

IPANZ New Professionals Conference 2018

Future Lab: See the Future, Be the Future

MAX LIN of New Professionals runs through some of the highlights of the New Professionals 2018 Conference.



Max Lin

“It is important to support, protect, and nurture that spirit of service in the people who give expression to it every day. Especially those who are just starting out on their public service journey.” Peter Hughes, State Services Commissioner

On 10 and 11 October, some of the brightest young public servants across the country came together in Wellington for the biennial IPANZ New Professionals Conference.

The theme for the conference was “Future Lab – See the Future, Be the Future” and was aimed at helping new professionals explore and prepare for the challenges and opportunities that are coming to the public sector.

The conference was held at Te Papa, in the heart of Wellington. There were over 100 people from various agencies, ranging from government departments, councils, and private sector organisations that work closely with the public sector. I was fortunate enough to attend as one of the organisers of the conference (led by Louise Reddiford and Ryan Angus) and as a committee member of IPANZ New Professionals.



The conference committee welcoming attendees on the first day

of purpose that came from working in the public service, and he wove it into his journey as a public servant, starting as a case manager at Work and Income.

He talked about change being a constant in the public service – from the state sector reforms that happened in the past to the proposed review underway today. These changes sought to make our work more client-centric, with the goal of making it easier to collaborate in the pursuit of the public good.

Naomi Ferguson, the Commissioner and Chief Executive of Inland Revenue, built on this theme of client-centricity and the need to



Peter Hughes, the State Services Commissioner, speaking to attendees about his journey in the public service and the central importance of “service”

increase diversity and inclusion in the public sector. This was an important obligation but also a necessary part of understanding the needs of New Zealanders and to earn their trust and confidence. She talked about the subtle difference between diversity and inclusion – “Diversity is being invited to a party, but genuine inclusion is being asked to dance.” This meant that the public service not only needs to look like the people we are serving, but the work also needs to be meaningful and reflect the values and needs of our communities. The MC, Tamati Rimene-Sproat from Seven Sharp, then facilitated the first series of Q&As with Naomi, using a dedicated conference application.

The participants then had the opportunity to hear from two case studies that provided a glimpse of the future. The first case study by Te Puni Kokiri challenged some of the traditional modes of policy making. Instead of predetermining a framework and agenda, the organisation went out and engaged with tamariki at the earliest stages of the policy-making process to inform the scope and nature of their work, and they continued to involve their key stakeholders every step of the way. This was followed by a presentation by the Government Communication Security Bureau (GCSB) on how technology was changing the way the organisation works to make New Zealand safer. This showed that in the future with the emergence of new technologies, there needs to be a conversation with the public to build a consensus that maintains public confidence in the vital work that the government does.

An Insights Panel then discussed the future of technology and data in government. The panel talked about the disruption to the public service coming from developments such as big data and machine learning and how it can make the work we do more precise, but the panel also emphasised the importance of needing a human presence to complement these developments and round off their sharpest edges.

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A live poll conducted during the presentation showed that the attendees were optimistic about their future careers in the public service despite this technological disruption. However, change is coming – inevitably some roles will be replaced, but no doubt new frontiers will emerge. Therefore, it is crucial for young public

servants to think about the role they play and the skills they need in the future workplace, especially the need for ethics, empathy, and communication and the ability to make trade-offs and exercise judgment.

After lunch, the attendees got a taste of the issues they could encounter in the future with a simulated “War Game” run by Deloitte. Deloitte simulated a security crisis, and the attendees worked together on how to respond. Andrew Hampton, the chief executive of GSCB, then worked through the case study with the attendees.

At the end of a first day, attendees grabbed a drink at Mac’s Brew Bar, which gave them the opportunity to reflect on the lessons from the day and to network with their peers.

Day two – be the future

The second day focused on the future. The day opened with Karen Tregaskis, Managing Partner at Tregaskis Brown, who talked about how to cultivate your best self. The first step when preparing for change is to know yourself. The session focused on identifying and developing our strengths. All attendees completed the VIA character strengths assessment, which ranked a list of key attributes – such as kindness, forgiveness, and hope. However, it was important for the attendees to realise that strengths can be highly subjective and team dependent – a strength could be a weakness if overplayed, and weaknesses could actually be strengths in the right context. This session set the attendees up for the workshops they were to attend for the rest of the day.

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The day was then broken down into morning and afternoon workshops. The morning had three sessions, from which attendees could choose two. David Peddie from Project Plus talked about the growing importance of delivering “value” instead of “projects”. Projects are also increasingly interlinked, and policy makers will need to focus not just on the analysis of policy but also on its implementation and delivery. Joan Costello’s workshop focused on building the attendees’ confidence in using te reo at work. While this was a small step, you could see attendees noticeably using te reo during the rest of the conference.



Joan Costello from Te Papa talking to attendees about how to be confident using te reo at work

The third session saw Jayne Russell and Louise Davidson and their team from the Ministry of Social Development speak about how to apply “design thinking” to policies and services. They gave examples from their work with the Auckland Co-Design Lab, which included transforming Work and Income offices by thinking about their different users. The attendees in this session also had a hands-on opportunity to experiment on how they would apply design thinking to the delivery of social services.



Louise Davidson from the Ministry of Social Development sharing her story on the transformation of their services after collaborating with the Auckland Co-Design Lab

In the afternoon, Andrea Thompson’s workshop on leadership focused on busting leadership myths. Jane Moore and Paul Rayner from Parliamentary Services helped the attendees develop some important skills in navigating the workplace and how to manage relationships and conflicts. Georgie Ferrari from Wellington Community Trust talked about mindfulness, wellbeing, and self-care.

She cited a report that showed that mental illness will be the largest contributing factor of absence from work in the future. The workshop was important in helping attendees discover the way they work and, equally important, the type of workplaces they would want to work in and even create in the future.

After the workshops, and after two action-packed days, Georgina Beyer closed the conference speaking about fearlessness and making your own future. You could really feel her presence in the room. I think this was because she spoke truth to power and was unapologetic about being herself. I learnt that fearlessness is more than just having courage but being comfortable in our own skins. The future might change, but it is not all about adapting to the future. Sometimes for the future to actually change, and to survive all its uncertainty, you actually need to stay true to yourself.

Mental illness will be the largest contributing factor of absence from work in the future.

As both an organiser and as an attendee, the exposure to so many high calibre speakers and ideas often left me with more questions than answers about the future of the public service. However, I cannot deny that I am both excited and optimistic about the challenges and opportunities this ambiguity brings. Last but not least, it is also at events like these where we are able to form the bonds and connections that help us to “see the future” and “be the future” now.



Some members of the conference committee and the rest of the IPANZ New Professionals committee celebrating at the end of two action-packed days