that, there could be a potential to allow this structure with a lot of work for the next 10 years to get through just that one picture that we've looked at, at the moment, that could take us this amount of time. So you don't want to get to the end of what we've looked at 10 years ago before we start addressing it. So that's what I mean by bringing some other processes, and it could be other Collaboration Circles. They may not be as big. They may, depending on the issue, but there's an agency where I think the idea originally came from, up through the COO of that agency, that they've already got these circles operating within their agency, so within their branches. So it's an internal thing within the agency to be doing this. So they've got this-

DAVID PEMBROKE: They take that away from this idea? They thought already had it? They're already doing it.

SAM JEFFRIES: I think it informed our idea.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Oh, okay. Right. Yeah, right. That's good.

SAM JEFFRIES: And that's a potential that could happen across the public service, as well.

DAVID PEMBROKE: And drawing attention to these conversations like today are so important, aren't they? So as that people understand that there are these conversations and these initiatives taking place and progress is being made, because it can sometimes be, I'm sure, quite demoralising when you look at the wider challenges that you talk about that there's plenty of bad news and here's some good news. So for you, Julie, when you look ahead, what's your aspiration?

JULIE HANSEN: I would certainly echo what's been said. I do think that it will blossom into BAU, which is ultimately, the big achievement, to have a day-to-day experience where there is collaboration and consultation, and the continuous review and improvement, these are words that are said all the time,

But I've got to say, in this Collaboration Circle and the engagement with the group, there is something very vital and genuine about the interactions and the outcomes. Everybody who is participating is

clearly and evidently sincere in listening and contributing and being part of a bigger picture. So yeah, I do believe it'll go to BAU. I do believe it will get to the point where maybe this mechanism has achieved what it needs to. But equally, I don't want to put a timeline on that because I think the great thing about the conversation has been we're fostering these ideas, but assurance comes up a lot, too. So I do see that while the group is, we've done the cultural awareness stuff, and Sam's spoken about this is what we're looking at, it wouldn't surprise me if the Collaboration Circle is used to revisit that 12 months time and go, this was our recommendations, this is what we've got, and this is what the data is from the outcome.

What are we thinking? Is there any tweaks, improvements? What's people's experience? That sort of stuff. So it might be that we end up revisiting because we're doing some BAU, we've introduced it, we're letting it grow, and then we revisit and go, so how are you doing?

DAVID PEMBROKE: But it sounds to me, certainly the COO Committee are very engaged. It sounds like they have really taken to this and are really motivated to make a difference to move forward in this. But there are lots of people in the public service, not just the leadership. This is a task that belongs to everybody from the bottom all the way through to the top, and it's great to be at the top.

So perhaps a question to all of you around these issues that we're looking about around cultural awareness and training, but recruitment and retention of these other issues. Sam, perhaps, what advice might you have to the wider public service about how they might be able to contribute? They're not sitting on the COO Committee, but they may make a difference, they can make an impact. What are some maybe two or three things that people can think about in their daily roles to strengthen this framework, perhaps, this culture that makes us more able and more confident that we're going to get to those goals that we've set ourselves of 5% at all levels by 2030?

SAM JEFFRIES: I think that there's an opportunity for them to embrace the learnings of the circle or the findings and the agreement, and apply those things across their branches.

DAVID PEMBROKE: To be interested.

SAM JEFFRIES: Be interested. Yeah, be interested in that.

And you may not necessarily have First Nations staff in your branch or in your thing, but it's how do you get some in there so you can actually use this to change the makeup of your group if that's what's important to do that. So I think engage with the process, understand what its intention is, and what that can do to actually improve your contribution within your agency, within your group, et cetera, that kind of stuff. I think there's, at all levels, I think there's opportunity for no matter where you sit in the public service, what level you sit at, there's something of interest in this for you to think about and understand what it's doing. It may not be right now, but it could be next year that you're in a position, you think, wow, I know I've read something about this, and you know you can go back to it.

So sometimes you might get emails and emails and emails, and then there's other emails kind of thing. But when you get something that probably may come from the COO Committee or it might come from the APSC there, that's across the whole public service, and they're things I think that people should read because they're important because it affects everybody no matter what your backgrounding is, what your title is or whatever it is. So I think you get that understanding so that you then don't have to go and seek information or answers to questions that you have in your mind.

There is a lot of stuff that is communicated out there, but I think embrace the work that's going on, be interested and engaged in that, and make sure that your agency, even if you're at the top of the chain, if you're at the top of the tree, if you're a secretary or a deputy secretary, make sure that these things are being considered when they're doing their group recalls and their senior leadership team meetings, et cetera, that kind of stuff is to understand and know that this stuff exists.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Okay, and for you, Stella?

STELLA RENAGI: Perhaps it's recognising privilege and your responsibility around that.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Yep, good point.

STELLA RENAGI: And appreciate that different life experiences exist in society and that they might be different to your own, perhaps, bias, and how that plays in your day to day. I've got lots of biases. It's about recognising what that looks like and how it affects others around me, and perhaps adjusting and being agile and flexible to different needs of different people. I work with many different people in the Australian Taxation

Office, people from different Asian backgrounds, different Indian backgrounds, people who are Caucasian from different backgrounds, but I always make a point to understand my privilege and what makes me Stella and how I can bring out the best in others. But with that end goal in mind that we are here to do a job, and it's really important to understand your privilege and what difference you can make in society.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Okay, and for you, Julie?

JULIE HANSEN: Well, I've told you before, I'm people orientated, I'm pretty pragmatic. So I guess I would encourage anybody in the APS to connect with any indigenous network that's within their agency, and by extension, get involved with the Reconciliation Action Working group. I was the secretariat for that group at a previous agency I worked for. And I've got to say, it was amazing to see people, both First Nations and other, interact in a dynamic way, and it was a precursor to or being involved in this, really. So I think as long as you're actively listening and contributing and finding mechanisms to do that, we're heading in the right direction.

And I do applaud what I will mirror what you said. I think it's great that the APSC has started the Collaboration Circle and supporting it because the APSC has such an important role in guiding and shaping the whole APS. And regardless of whether an agency is small or mega, and there's some mega agencies, being able to have those, the commonalities, the framework in place so that it isn't really about your funding, it's about the leadership that the APSC is showing in this. And the way the Collaboration Circle has been established, it is respect in action, and that's amazing.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Excellent. Well, Julie, Sam, Stella, thanks for coming in and sharing your story about the Collaboration Circle. Yeah, it's motivating. I think there's a real, it's great to hear particularly the reactions of the COO Committee taking this on and really taking it to heart, and the fact that it's now gone from a pilot and it's now, it's a thing. And so what do we do collectively, now, as an opportunity, as an APS, to take this and really continue to try to improve and have the impact by being, as you've just said, being engaged, get interested, be aware, address the biases, understand your privilege, but make progress.

So thanks a lot for coming in. Really appreciate it. It's such an important thing, and it's great to know that you've had so much

success. And yeah, congratulations on all your hard work, and I'm sure you are. Stella, you are now grateful that you stuck around, and you two, you stuck around.

STELLA RENAGI: Totally.

DAVID PEMBROKE: I think Sam's going to tap you one.

STELLA RENAGI: The last meeting was rewarding itself.

JULIE HANSEN: Absolutely.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Just quickly tell me that, what happened there at the last meeting? What was, was it that something happened or was it just a?

STELLA RENAGI: It was dynamic, really. And then I came away from it and went, do you know what? I'm so glad I'm still a part of this.

JULIE HANSEN: Me, too. Absolutely.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Isn't that wonderful.

JULIE HANSEN: It was really refreshing. Yeah. Yeah. Very fantastic.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Well done, well done you, and well done the COO Committee for taking it on. Fantastic. Really enjoyed that conversation today. Listeners, and I'm sure you did, as well. Another great conversation there about life in the APS. It's great to see this APS reform having such an impact, so there you go.

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there you go, another episode down, another great conversation about the Australian Public Service. My name is David Pembroke. We'll be back at the same time in a fortnight's time, but for the moment, it's bye for now.