

# Resilience

## Chapter 3

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The NSW public sector's capacity to succeed during 2020 was partly a product of workforce resilience. Our performance is testament to our people, who were able to draw on their diverse backgrounds and capabilities to rise to the challenges of the year. Modern, future-focused workforce management practices will bolster the sector's resilience and productivity and ensure that we anticipate and meet customer needs.

## Strategic workforce planning

Strategic workforce planning is about understanding and proactively preparing for changes that may affect the workforce. It differs from operational and tactical workforce planning because it is longer-term planning and often covers a period of three to five years. It aims to provide actionable strategies that will mitigate current and future workforce risks.

In 2020, strategic workforce planning provided a foundation to effectively respond to the unpredictable challenges presented by the bushfires and COVID-19. It continues to serve as a tool to navigate the rapid pace of change in the workplace and help leaders make informed longer-term decisions for the workforce.

The PSC's Strategic Workforce Planning Framework provides a practical, principles-based approach to this planning. This is vital for organisations that want to effectively respond to trends, events and shifts that can occur in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world.

The PSC launched the Strategic Workforce Planning Inspire Collaborative as a whole-of-sector initiative that aims to connect human resource and workforce planning practitioners. It will act as a learning community to support the recovery phase of COVID-19 by building peer-to-peer learning, exploring new ways of working, maximising the benefits of flexible working and optimising our workforces for ‘the new normal’.

In the longer term, strategic workforce planning can help agencies enhance diversity and inclusion in their workforces by implementing change and targeted workforce strategies. In this way, the sector will strengthen its capability to not only recover from COVID-19 but also maintain its resilience in the face of all unexpected challenges.

## Keeping everyone safe with data-driven workforce planning at Transport

In a year of rapid and widespread change to working arrangements, data-led workforce planning has never been more important. Like many other areas of workforce practice, the bushfires and pandemic have accelerated the use – and demonstrated the value of – sophisticated workforce planning.

With Transport offices and employees spread across the state, the extent of fires caused unprecedented safety concerns for its workforce. In early 2020, the Transport Workforce Analytics team obtained data from the Rural Fire Service on the local government areas impacted by fires during the 2019–20 season. This was a trigger for the Workforce Analytics team starting to use workforce data in new ways, then developing a cluster-wide geographical overview of employee home and work locations. This foundation supported numerous initiatives involving employee welfare and business operations in the weeks that followed.

In March, a new threat emerged – one that would impact the entire workforce and customer base: COVID-19. The Workforce Analytics team was prepared to respond with insight packs about Transport employees and their work and home locations across the state. Tapping into the real-time outbreak information provided via NSW Health, the team developed heatmap dashboards to readily inform the business of at-risk staff members based on their location and work type, to inform and manage business continuity plans. The People and Culture Business Partnering teams also used this information to work with the business and ensure vulnerable employees were safely sent home in accordance with NSW Health orders.

Additional analysis highlighted other workforce management matters such as employees cancelling their planned recreational leave during the pandemic. These insights were provided to the COVID-19 taskforce and used to create support materials throughout the pandemic.

In a matter of days, Transport transitioned 10,000 staff members to working from home, and the need to know more about employees' wellbeing became more important than ever. The quick provision of employee data was welcomed across the business, although it did bring its own challenges.

*“As managers saw the analysis of staff in their division, their interest grew, and they sought more and more information in quicker time frames. It was important to us that even with the heightened concern while operating in a crisis, employee confidentiality was maintained and didn't get overlooked in the pressure to get information out quickly. One of the achievements I am most proud of this year is the high level of confidentiality that we have maintained, especially because we were operating in a previously unseen crisis.”* – Transport employee

The tools developed and analysis generated enabled Transport to create contingency plans for keeping essential services operating, even if entire suburbs or regions were locked down. Where existing skill sets were all located in one region, analysis was undertaken to identify employees elsewhere with the necessary capabilities who could be reassigned if needed to avoid a skills shortage. A COVID-19 Workforce Planning pack was distributed to the business continuity teams, providing guidance on approaches to managing resourcing risks and ensuring uninterrupted services.

Frequent analysis and workforce planning enabled Transport to have a plan for quickly responding to staff shortages and being cognisant of staff members who might require additional support under increasing pressure.

Roles were also evaluated based on criticality and the extent of exposure to multiple people. Transport used this analysis to map roles with the potential to spread COVID-19 throughout the state should an employee be infected, and to identify employees who have the most contact with people.

*“The bushfires and COVID-19 demonstrated to the business the value of workforce planning and the need to frequently review contingency plans. While the foundations for data-led workforce planning have been in place for some time, the crises of 2020 have accelerated the business’s dependence on workforce planning as a fundamental pillar of successful operations. And the changes are here to stay.” – Transport employee*

## Performance management

Once the sector has the right people in the right roles at the right time, it’s important that they understand what they need to do to succeed. This is where performance management comes into play.

To deliver high-quality, customer-centric services to the community, employees need to feel connected to the outcomes sought by their agency and the whole public sector. Agencies that exemplify good practice formally link employee performance management with broader organisational strategy.

In 2020, employee perceptions of performance management were similar to the previous year (see Table 3.1). While managers were better at recognising high performance and encouraging employees to learn from mistakes, they need to focus on providing constructive feedback, managing underperformance and setting clear performance goals.

**Table 3.1 Employee perceptions of performance management, 2020 vs 2019**

Question	2020 (% positive)	Change from 2019 (pp)
I have a current performance and development plan	72.3	0.8
I have informal feedback conversations with my manager	79.2	2.9
I have scheduled feedback conversations with my manager	63.3	3.7
In the last 12 months, I have received feedback to help me improve my work	64.6	-1.3

Question	2020 (% positive)	Change from 2019 (pp)
My performance is assessed against clear criteria	55.3	-2.1
My manager provides recognition for the work I do	71.8	2.5
My manager encourages me to learn from my mistakes	72.3	
My manager appropriately deals with employees who perform poorly	48.9	0.8

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2019, 2020)

Note: 'pp' stands for percentage points.

## Flexible working

Managing for outcomes also helps with implementing flexible work because it shifts the focus from being present at work to delivering on goals. In March 2020, many employees in the sector changed their working arrangements to full-time remote working. This change was made to keep employees safe, ensure public safety by minimising the number of public servants on transport, and make sure important services continue to run throughout the pandemic.

Sector leaders were encouraged to implement full-time work-from-home arrangements for as many staff members as possible, including those based in regional areas, without knowing how long the arrangements would be in place. The sector was able to embrace this dramatic change. Functions that were previously thought to require an office and colocation of teams were instead successfully performed at home. As a result, the sector witnessed a major increase in employees reporting that they were working from home (62.0%, up from 17.4% in 2019).

Other forms of flexibility were also embraced more readily (see Figure 3.1), with 78.4% of sector employees reporting that they used at least one type of flexibility over the preceding 12 months (an increase of 15.9% since 2019). This flexibility allowed employees to balance the changes brought by the COVID-19 crisis, such as additional childcare responsibilities caused by the shift to home-based schooling for many students.

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2019, 2020)

While having most employees working from home on a full-time basis was new, the sector has been growing its capability for flexible working since 2016, when flexible working was prioritised. The push to allow all roles to be flexible on an 'if not, why not' basis provided the foundations for the sector's rapid change to remote working. Since January 2018, the PSC has been supporting government sector agencies to

implement a program to raise awareness and communicate access to flexible working. The program was also designed to build capability to work in new ways while maintaining or improving service delivery, and update policies, technology and processes to accommodate flexible working.

In 2020, 65.5% of employees who completed the People Matter survey reported satisfaction with their access to flexible working (an increase of 6.6% from 2019). This is a significant improvement from the previous three years, which had seen stable responses of about 58%. A closer assessment, however, shows a divergence between frontline and non-frontline employees.

Non-frontline employees are much more satisfied with their access to flexible working arrangements (77.8%) than frontline employees (48.7%). Non-frontline staff also report using at least one type of flexible working in the preceding year (87.2%) compared to frontline staff (66.4%). Clearly, the benefits of flexible working are not yet shared equally across the sector (see Figure 3.2).

*Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2020)*

Empowering public sector staff to work flexibly in ways that work for both them and their team is crucial to developing an inclusive and diverse workforce that reflects the community it serves.

## Inclusion and diversity

Building an inclusive and diverse workforce is a key pillar in the NSW public sector's plan to provide the people of the state with a world class public service that is resilient in the face of challenges posed by the future of work. Inclusion enables a genuine sense of participation and contribution so that everyone – regardless of background, identity or circumstances – feels valued, accepted and supported to thrive at work. Diversity, on the other hand, refers to the seen and unseen characteristics that make each individual different.

The more diverse and inclusive our workplaces, the more productive we are, and the better the services we deliver for our employees and for the people of NSW.<sup>9</sup> Evidence shows that workforce diversity, when supported by inclusive practices, can result in positive outcomes for individual employees, teams and organisations, as well as the customers they serve. These outcomes include improved performance, increased productivity, the attraction and retention of the best talent from the widest possible pool, satisfied customers, better decision making and innovation, and a high sense of employee wellbeing.<sup>10</sup>

The results of having a diverse, inclusive workforce were never more clearly demonstrated than in 2020, when the NSW public sector was able to respond to new challenges and chart a course towards recovery. Recognition of these ongoing efforts was reflected in improved overall inclusion and diversity scores as well as more favourable impressions of specific aspects of inclusion (see Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2 Employee perceptions of workplace inclusion, 2020 vs 2019**

Question	2020 (% positive)	Change from 2019 (pp)
My manager listens to what I have to say	78.6	2.2
My manager encourages and values employee input	75.8	3.0
My organisation respects individual differences (e.g cultures, working styles, backgrounds, ideas)	79.1	2.0
Personal background is not a barrier to success in my organisation	79.4	3.3
I am able to speak up and share a different view to my colleagues and manager	69.1	0.4

Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2019, 2020)

'Note: pp' stands for percentage points.

Despite the challenges of 2020, the NSW public sector continued to work towards meeting commitments to increase workforce diversity by 2025. This includes achieving a target of having 50% of senior leadership roles held by women, increasing the number of Aboriginal people in senior leadership roles and ensuring 5.6% of roles are held by people with disability.

Workforce Profile data reveals that in 2020 the level of representation of women in senior leadership slightly improved, from 40.3% to 41.1% (see Figure 3.3). However, if this trend were to continue, we would achieve a female senior leader rate of only 43.0% by 2025 (see Scenario 1 in Figure 3.3). And projections indicate that even if we immediately improved our recruitment rate to reach 46.0% (see Scenario 2), we would still fall short of our target of having 50% of senior leadership roles held by women (see Scenario 3).

**Scenario 1:** three year average recruitment rate

**Scenario 2:** continue current recruitment rate or achieve at least 5/10 immediately

**Scenario 3:** everyone hire at a rate of 6/10

Source: Workforce Profile (2014–20)

To achieve its target, the NSW public sector needs to recruit six women for every 10 senior leadership roles (see Scenario 3 in Figure 3.3). This rapid improvement will only be achieved if the NSW public sector accelerates its efforts to develop a pipeline of female leaders; and identifies and removes the obstacles in

the recruitment process that impede women's advancement to senior levels. Nonetheless, the improvements to date have been noticed by the sector, with 64.4% of People Matter survey respondents affirming their senior manager's commitment to supporting the career advancement of women, up from 61.1% in 2019.

The NSW public sector also continues to monitor and respond to the issue of gender pay equity. In 2020, each cluster conducted a pay equity audit, with assistance from the PSC. These audits revealed that the gender pay gap for government sector senior executives increased. This was corroborated by Workforce Profile data, which showed that for Public Service and aligned services senior executives the gender pay gap grew slightly, from 2.2% to 2.4%, in favour of men. An increase occurred in two of the three executive bands (see Figure 3.4).<sup>11</sup> While this negative movement can be attributed to some structural changes in the sector, it also reveals that the forces maintaining the gender pay gap persist and will require ongoing attention. In October 2020, the PSC held a Pay Equity Masterclass, which provided the sector with an opportunity to share pay equity findings and practice, as well as hear from employers outside the sector on actions to address the gender pay gap. The PSC is also working with the sector to better integrate employment and career development initiatives for women into the broader inclusion agenda.

*Source: Workforce Profile (2019,2020)*

The NSW public sector retains its status as one of the country's leading employers of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal employment levels in 2020 remained at 3.5% and if we continue our current trajectory, we are on track to achieve, and potentially exceed, our target of doubling the number of Aboriginal people in senior leadership roles from 57 in 2014 to 114 by 2025. However, unequal distribution continues across non-executive salary classes, with most of our Aboriginal talent at entry-level positions (see Figure 3.5).

*Source: Workforce Profile (2016, 2020)*

The current Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2019–2025 takes a career pathway approach to improving the employment of Aboriginal people across the sector and includes practical actions for developing a pipeline of senior Aboriginal leaders. The PSC is also continuing to grow the sector's workforce cultural capability to support the creation of inclusive and culturally safe workplaces for Aboriginal people.

People with disability also remain under-represented in the workforce, at only 2.4% representation in 2020 (a slight reduction from 2.5% in 2019). Based on the latest projections, we are still likely to fall short of our goal of 5.6% employment of people with disability by 2025. However, it is worth noting that when given the opportunity to report their disability status anonymously, such as through the People Matter survey, the sector produces a higher rate of disability representation (4.3% in 2020).

Much remains to be done to attract, reward and retain people with disability, and to make them feel they can safely identify as a person with disability. The latest People Matter survey data reveals that people with disability report lower levels of engagement compared to the sector (63.8% versus 67.5%).

Worryingly, 24.2% of people with disability reported being bullied at work in the previous 12 months, almost double the rate of bullying experienced by NSW public sector employees overall (13.9%). The situation was even worse for people with disability working in regional areas, with 28.0% reporting being bullied at work.



Although this represents a minor improvement from 2019, the higher rates of bullying for those with disability continue to be an area of concern. The harmful consequences of bullying at both the individual and organisational level are well established and undermine our efforts to create a positive workplace culture.<sup>12</sup>

Similar challenges confront the sector in terms of LGBTIQ+ employees, who reported higher levels of mental ill health than other staff members in 2020 (22.6% compared to 8.7% for the sector). They were also more likely to have reported experiencing bullying in the previous 12 months (17.1% compared to 13.9% for the sector). For LGBTIQ+ employees living in regional areas, this was even higher (21.9%).

To better serve its LGBTIQ+ community, in July 2020 the NSW public sector launched Pride in NSW, a sector-wide network open to all public sector staff members. Pride in NSW brings together the networks that already exist across clusters to connect LGBTIQ+ members and their allies more formally. It offers people a place to collaborate and share resources inter-departmentally, especially those staff members located in regional NSW. The network already boasts more than 1,000 members, 17.0% of whom are based in regional or remote NSW.

Despite making progress towards improving the inclusiveness of the NSW public sector, the evidence suggests that not all employees feel safe and included. The sector still has some way to go towards truly reflecting the community it serves.

## Bullying and other negative behaviours

To boost inclusion, the sector needs to reduce negative behaviours such as bullying, physical harm and sexual harassment. Bullying has been a problem for the sector for many years. In the 2020 People Matter survey, it was defined as:

repeated unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or group of workers. Examples of bullying include shouting, spreading rumours and deliberately excluding someone from work activities. Feedback on work performance delivered in a respectful way is not bullying.

The dramatic increase in remote working, which limited some interpersonal interactions, led to a fall in the rate of witnessed bullying between 2019 and 2020, from 32.9% to 21.7%. The rate of experienced bullying showed a smaller drop, from 17.9% in 2019 to 13.9% (see Figure 3.6).

*Source: People Matter Employee Survey (2016–20)*

Bullying appears to be more prevalent in frontline roles than non-frontline roles (16.6% compared to 11.9%). Rates are also higher in regional NSW than in Sydney (16.0% compared to 11.6%), partly due to the higher ratio of frontline roles to non-frontline roles in the regions. Survey respondents who did not work remotely

during the pandemic reported bullying at a rate of 17.1% – not far off 2019’s overall rate of 17.9%, showing that remote working may reduce the chances for bullying to occur. This could be due to several reasons, including fewer interpersonal interactions and reduced stress while working remotely.

As in previous years, senior managers, managers and colleagues at the same level were the most common perpetrators of bullying, according to survey respondents (see Table 3.3), suggesting that workplace culture has a large part to play.

**Table 3.3 Sources of self-reported bullying incidents**

Group	Incidents (%)
A senior manager	27.7
Your immediate manager/supervisor	30.9
Another manager	16.3
A fellow worker at your level	34.2
A subordinate	12.0
A customer	8.1
A member of the public other than a customer	3.2
Other	4.3
Prefer not to say	11.3

Source: *People Matter Employee Survey (2020)*

An expanded set of survey questions on bullying also shed light on under-reporting, with only 20.4% of those reporting being bullied saying they submitted a formal complaint about the most serious incident. Still more worrying, only 20.3% of those who did submit a complaint said it was resolved to their satisfaction.

For the first time, the 2020 People Matter survey included separate questions about sexual harassment and physical harm. Although the rates of these negative behaviours are much lower than for bullying – 0.9% for physical harm, 4.4% for threat of harm and 3.8% for sexual harassment – they are still far too high. Under-reporting is also common. Across the three areas, survey respondents worried about not being believed or taken seriously, and facing reprisals.

The causes of bullying and other negative behaviours are complex, with individual, occupational and organisational factors influencing the incidence of such behaviour.<sup>13</sup> Concerted action at the organisational level is needed to ensure that workplace cultures do not enable these negative behaviours, and that when

they do occur, people feel comfortable about reporting them and have confidence in the avenues for redress. At the team and individual levels, bystanders need to call out negative behaviours and be aware of triggers. The PSC will be working with the sector over the next few years to ensure this happens.

## Digital capability

The adoption of digital measures to deliver public services for the people of NSW has continued to gain momentum over recent years. The sector has readily applied new digital tools and processes that are more convenient and reduce costs, such as digital driver's licences and identity cards. In 2020, 71.4% of People Matter survey respondents agreed that they had the tools and technology to do their job well. In particular, the ongoing integration of digital tools across the sector has allowed increasing numbers of people with disability and regional employees to access opportunities for career advancement, and learning and development.

The sector's bushfire and pandemic responses illustrated the importance of using new tools and technology to support data analysis and communications. For example, during the bushfires, the NSW Rural Fire Service developed a mobile phone app to give citizens timely information about the location and status of bushfires. This allows people in or near bushfire-affected areas to plan for their potential impacts and gives more information about the risks to those travelling into or through these areas.

Since April, the NSW Government has provided daily updates on COVID-19 cases in NSW on its website. This includes up-to-date information about new and active cases in NSW, hotspots, testing locations, total number of tests performed, total confirmed cases and lives lost. The website also includes a map of active cases by postcode location. This information helps customers assess the risks of COVID-19 transmission and plan their travel accordingly.

Additionally, the Digital Restart Fund has been established, allowing us to quickly disburse funds to promising digital initiatives in response to our customers' changing needs. The pilot Digital Capability Uplift program has already drawn on these funds to help several teams use digital tools, such as human-centred design, for projects that help them better serve their customers.

## Learning and development

Equally important is the upskilling of relevant personnel to ensure they can leverage innovative technologies for the benefit of customers.

The pivot towards home-based work for many employees required a reimagining of learning and development for much of the sector. Face-to-face and less structured modes of knowledge transfer and experience building, such as mentoring and on-the-job learning, became more difficult. With a narrower range of opportunities for learning and development, online learning became the primary option for lifting the capability of those working from home.

The People Matter survey consistently shows that learning and development is a key driver of employee engagement. However, while the opportunities for online learning and development increased exponentially during 2020, as organisations developed new digital resources and teaching methods, not everyone had their needs met. Only 61.7% of People Matter survey respondents report receiving the training and development they need to do their job well – a 4.0% reduction from 2019. These lower scores may reflect a level of frustration among employees, as they are unable to access the full breadth of learning and development opportunities available.

However, online learning did provide some unique opportunities for innovation. For example, the Community of Policy Professionals took up the challenge of virtual learning and development by creating a new program of policy-themed webinars. Originally envisaged as face-to-face seminars, by the end of 2020, 11 webinars had been delivered on practical topics such as policy design during a crisis, learning from failure, and developing evidence-based policy. These webinars were delivered live but were also available online afterwards so that members could view them at their convenience.

The Community responded very favourably to this new program of webinars, appreciating their consistency and high quality. Regional staff, those who worked part time and those using other forms of flexible work particularly relished the opportunity to access learning and development opportunities that had otherwise been out of reach.<sup>14</sup>

## Notes

<sup>9</sup> Deloitte (2011); Mor Barak et al. (2016); NSW Public Service Commission (2018)

<sup>10</sup> NSW Public Service Commission (2018)

<sup>11</sup> This report uses the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development method for calculating the gender pay gap. This measures the difference between the full-time median remuneration of men and women, relative to the median remuneration of men.

<sup>12</sup> Bartlett and Bartlett (2011); Giorgi et al. (2016)

<sup>13</sup> Bartlett and Bartlett (2011); Feijó, Gräf, Pearce and Fassa (2019)

<sup>14</sup> Mamouny and Antpohler (2020)