



## GOVCOMMS PODCAST

### EPISODE #147 DIGITAL GOVERNMENT FESTIVAL

- WITH STEPHANIE SPECK, ROGER  
CHRISTIE AND DAVID PEMBROKE

[TRANSCRIPT](#)

# TRANSCRIPT

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Tim:

Fantastic. So welcome back everyone. I'm going to pass it straight over to Roger for this session, but I just wanted to say Roger, Stephanie, David, thank you for joining us for the final session of day one of the festival. I know it's been a long day. I think I knew government in a federal level, and I know that you are having meetings at your own levels of government. So, thank you for coming at 5:30 to host what I'm sure will be a really wonderful discussion. And thank you to all on the call for sticking around for the 5:30 slot. I've been told that some people have already broken out the snacks. So we won't judge any of you if you break out the snacks as well on the call. Passing it over to you, Roge.

Roger Christie:

Please don't make us feel too jealous, but absolutely. It's the equivalent of the graveyard shift, but I think we're going to finish really strong on day one, Tim, that's the good news. And this is one of those conversations that there's, yeah, not to put any pressure on you, David or Steph, but it is one of those conversations that I know many people are talking about if not trying to tackle at the moment around this idea of leaders and individual digital participation. So what I'm going to do is actually share my screen and just set the scene for things a little bit. So bear with me one moment. I know we've heard that phrase a million times over the past couple of years. So hopefully what you can see on your screens now is just a little bit of framing and I thought it'd be helpful.

Many of you will obviously have read the, I suppose the preamble to today's session. So why should public sector leaders be digital? And I'll do a bit of a speaker introduction in a moment, but what I wanted to give us in terms of context is some comments that were made by the honourable Victor Dominello, the New South Wales Minister for Digital and Customer Service. And he said in a financial review article a little while ago, towards the end of last year, that COVID has busted sleepy governments into digital action. Now that the public have had a taste of what good looks like, they will punish governments that retreat back to their analogue donor. Some fairly stern and confronting words from someone who understands this environment incredibly well.

But in 2022, where we are living now, and I can't call it a post COVID era, but certainly one that's lived through it for the past couple of years, this reality applies to institutions as much as it does individuals. And I think Minister Dominello is a great example of someone who is doing this day in, day out on LinkedIn and Twitter and other digital channels. But it's not just our elected leaders, it's also the bureaucratic and the public sector leaders who have a wonderful opportunity here. So what I thought I might do is just set the scene, introduce our speakers before we dive into the Q and A.

But I did just want to highlight some of the comments that are being made, some of the feelings that might be out there, things that you're experiencing in your own world at the moment, that there is this expectation among citizens today that there is no opportunity to retreat, not to sound too dramatic, the only opportunity is to move forward. So what might that look like? So let's go forward. So who have we got with us today? Well, obviously you can see them on your screens, but David Pembroke is the founder and CEO of contentgroup, which is based in Canberra, and who I would consider a public sector communications expert.

And since David started contentgroup back in 1997, he's been dedicated to improving the effectiveness of government communications and engagement capability as a trusted advisor. So thank you for joining us today, David, and I'm very much looking forward to your insights. I know we've had several conversations around this topic in the past. And we're also joined by Stephanie Speck, who is the Executive Director of the Communications Division and Chief Communications Officer for the Department of Education and Training in Victoria.

Now, Steph has actually lived and worked in more than 20 countries over the past 25 odd years. Yes, it has plenty of experience to draw from and you've only just recently returned too, Steph, so it's good to have you here with us as well. Looking forward to dipping into your treasure trove of experiences from around the globe, and also your reflections on what things are looking like here in Australia at the moment.

Now, I'm Roger Christie. I, according to Google, I'm not necessarily the Managing Director of Propel. And in fact, if you do this right now and I don't know where you are sitting, you are welcome to Google my name. This is the first image you'll find. No, it's not my dad. I don't even know the guy, but I can tell you that this is Roger Christie according to Google, but it's Roger Christie who happens to be a 72-year-old ordained minister, cannabis advocate, and according to the image in the top right, a long-haired traveller. What's interesting about this and why I share this as a very personal and relevant story for topics like this, and we're talking about the topic of why should public sector leaders be digital, we cannot control what Google shows the world.

So why is it important to be digital? Because the only opportunity you have to control what others see about you to ensure that you are not in this case, this is a very unfortunate thing for my namesake over in Hawaii, someone who literally did hard time for a distribution of cannabis, if you want to avoid that scenario, you've got to be in it to win it. No one controls their digital reputation today. That is the truth. But whether we're active online or not, we all have one.

We all have a digital reputation, something that people are using, whether you are a candidate looking at a career in the public sector, whether you are someone who is looking to partner with the public sector, whether you're a citizen who has a gripe with the public sector. Everyone out there is looking at this digital reputation today and using it to inform their decisions about whether they trust you, whether they like you, whether they want to get along with you or not.

And to influence what they see, to influence your own digital reputation, you need to participate online. As I'll talk to you in a moment, there's simply no other strategy and particularly some comments that were shared in that same Australian Financial Review article about the role of anonymity. So what does that actually look like for public sector leaders? Well, I thought I'd start and set the tone before I throw to our experts and start firing some questions at them. Let me set the tone by sharing this one example of Minister Dominello, the very person who is making those comments in the Australian Financial Review.

And what I've done here, I've just taken a comment that he shared, or a post I should say that he shared on LinkedIn a little while ago and highlighted a few sections here that might be of particular relevance. Now he's having a Sunday coffee working through some direct messages. And what's really helpful about this, I'm getting an insight into his life, and he loves a photo with a selfie as you can see in the reflection. In his copy, he's taking a selfie on his mobile phone. This is the sort of thing that he does on a regular basis to build that identity and affinity with his audience online. And what he's saying is that he's listening to the comments that he gets, he's taking that feedback on board, and in many cases, actioning that feedback. He's giving people a regular update on progress.

As you can see by the last comment here, he is also been quite transparent about the fact that he can't reply to every single message that he receives. So he's got team members who are helping him out to make sure that he's sitting through and getting to the responses that need to be made. Now, this is all well and good. It's easy arguably for leaders to have a digital presence that simply is broadcast messages out into the internet. What happens when that turns around? I think this is what we want to get into today, the potential benefits that come from participating online.

In this case, it's a post from someone who, I'm assuming, he doesn't know, but someone who's made a comment about an experience they've had at Service New South Wales, tagged Minister Dominello, as you can see, made a lot of comments and given a lot of context around their experience and where the challenges have come. Which ends with this particular person running screaming from Service New South Wales, "Victor Dominello, MP, please help." This is where things get really interesting. This is something that I'd like to unpack a little bit with our guests today.

What happens next is that you see people like Emma Hogan, Secretary for the New South Wales' Department of Customer Service and Digital, jumping on and saying, "This doesn't sound like an experience you would like to have. Damon Rees, could you look into this?" Throws over to Damon, who's the chief Executive Officer at Service New South Wales, "Sorry to hear about the challenges that you've experienced." Goes on to explain the complexities behind the scenario that this person's experiencing and then goes on to tag other people in the post to let them know they should also look into this.

And what's the response that you get from people watching on? Everything's in the public domain online. Brilliant response, #leadership. This wasn't one comment that I pulled out of a whole range of anger. This is the general tone that's being felt there. You will always get [inaudible 00:09:04], you'll always get criticism from people online. But in this case, it's an opportunity to demonstrate that in this case, this agency is listening, their leaders are listening, and they're taking action all very visible.

It's just one example that I wanted to show us at the time for today. But importantly now, let's dive in. I'm very keen to hear from our experts who have joined us today, Dave and Stephanie. Maybe if we can just start by getting your reflections, I suppose, acknowledging the comments that Minister Dominello made right up front. And given that example that we've just looked through, do you agree with this perspective that the public citizens will punish analogue governments? And what do you think punishment looks like in this day and age? Stephanie?

Stephanie Speck:

Thanks, Roger. Great to join you in this conversation with David. Good evening to everyone. It's really a pleasure to investigate and discuss this fascinating but rather fraught topic. I want to say straight out that yes, I do believe that public punished governments and I believe we're seeing this right now. The Edelman Trust barometer that we all know and love, I'm sure, reported this year that 61% of Australians think that government is actively trying to mislead them. Not think that they may be, but actively, that the government is conspiring to cause mischief and disturbance amongst the public.

I think it's not that we're at risk. We're living through this age now of a great gap between lack of confidence of public in government and in government institutions or bureaucracy or the public sector. And I really like the fact that you framed the opening statement around this. If you can't manage your digital reputation, it's becoming increasingly harder. But you can bet your bottom dollar, if you are not doing it, someone else is trying to take that power away from you. So if you are not playing in that space, if you are not active in managing what you look like or what you say your reputation and voice online, then someone else will be using it as an opportunity.

I also really love that example that you gave because I think that speaks to immediacy and authenticity of public sector leadership. There's a problem? That's why we are in the public sector to improve service, to solve the problems that every day Australians anticipate and encounter. And that's someone cutting through all the noise, all the filters and saying, "We see you, we hear you. We're going to do something about it." And that is the only thing that builds trust, immediate action, spoken truthfully by the people who can do something about it.

Roger Christie:

Absolutely. Thank you, Stephanie. David, did you have any comments on that?

David Pembroke:

Well, I think we've seen just in the last federal election just recently gone, the two major parties have recorded their lowest primary votes ever. So when you talk about punishment, the punishment's been handed out. Now the Federal Labour Party in the good fortune to have enough of those votes captured in the right places where they can now be majority government. But you can bet your bottom dollar that that warning has been well

and truly heard. Again, what happened to the liberal party? There's a lot of speculation that it could well happen to the late party next time when engaged, thoughtful local candidates, well-financed, well-organised with very, very strong digital footprints will threaten the Labour Party at the next election.

So yes, there is a real opportunity now, and it's this step change I think where I think everyone now gets it, everyone now understands it. Politicians know about the importance of content and communication in digital better than anyone. They're the ones who've been living and breathing it, particularly at a federal level, to try to get elected in the last federal election. So they're very, very well aware of it. But I think it's now trying to mature the relationships between the agencies and departments and the political officers to try to find where is that space where you can have those respectful and well-understood guardrails in order for people to be better informed about what government is doing to solve a problem on their behalf.

I think as Stephanie just said, we're really now at a point where it's time to kick off this conversation, and those conversations need to be had at the senior levels. I'm just talking about Canberra, I suppose, for the moment. But clearly, you can see that relationship there in New South Wales where those three, the minister to the secretary to the deputy worked very nicely that they're able to interchange. But let's hope we start to see more of that and that we do get to see more of the great things that government do.

Because I know a lot of people on this call, the work that the public sector does is extraordinary. And you can go into any government department anywhere in Australia, any agency, and just see the brilliant work that's being done. And I think the real opportunity now is to bring that to life because that's when we'll start to address some of the challenges that Stephanie was referring to in that Edelman Trust Barometer.

Roger Christie:

That's a really helpful framing. I think that talking to big research reports like the Edelman Trust Barometer, things like the Brunswick Groups Connected Leadership report, which doesn't focus necessarily on the public sector, but again, it's a treasure trove of wonderful insights there. What these talk to is this reality today that people are seemingly less interested in the institutional message and more interested in the individual message. If I go back to, and we can unpack that a little bit, but it's almost like if that's not part of your capability, if it's not in your communications toolkit, you're missing a valuable opportunity because that's who people want to hear from.

Edelman very much calls that out in terms of the role of the individual in stepping up and speaking out online. And we know that online scales are far better than any other channel. Taking that and looking, I suppose, back at that Australian Financial Review article that I mentioned earlier, one of the other comments that came through was that anonymity doesn't work anymore. So if that is the case, if anonymity isn't an option and we instead need to lean into this environment, what do public sector leaders, agencies, and I suppose ultimately society at large, because at the end of the day, as you are saying David, if it's about informing people about the really important pieces of information, society at large are losing if the anonymity strategy is taken. David, maybe you could give your own views on that. What do all these different stakeholders lose when anonymity is the preferred approach?

David Pembroke:

Well, they lose access to this wonderful treasure trove of work. I know in my daily work here at Content Group in Canberra, it never ceases to amaze me just the brilliant work that is being done in so many different parts of the federal bureaucracy. And what we are losing is the insight and the understanding and the awareness of where the taxpayers' dollars are being invested. I can give you a simple example. At the moment, we're working on a project for the Federal Department of Agriculture around the future drought fund. It's about future drought resilience. But we've now filmed a number of these projects around Australia and they're breathtaking.

When you have a look at the work that's being done, when you're seeing the collaboration between academia and industry and local government and state government and federal government working on common problems for the benefit of the community, they're the stories that we need to surface and we need to surface them in modern waves. Not just a three-page brief with blocks of text, but show us the old thing. Show, don't tell. But we really do have to address this problem in the bureaucracy and the relationship between the elected ministers and those bureaucracies. Because there's someone very smart ones said to me, "You don't get sat for being invisible."

So it really is that mature conversation that needs to take place to say, "Well, listen, where's my space and where's your space and how can we work together better to explain to people what we are doing?" And I think that's the only path forward. And there's a huge amount of work to be done in terms of skills and capability and priorities. But that's the opportunity and that's where we... Wherever start from today, let's hope we can improve each day going forward.

Stephanie Speck:

Rog, can I offer a quick reflection building on what David said there? Coming back to I think two important points, is around scale and message conduit. We want our information personal. We want to know the person who's giving it to us because in a fractured society, and I think societies have fractured through COVID-19, we want to be able to get the news that matters to us from the people we trust. And that circle has, I think, shrunk during extended lockdowns, extended experiences with the pandemic. So the scale and conduit of message. Anonymity is the luxury of the past. We may rue the day when we got to be faceless bureaucrats. But I don't think that's the reality because people want to know who they're expected to trust.

And I think leadership is visible. Leadership is always visible. There's a reason why when we used to fight physically, that leaders and kings were out the front of armies. Because they had a huge duty to perform and they needed people to see them executing that duty. Not for their own glory. And I think that's probably the difference between when we're talking about ministers on social media and bureaucrats on social media. Not for their own duty because they have a public service to improve lives. So I think we think about scale, conduit, and the fact that good leadership is always visible.

Roger Christie:

Wonderful. Thank you both. I think touching on that indiscriminate forward momentum and the fact that we cannot undo some of those comforts that we may have been used to in the past, here's another thought. David, you actually quoted this in a post that you wrote recently on the OECD report on public communication. I don't know if others have had a look at this report that was put out last year, but it's well worth a read if you haven't. In that, you talk to a point where you say the enterprise is being reinvented whether we like it or not. And the impacts of digital technology are indiscriminate. It doesn't respect all charts, it isn't interested in job descriptions.

And it's such a powerful picture you paint of almost flagrant disregard that digital and technology has to what we think and feel. It doesn't really care, it's already here, it's already moving and it's simply a matter of us keeping up. So in your views, and I understand your perspective on this from that comment, but maybe, Stephanie, if I can go to you, is the public sector adapting fast enough in your opinion? Or perhaps maybe more constructively, what are some of the common things that hold agencies and leaders back? What do you think people could be doing?

Stephanie Speck:

Great question. I think it's risk, and there's different varieties of risk. You have your garden variety of risk, which is, "I just don't know how to do it." I think it's the reality, that many secretaries of departments belong to an older age group. That's their function. They've climbed the career ladder. And they haven't been brought

up with the diet of Googling ourselves and seeing that you're a 72-year-old hippie, Roger. I don't know how to do it, and so I'm not going to venture to that. There's a fear risk agenda there at work. Then I think there's another risk fear at play, which is if I do it, I won't be good enough. Or maybe I'll do it the wrong way and cause offence.

And I think there are big question marks around how bureaucrats both adhere to the code of conduct for public service, which is tight. It should be because it's there to protect me as a public servant, to protect my role in living out my values of impartiality, of transparency, of good conduct. There's a line to walk between what is acting being seen perhaps or being perceived to be a cheer squad for the government, which is not at all the role of the public sector or bureaucrats leading departments. And the other side of the equation, which is demonstrating what good looks like in public sector administration. In education, how are we making sure that kids are back at school.

Not talking about the promises that the minister may have made but the action of ensuring that kids can go to school. So I think it's risk. I don't know how to do it. Maybe I don't do it well enough, maybe I'm going to cross the wrong side of the line. So I think it's critical for leaders. And when I'm speaking to public sector leaders around the world, I say, "Let's get the why right first. We're not just going to open a channel and start posting. Let's really investigate why are you here and in this space." And I think being very clear about what your voice and your role is in that space.

And your role is, as I said, not to be a cheer squad. Your role is as a public sector leader to show how public administration is best served by having a conversation in this space. So you should be talking about the how, what, and when. Not the big glory statements about promises and reform, but how that reform is touching the lives through the processes of your department.

Roger Christie:

I think that's really nice. Actually, we talk similar language in terms of finding that purpose and ensuring that it informs everything you do as a way to mitigate risk. I think to your point about some of those common risk factors that leaders, that they feel will I say and do the right thing? Will I cross the line? Whatever it might be. Having that clarity of purpose is critical to actually avoiding conversations that you shouldn't dip into or saying things that may come across as tone deaf. And I think the important factor in there that can sometimes get forgotten is the stakeholder on the other side.

So considering who you're actually talking to through that channel, who may be listening, how they may be impacted by any particular message is as important as the conversation you want to have. Because if you understand their perspective... And digital's wonderful at giving us that kind of always on access to the views and attitudes of others, you can use that public barometer to help you understand how to frame your own message to have it better received. David, is there anything you would add to that around this idea of risk and what's holding people back?

David Pembroke:

Well, yeah, okay. But again, I just think those mature conversations really... Try to understand that line between where do the different players play. I think probably a bit with both of you really in this sense of spending a bit of time listening. And I think that's your advice to people, Rog, is really if it's going to be LinkedIn that you think you might want to make a contribution, be in it for a while, pay a bit of attention because it has significant impact. And a place that I like to see leaders in the public sector play is when they're reflecting on the work of the people in their agencies. Because there's nothing that junior people like more than being seen by their leaders and pointing towards, "This is great, this is exactly what... I'm very proud to lead this department because we did X. Person Y, did you know that they have just achieved..." whatever it is.

There's a really powerful internal opportunity to use social, which shouldn't be lost as well. So yes, external is important, but that internal, when you're reflecting on the organisation, it just builds confidence, it builds

pride, and it builds that real worth of, "I'm a public servant because look at this great work I'm doing. And it's great work because my secretary has just said to all of the people who follow him I'm doing great things." I think there's a real opportunity there for public sector leaders.

Roger Christie:

Absolutely right. Never underestimate the power of a like, a simple thumbs up to drive loyalty. Why wouldn't you amplify that internal goodwill externally? I'm completely on board with you. What you're highlighting there, I think what you were saying as well earlier, David, and if I can refer back to that OECD report too, because as it say, it's 200 pages of a really interesting insight for those who have the time to look through it or maybe just skim read certain sections that appeal to you. But it sounds like you're talking about this capability gap and referencing the lack of confidence as you are saying there too, Steph, and that perception of risk.

What about interesting in that report? It doesn't miss the mark, and in your comments reflected this too, David, it doesn't miss the mark and it's assessment of the investment and the capability gaps in public sector communication, certainly it doesn't miss there. But in all of those 200 plus pages, there was not one single reference to the crucial role that these public sector leaders themselves play in flying the flag online. There was a section that was even dedicated to public service leadership and capability that talks to talent attraction, as you are talking about here, David, and retention. Translating vision into action almost as you were describing there, Steph, and building skills and competencies that create a learning culture within the public sector.

It goes on to say that it's crucial for sector leaders to modernise their skills and empower their workforce by setting the example. So it goes on to say all these wonderful things, but there is not one reference to digital participation at that individual level as a way to do these things. So if I can throw something at you both, if it's crucial for sector leaders to attract and retain talent to communicate vision, to create this kind of learning culture. And if there's over overwhelming evidence as you were talking to before, Steph, with the Edelman Trust Barometer, that shows our preference for digital and we want to hear from leaders, they're informing the choices that we make about where we work and what information we consume. Why do you think that we aren't seeing more public sector teams or more leaders harness this digital opportunity? What's missing?

Stephanie Speck:

I think there's a couple of things. I think that our relationship with institutions and organisations has changed as employees. I don't think we think of work as somewhere we just go or work as location. I think we think of work as relationships. I'm in a relationship with my organisation and my institution, which has its foundation on or is predicated on the fact that I know the people in my institution or organisation. And not just my immediate colleagues or my team members, but the person who's setting the vision for where we are going as a team. That visibility, again, of leadership is about that personal connection.

And I think we can't be underestimated in this era of the great resignation. We want fabulous people in the public sector. We need fabulous people to develop and deliver fabulous services. And if what I expect as a young graduate or person thinking about growing my career is to understand the person who is giving me my instructions about being a good public sector bureaucrat, if I want to understand that person, I've got to be able to see them, hear them, listen to them and understand their impact in their intersection with my life.

I think too, that David made a really interesting point there about this we live in a crossover between what is external, what's internal. Before the advent, I think, particularly of LinkedIn, you would have internal comms programmes that were entirely based around newsletters almost or staff forums as a way of engaging, shifting mindset, linking policy and purpose with people. But LinkedIn actually crosses that space. It bridges that gap between what was external, what I've said externally, and the way that gets then mirrored internally. When I look through my feed, it's full of my colleagues highlighting different service aspects of what we're doing in the department.



And people either liking or sharing or commenting. That builds community, it builds engagement with our purpose, and that's how you get people working well, that's how you get people contributing to efficient and effective quality gains. If I can just make one more point there too, I think too, in the conversation, we're talking about how we maintain a public presence in terms of our visibility and our interaction, but there's also the big important part of being online as a leader is your gathering intel, aren't you? You're seeing what your staff are talking about, you're seeing what's being currently discussed in terms of...

And that we've seen millions of discussions around what does good hybrid look like. And if I were leading an institution, I'd want to be participating maybe sitting on the sidelines, but certainly understanding what my staff are talking about so I can develop that and mirror that back to them. It's not just about how I come across online as part of my purpose, but also what I can harvest from being online to help me be a more effective leader of my people.

Roger Christie:

Do you think there's something in there, Steph, too, around the mere presence of a leader giving permission? The OECD report talks about empowering their workforce. Yes, it's about listening and learning, but even simply being present sends a message to others that, "This is where we should be." It's almost like, "What matters to my boss matters to me. So if they are there and they are leading from the front, therefore I should also be participating. And if they're talking, if they're sharing opinions on things like hybrid, as you are saying, it encourages me to have a voice, it empowers me to have a voice and therefore, that discussion is enriched and we're getting a more diverse set of voices and opinions and attitudes." Is that fair to say as well? It's something that they should be considering?

Stephanie Speck:

Yes. With a caution at it and a caveat as a good public servant that we should firstly be guided by the code. There are social media and digital conduct codes and that's our north star as it was. It says these are what we should be doing and shouldn't be doing. I think within that broader framework of a safe operating space... That's why I say don't leap in. Think about your why, think about the how of what you're going to do and discharge your duties in the online space according to your values as much as you do in the physical presence every day in the office. That's what I think is the cautionary note around that.

Roger Christie:

Absolutely. David, was there anything you'd add to this?

David Pembroke:

Well, I totally agree with what Steph just said in terms of understanding what's permissible. But I think it is best practise where you are enabling communication through your communicators and spreading it far and wide rather than, "This is the department channel and we've got one way of getting the message out." I think modern practise is really about trying to find where are those networks that we can activate with good, useful, relevant, consistent content where people can start to build that awareness and understanding about what is taking place. And you can do that by activating these networks that are latent in your organisation.

So really, I think it's about thinking about how you can bring that to life. Every private sector or organisation I know about, they're always talking to their staff about, "Hey, share this with your audiences. Why don't you get the message out there? We want to build our reputation, we want to be known for what we do." And again, I just think there is just that reticence. It'll come but it'll just take a little bit more time because of probably some of the traditional barriers that we've got to overcome that we've spoken about earlier.

Roger Christie:

I think one of those being the code, not necessarily a barrier, but certainly some parameters to work within. As you are saying, Steph, I think that's an important consideration. And making sure that people feel informed and aware of what it means, what it doesn't mean as well, as opposed to a blanket black and white sort of response, I'm either on or I'm offline. I think they're important considerations. But what we find when we're having conversations, and this applies across public and private sector to be honest, but when you're having conversations focusing more on the outcome and what we're trying to achieve, and I think particularly in the public sector that's important in terms of what outcomes we're trying to generate.

If you put digital into that context and take that mindset around outcomes, suddenly things like, if I can borrow your example from earlier, David, if it's around talent attraction or retention, if it's talking about diversity in the workplace as an example, and we've had a lot of those messages over the past couple of years, we see time and time again that there's almost a fixation on what the agency or what the brand, the institution might be saying about its own diversity and inclusion policies or initiatives and how we're trying to recruit these specific roles. And you might go back and look at a range of a suite of leaders and see that there's radio silence about diversity and inclusion. It's something that's never talked about. International Women's Day didn't feature, Reconciliation Week doesn't feature.

And all of a sudden you go, "Well, where's the authenticity there? If we're relying too much on the institution to push messages out that we expect from an institution but they're not being backed up by key figures, what message might that send to candidates who then perhaps can't see themselves?" We can't be what we can't see sort of thinking. They can't see themselves working in that particular agency or members of the community, those citizens who then don't feel like the big brand campaigns translate into individual choices and actions. Do either of you have a view on that and maybe even examples of where you've seen it go well, if there is? Some that you can refer to. I certainly can, but keen to know your thoughts.

David Pembroke:

Steph, over to you.

Stephanie Speck:

I can't think of where I've seen that done well in Australia. I can think of places overseas, and I think the conversation will move in this way anyway. But I was just thinking about your points about recruitment and alignment of what you say with what you demonstrate. I think that's what we're judged so much of our absorption of information is done visually now. And it's very easy to spot the fakes and to spot the fact that you have values written here, but we're not seeing those digitally demonstrated. So I think that should be an expectation. And we expect our leaders to walk the talk now. And I think that the digital landscape is one area in which you walk the talk.

I think too, that one of the interesting... If we think about how our public sector leaders are judged and adjudicated, I think it's often been around efficiency and effectiveness. Have you been able to manage your budget? Have you been able to deploy the reforms that the government promised? Has service delivery improved? I wonder, if we put a bigger emphasis on the ability to communicate and engage staff, if some of this talk would receive... Because it would just be seen as a natural. Well, if I'm also being judged not just on my ability to manage budget but also to engage staff, attract and retain the right people, perhaps if those skills were elevated, perhaps things we've traditionally seen as soft skills but I think are foundational skills, maybe there's a broader conversation about KPIs for our leaders.

And not just our leaders, but how that trickles down through an organisation. And I wonder if that's something that we should be speaking with leaders about, that this is core competence now. We spend a lot of time in agencies and organisations talking about how we make processes more efficient by bringing them online. But how do we improve the way our staff feel about their job, and therefore, the way they deliver their job by the conversations we have in this digital space.

David Pembroke:

I think there's something to that. I think that's a really smart idea. And again, it goes back to that point about those key mature conversations between the elected officials and the senior people in these departments to try to work out where that space is so as, exactly as you say, Steph, that is going to help to solve a critical challenge that every government around Australia has, which is attracting and retaining high quality people. So if it's going to help to solve that problem, it might say... Well, and again, I suppose if you couch it in the terms of, "This could save us millions and millions of dollars," maybe that'll start to get people's attention.

But it really does go to this evolving space that we're in now. And I'll be really interested just to see those types of conversations, and having conversations with leaders at both levels about these things and just to see what the appetite is like. But inevitably, what will happen, something will go wrong and then someone will lose their job and everyone will slam shut and everyone will run away, it might take a while for it to come again. But who knows? But look, the change will take place. It will mature over time but it'll only mature as those relationships mature. And it comes back to those really, really important... Because that's where the authorising environment is at that higher level. So that's really where those conversations go take place.

Stephanie Speck:

I think picking up on the example you shared at the beginning, Roger, and I've forgotten, excuse me, the secretary's surname, Emma, what an incredible example she said. She said, "I'm here in this space and I'm watching and I've heard you and I expect my department to act now and act quickly." That's an extraordinary example for a leader to set. And so I think that not only empowers her staff to think that that's a good way to act, to be present, to register, and then to do something, but she's setting an expectation that, "This is how my department... We are discharging our duty to the public in terms of our responsiveness and fixing issues that the public is encountering." So it's not just empowering, it's setting expectation.

Roger Christie:

Absolutely. In a public environment with a date stamp and a timestamp on it, I completely agree. It is that expectations and empowerment and setting an example. I think David's point there too, around risk is a really important one to explore though because I find it helpful. We should start the conversation as we are and hopefully this is helpful for people listening in to also then start a conversation back in their offices. We should start the conversation as opposed to putting heads in the sand. Because when you look at risk through a different lens, if we're not talking about issues like diversity and inclusion, we won't attract the talent with whom that resonates.

But if we don't participate in digital channels, we avoid the risk of saying the wrong thing. Which risk is more important? And to your point, David, around the cost. One thing might cost us, it might be a short-term pain, the other might be long-term talent drain. I think that's the risk that we really should be looking at here. But if I can take us from dark place, I know it's getting darker outside. Not a dark place, but certainly we take us into a more positive space and maybe share some of these good examples that you talked to before, Steph.

And if I can link the two here, one of the wonderful examples that I remember having a conversation with a very senior bureaucrat not too long ago, and she was talking about her own experience of literally finding a candidate reaching out to her because of what she was saying and doing on LinkedIn who reached out and said... Well, not exactly in this way, but over the course of several conversations, it transpired that she was looking at a range of different roles. I'd consider this to be high performing young talent. Looking at a range of different roles, she could have gone down the path of something that was very exciting, new, different, things attached to sustainability, climate change, the ESG world that we're very familiar with.

Looking at one of those interesting tech startups or looking at something that's in the government space. And I think if you put those two things side by side, most people would say, "Choose the startup for excitement and energy every day." And that's the perception that some parts of the public sector have. In this case, it was the

leader's individual actions, her attitudes, her values, to your point, David, her treatment of staff in a public environment that led this individual to choose to work with government.

Those are the opportunities that are missed when we don't participate. They're the opportunities that are missed when we don't have a digital presence. So I think if we can use that as almost a bit of an example, I'm keen to know from both of you, and maybe, Steph, if I can start with you, where do you look to or where do you point others to for inspiration around best practise in this space? Is it offshore or even offshore? From the many places that you've worked, who's leading the way that people listening in today might be worth going and having a lookout online to see how those leaders are doing their thing online?

Stephanie Speck:

I think this is such new territory that I don't feel confident and comfortable to recommend anybody really at this moment in this space because I think that one of the things I've noticed-

David Pembroke:

Come on. Get off the fence.

Stephanie Speck:

... returning to Australia, it's my natural position [inaudible 00:43:30]. Believe me. But for returning to Australia, I've been really stunned actually about the backward nature of the use of digital communications within the public sector. And I think that's perhaps because we live in a functioning democracy where there are other environments for people to make their voices heard, elections that you get to vote and you are counted. And as a woman, my vote equals anyone else's vote and it's registered. So I think there are other avenues.

But some of the countries I've worked in the photo that I shared for this is holding up a selfie sign for elections in Iraq where, as the government, we went hard online to build confidence in the public institution that was charged withholding free... Sorry, that's a puppy in the background, free and transparent elections. And we knew that that digital space was a key space to build trust.

So I think some of the best examples of this are actually in countries where they've emerged from conflict, they're needing to build a citizen engagement with government and they know that if they're not present in that space, particularly with growing youth populations, they've lost a vital chance to connect, engage, talk about reform and most importantly, get people to adhere to reform. So I think if I look at departmental heads in places like Iraq, in places like Somalia, in the Ukraine at the moment, where there are really real life examples of needing to get it right because safety and security of citizens is on the line and a democracy growing or failing is on the line.

Roger Christie:

That's a really interesting point and it's something we could probably explore in a greater amount of detail. Even the Ukraine example, I remember seeing... I'm probably going to get this wrong and someone will correct me, but I think it was the Minister of Defence in the Ukraine reaching out, using Twitter to reach out to some fairly senior private sector and public sector leaders and government leaders around the globe. One of those interactions was with the very familiar phase of Elon Musk on Twitter asking for the Starlink to try and get access into the Ukraine when things were being shut off around them.

And that response actually led to a positive outcome in terms of access to the internet and so on and so forth. Now who knows the widespread impact of that? It is interesting to see leaders across sectors using these mediums to, as you say, protect the interests of citizens in this case. And that's a fairly unorthodox approach

but... David, did you have any like that? I mean, that's a very unique example around citizen reform that Steph's given us. But are there any that come to mind for you?

David Pembroke:

It was good to see Steph jump off the fence there, straight into it. It's good to see.

Roger Christie:

Didn't take long, did it?

David Pembroke:

That's right. Look, I'll throw a couple out there. Look, I thought the Australian Electoral Commission did a really good job during the recent election to get engaged, stay engaged, to address mis and disinformation. And again, it was a very active, content driven, quite clear and specific what they were trying to do, but they brought to it with a bit of a smile on its face. And really, I think often, we forget to celebrate just how great a system of government that we have in a wonderful country that we are. And I thought that I felt that I got that tone, which I thought they got right.

Going back a few years, the police departments, I think it was Queensland, the police department that really led the way a number of years ago about that personality driven, but really directed towards solving problems that they had, but doing it with a real engaging style, which I thought would... Well, certainly was picked up by all over the place. I thought that was a really good example of a public sector organisation understanding the audience, understanding its tone, understanding its objectives and its mission and what it was trying to achieve, but then being able to communicate really effectively.

And for a couple of personalities, getting back to this point around leaders, the departmental secretary here in Canberra of the Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment, a gentleman by the name of Andrew Metcalfe, really good, very engaged, lovely guy and you know who he is. His people absolutely love him because they feel like they know him. And everyone, from the youngest person in the organisation to the people he work with, he treats people with respect and he really, I think, uses the platform very well.

Also the eSafety Commissioner, Julie Inman Grant, here in Canberra, she's another who is, as you would hope, that she's very effective in the space because she's trying to influence a number of people, not just here in Australia but around the world. She's another who I would give a bit of a shout out to as well because she does a good job in helping you to understand the work that they're doing, why they're doing it, where their priority is pointing you to different places where you can learn a bit more. Again, just great examples again of good use of the different platforms and different uses of content.

Roger Christie:

Really good examples there. And I agree with you, Julie Inman Grant too, is a wonderful example to look at and as you say, travels the globe. Some of the work that she's done recently on LinkedIn, just highlighting the global pedigree that the eSafety Commission has based on the work that she's done through the partnerships that she's sharing on LinkedIn I think is first rate. It just elevates the status of the work that they're doing here in Australia. And if I could just touch on the AEC as an example that you gave, the Australian Electoral Commission. Actually, we did a podcast conversation with [inaudible 00:49:26] who's at the AEC, and we actually asked him about Commissioner Rogers and what his role was or wasn't online.

And it was really interesting, getting his views around... It was something that they have talked about and it was something that they were considering in the lead up to this election. Did Commissioner Rogers actually have a specific or a different voice that required its own presence, and it's something that they really grappled with in the lead up to the election. And they ended up deciding that, "No, we wanted to invest all our eggs in

the brand basket." And they've set a reputation strategy. Not a social media or a digital strategy, but a reputation strategy, reputation management strategy, which included social and digital. His role was more the mainstream, I suppose, the traditional media engagements and the brand of the team.

And if anyone who's listening hasn't seen what they're doing on Twitter and Facebook and Instagram and others, please pardon me and have a look and have a laugh. It's not done yet, even though the election is. Go and have a look at that one. But it's interesting that he did say Commissioner Rogers and his identity and the way that he represents the agency because essentially, it will be authority. Because essentially, that is it. That's what the commission is there about. He should, in the future, look very hard whether there's a role for him to play alongside the brand voice. So it's an interesting one there.

David Pembroke:

Just to jump in there, Roger. I think, for me, you've just hit on something that is just so fundamentally important about the maturity of this space. And it's really to start talking about it as in business terms of objectives, reputation management, understanding that these channels only exist to achieve business objectives. And as we mature, it's all going to fall away in time that we won't be talking about social, we won't be talking about digital because that's pretty much what everything will be. But we have to start talking about it in terms that make sense around the business and around achieving business objectives because that's where the conversations will resonate.

Again, I go back to those higher levels of conversation, if you can go in, you don't go in talking about a great social media strategy, you want to go in and talk about those problems that you're trying to solve, "By the way, this is how we're going to do it." So think about it around business and have your conversations what are the things that are keeping your leaders up at night? What are those 3:00 AM questions that they're looking at? And how can you go to them with a solution around that, which just happens to rely on content, digital, social, whatever it might be. But catch the conversation in the business solution and in the problem that you're trying to solve and you'll get a lot more traction than you will if you just go in there saying, "Hey, I want to do this wizzywig thing because it's all great."

Roger Christie:

Exactly, right. And if we can go back to what you were saying earlier too, step around that risk around, "Should I enter this environment? Will I say the right thing? Will I say the wrong thing?" Those sorts of concerns start to evaporate. Because what's happening, as you are saying, David, when you couch it that way, digital becomes an obvious choice. My own participation becomes an obvious choice. So the question is around to or not to, the question is how to, as you were saying, Steph. How do I now build the capability? How do I start to feel comfortable in this space?

And that's hopefully where conversations are going to go with teams, which is on the writings on the wall here, we can either opt out until we do feel comfortable and just pop the punches as they come. Or if we're going to invest in this environment, listen first, understand what the attitude is out there, define that purposes you're saying, work out very clearly what you intend to do in this space, and then start to build capability around it. And if you can do that, you won't be worse off. I promise you, you will not be worse off if you take those very measured steps.

Look, this is been very... I suppose that was a very nice thing. As we move towards the end of our session, nice thing to finish up on. But if I could just suppose get some practical advice from both of you, and maybe if I can present two scenarios, I suppose, one is the person who might be listening here going, "Well, this sounds all well and good. And now I'm not in the middle of a major citizen reform," as you were saying, Steph, "but I feel like I might be behind the eight ball." I'm not sure what you are talking about. Seems way too advanced for me. What are some of the really practical steps that people can do if there's a very early on things in... David,

in your view, maybe it's one, two, three things. Where do you think people should start if they're really early on in this journey to ensure that they get off on the right foot?

David Pembroke:

Register, download the app, and find the places that you want to participate in, and loiter. Loiter until you feel comfortable. Observe, learn a little bit about the use of hashtags and the ability to be able to put imagery up to support posts and just play around a bit but be present. You don't have to jump out and jump in straight away. You don't have to have a million things to say. But I think it's the advice that you always give to people. It's listen first. So I think that's what I'd get on, get started and be patient because it's the long game. This isn't going anywhere. It's not going to finish any time soon. I used to be on Twitter for a long time, but then I got sick of it, and then I haven't gone back. I just decided that it really wasn't for me. I found it distracting more than anything else.

I'm not a big participant in Facebook either. My wife's on Facebook, so I keep saying to people, "If you want to know about me, just follow her." I think we're all different. We all consume content in different ways. Again, it goes back to what Steph was saying to you around purpose. Well, why? If there's no reason, don't do it. But if you do feel that there's a reason, do get started. But I do think that point that you made right at the beginning around digital reputation is a good one. Really, I do think you have to give some thought to how you are going to participate but don't feel like you have to come out of the gates at a million miles an hour and give everyone a comment and share and like. Because you won't have time to get other work done, but just get started.

Roger Christie:

That's very good advice. Just get started. And I think that your point about you don't need this back catalogue of content ready to go on day one. It's okay to listen, it's okay to observe, it's okay to participate and ease your way in. And I think one thing that we haven't actually talked about at all in this conversation, we're talking about why public sector leaders should be digital. The unfair leader advantage that any leader has... As you were saying, that the simple like speaks volumes, it just has such a greater impact than if I can call it a layperson's like. There's a reality around algorithms online that if you are a leader, if you're someone who comes with credibility or authority, even if you're starting out online, you will naturally get more attention.

Rightly or wrongly, you will naturally get more attention and have more sway online. So harness that unfair advantage that leaders have. They can certainly get more cut through than the brand in some case. Stephanie, if I can ask you a slightly different question, I suppose, it's along the same lines, but maybe from the perspective of resources or what sort of resources, what sort of places or even authorities on this topic, where should people be going to get the information they need to help them take those first steps?

Stephanie Speck:

It's a great question and I think this is, as we've said many times, this is such a new space. We won't be asking this question in five years, maybe three years because it will be so self-explanatory. I think firstly go to David, because David and his team know what they're doing, and they've worked across private and public, so they're really good sense checkers and sounding boards and good at that strategy. So that's my first recommendation. The second one is that this is a process of trial and error. And if you are working in a department and you're working to a leader of a department, you've got to give them confidence that they can wait in and wait in safely and extract or get back on shore if they need to.

I think unfortunately, there's very little that resources in this space. That's why I'm glad that David and his group are starting to build in this space because I think we need those signposts along the way. If I can just actually quickly come back to the question you asked, David, because I think those practical steps for people who are advising upwards and trying to convince people know your boundaries or know your codes around

your public sector codes in this area, identify your why, and then choose your themes that will help activate that why, and link value with business objectives.

Your leader will make decisions based on what is good for the department. So you've got to be able to demonstrate why them being visible and leading in a digital environment is good for the department. And clearly demonstrate other examples of good practise because people will wait in when they feel safe and they can see other colleagues and compatriots doing the same thing. So get your why right, identify your themes, link value with business objectives and show examples of good practise so that people feel comfortable and know your boundaries.

Roger Christie:

Wonderful. If I can steal your last point and blend the last two questions to give my two cents, I think that's where industry examples are incredibly helpful. If I can encourage anyone listening today and wondering where to start, a very, very safe step, even before you do your own thing, is just to go and look at some of those industry examples and see what others are doing out there to draw inspiration from, even criticism to look at it and go, "How did they handle that? Why? What can I learn from that?" Feel free to critique them.

But I think looking at those other examples and giving leaders confidence that people are already doing that, we've talked about some of those examples, some of the ones that I'd call out, go and look at the likes of Amanda Yates in Queensland Transport and Main Roads, Mike Kaiser also in Queensland, Amy Brown, New South Wales government, looking at these people, looking at the New South Wales Customer Service Department again as an example.

Because through those examples of people who are more established, it's almost a way to leapfrog and get a couple of steps ahead and not have to go through the same growing pains that everyone else has over the past 10 or 15 years if they started that long ago. Tim, if I can throw it back to you now. I think we've made it just on time. But I want to say huge thank you to, as I know you will, to both step and David for their insights today. It's been hugely helpful for me and hopefully others. But over to you, Tim.

Tim:

Thank you, Roger, Stephanie, and David. I think I've taken away so much from this discussion. I know we started, Rog, with you having an alternative persona on the internet and now going all the way to whatever practical steps. And maybe the first practical step is checking that you don't have an alternative persona on the internet. But I know that so many people on the court today would've taken so much value from this, and to round out day one with such a really engaging discussion. And I was taking lots of photos every time you're all laughing and engaged, and I think the energy you brought to this was just wonderful. Thank you, Roger. Thank you, Stephanie. Thank you, David. I really appreciate your contributions today.

David Pembroke:

Pleasure.

Roger Christie:

Thank you very much. That's a pleasure.

Tim:

No worries.

For those of you who's still on the call, I hope that you can go and rest and recover in preparation for the 9:00 AM start tomorrow. Where we'll be joined by David Bartlett, the 43rd premiere of Tasmania. If you've been on the call all day, you'll know that's my home state. So very excited about that. Then Miguel Carasco from BCG



Consulting. And pretty much, we're going to go from there with another 10 panel discussions, everything from digital identity to privacy and thinking about how we not just think in silos but think in systems.

So it's going to be a great extension of the conversation we've had today and this evening. I'll see you tomorrow. If you have any questions, I'm going to stay online for the next five or so minutes, if you had any issues today. But once again, thank you, Rog, Stephanie, and David for rounding out what has been a fantastic day one of discussions. And I'll see you all tomorrow bright and early with a coffee in hand.