

How do you drive motivation, innovation and success in a hybrid workplace?

Three leaders shared their insights at Think., *Qantas* magazine's thought leadership series that combines smart conversation with great food and wine. The panel discussion, held at Andrew McConnell's Cutler & Co in Melbourne's Fitzroy, was moderated by Editor-in-Chief Kirsten Galliot.

Deborah Yates

The global chief people officer for Lendlease, Deborah Yates looks after about 6700 employees around the world. She has a wealth of experience in people and culture roles, including for KPMG Australia, Reckitt and News Corp. She's at the frontline of the shifting working environment as leaders navigate how to attract, develop and inspire talent.



Larry Marshall

As the longest-serving CEO of our national science agency, Dr Larry Marshall overhauled CSIRO with a laser-like focus on innovation and commercialisation, befitting the 25 years he spent working in Silicon Valley. His new book is *Invention to Innovation*, he's chair of AmCham, the American Chamber of Commerce in Australia, and a board member of Fortescue.



Jan Owen

She describes herself as both a high school dropout and a lifelong learner. Jan Owen AM is a serial entrepreneur and impressive future thinker. She's the former CEO of the Foundation for Young Australians, current co-chair of Learning Creates Australia – which agitates for equitable education – and principal of AdaptabilityQ, a boutique strategic advisory service.



Think.

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KIRSTEN GALLIOTT: Deb, we went fully remote then we tried to drag people back to the office. What's the state of play now? Is hybrid here for good?

DEBORAH YATES: Hybrid is definitely here to stay but there's quite a spectrum of what that looks like. We have operations in the United States, Asia, the United Kingdom and in Australia. Asia is recovering the fastest in terms of days in the office and the US is recovering the slowest. The UK and Australia are somewhere in the middle, averaging between two and four days a week. It's important to talk about "return to office", not "return to work", because we all worked really hard during the pandemic and are still working really hard. Figuring it all out is a long-term plan.

Do you imagine that two to four days will become the norm?

DY: There'll be a range. We have to think about the work that a person is doing and how they best do that work. We need to have an adult-to-adult relationship with them, where we focus on output rather than a rule that they need to be at their workplace. At Lendlease a majority of our people don't go to the office, they're onsite – work is much broader than the office.

Jan, you work a lot with the younger generation. What do you think they want from workplaces now?

JAN OWEN: We're back to the new basics. People want some fundamental things: not to be yelled at or bullied or gaslit. They want decent and meaningful work, to work in teams and build a community. Yet they have one foot out the door. All the recent research says that 60 to 70 per cent of people say, "I like

my workplace but I'm looking elsewhere." Gen Y has changed work life forever. I've really noticed a difference among men – young fathers stepping into being there for school pickups and dropoffs. That's a real generational shift.

Larry, you talk to CEOs all the time. What are they worried about in terms of engaging with their workforce?

LARRY MARSHALL: People are worried about "how do we go back to normal?" But we're in the new normal and we're not going back. There's an assumption that we've lost productivity but when I took over CSIRO in 2015, there was this process called "effort logging". Imagine a bunch of scientists, engineers and software developers trying to remember how many minutes they spent thinking about this or that invention and filling out a timecard like someone working in a professional services firm.

It took a year to eliminate effort logging and instead measure the outputs, not the inputs. We had to run both systems in parallel to prove that measuring outputs was at least as accurate as measuring hours worked. Where people do the work really doesn't matter, as long as you're getting the outputs. How do you convince yourself of that? How do you measure that? And what are you losing by not having them be physically together?

Have leaders changed enough to adapt to this new way of working?

JO: Leaders are now required to be much more self-aware than they've ever been. Many got into a set-and-forget way of working and being – how they've done it for decades. That doesn't work any more, for lots of reasons. Social norms are changing fast and there's an expectation that there's a conscious decision from leaders to invest in their people. Leaders are also being asked to be learners. Young people are the best teachers – I call them the "early warning system" as they will tell you what's coming first. If you know what's coming then you do things differently for your customers, your clients and your partners.

Jan, you've always been a big fan of reverse-mentoring, learning from the young people in your teams.

JO: Anybody who's over 40 should have a mentor who's under 30. If you don't have that and you think you know what's going on, you're dreaming. People say, "I've got kids, it's fine", but your kids are not everybody's kids so that's not enough. The idea is to actively learn from someone younger. They have technical and digital skills, plus huge self-awareness. They know a lot about mental health and wellbeing and are the most educated generation ever in this country – and the most connected globally. Why wouldn't you want to invest in them and why wouldn't you want one of them to mentor you?

Larry, you've run companies through recessions, September 11 and COVID. What have you learnt about leadership?

LM: I was running a company in the US in 2001 and for at least six or eight months after 9/11, it was much worse than with COVID. You had to be far more self-aware. You had to almost be like a parent and get involved in every aspect of people's



Value human connection

"We shouldn't forget that coming together is a human experience. Work isn't meant to be just transactional – we are meant to get to know each other, to feel something for each other and to be in it together."

– DEBORAH YATES



Be open-minded

“To navigate the future successfully, leaders have to be far more flexible and to listen. The insight you need is in the heads of your customers and in the heads of your people. Listen and be flexible enough to overcome your own personal biases and experiences, to make the changes that you need to make *all* of you successful.”

— LARRY MARSHALL

lives. They did not want to come into work and, remember, it was a long time ago – digital technology wasn’t what it is today. We had to figure out clever ways to enable people to continue to be productive when they were working from home.

That first year of COVID felt very similar to me. It becomes about your EQ – I’d always been a technical entrepreneur and led with IQ until 9/11 taught me to lead much more with my heart than my head.

Deb, you’ve done a lot of work on distributed leadership.

What are some of the opportunities there?

DY: Distributed leadership is the future – leadership from an early age. Post-pandemic, we’re asking more junior managers to have the skills to lead in situations where you don’t see what people are doing every day. We don’t have teams with us, we don’t know whether they’re in the office or not. Instead, we set strategies and key milestones and decide what success looks like – then we let it happen. Those are the skills all leaders need now.

We tend to confuse activity and productivity – and there’s a really big difference. We are teaching first-time managers those skills and reminding them to be human – get to know the person, be clear about what success would look like and then trust them, adult-to-adult.

How do we foster collaboration in a hybrid workplace?

LM: The secret to innovation is diversity. A successful startup is one that sees a different future than all of their competitors. They’re able to target that innovation and create the product that enables their version of the future to happen. It’s known as market vision – you can’t see the future differently by going to the people who brought you the past.

To answer your question about hybrid workplace flexibility, if you’re going to create a different future, it’s never been done before and you can’t KPI that. Yes, there are methods to manage it and yes, you *can* measure it. But you have to be flexible enough to change because the way you make your vision of the future happen is by recognising what the market is telling you. You have to listen to it and pivot and change course until you are successful. You may fail many times on the way to doing that. Insisting that your employees are sitting in a chair in an office eight hours a day, five days a week is not the way to flexibility.

Jan, how do we look after young people who are starting in entry-level jobs?

JO: Historically, we have a low level of apprenticeships and traineeships in this country and those entry-level opportunities and pathways are disappearing fast, partly because of the kinds of jobs and partly because government incentives have changed. There are now “higher apprenticeship programs” in Australia, where you can go straight to a company like Lendlease on a higher apprenticeship, rather than via university.

Australia is obsessed, for some reason, about university but something like 20 per cent of young people drop out in the first year so why would you waste the money? We need to do more about traineeship pathways.

Deb, how do we replicate the incidental bonding, learning and knowledge-sharing we used to get when we were together in the office?

DY: The way that we're thinking about hybrid at Lendlease is that the magic is in the middle. The answer is not "never" or "always" – it's not that I'm never in the office or I'm always in the office. The real magic happens when we're together often enough – whether physically or virtually – that we make the effort, so we don't just bump into the people in our team, we bump into people who we don't normally work with. Those incidental meetings are really important to innovation – that's when diversity of thinking happens.

Is it up to employees to create those moments or should leaders be doing that?

DY: We should be thinking about how we create those moments but we should also remember that we're all adults. Resist the need to make rules because that really deals with the minority of people who are doing the wrong thing. If you're hiring the right people, the vast majority of them are doing whatever they can to deliver for you and your clients and customers. I say this to my team every day: "We develop leaders, not processes and policies." Develop someone who can make a good decision and who can create the place where people *want* to come into work.

Jan, with hybrid working, how do we ensure our young people are able to develop connections and relationships? Often it's leaders who find it easy to work from home and abdicate responsibility.

JO: People who are more embedded in the workforce are taking the option to stay home and work – and a lot of those people are working mothers. It is easier to work from home when you know what you're doing. But if young people don't have colleagues to show them the way and mentor them, it's going to be extremely difficult for them to progress and become the leaders that Deb is saying we need. So there is going to have to be investment.

We have evidence that there are times when it's much more creative, collaborative and effective to be in the same space together. You'll notice I'm not using the word "productive" at all. It's an incredible opportunity to think about our workplace spaces and we're already seeing innovation in office buildings all around the world.

Deb, is hybrid a realistic expectation – meetings when half the people are in the room and half are remote never quite work, do they?

DY: It's the toughest when you have some people in the room and some remote. Meeting etiquette is really important because even when you're all in a room together, one or two people tend to control the meeting, despite there being a lot more ideas around the table. Bringing in people who aren't in the room can benefit those who are there. It's a skill set we should already have.



What do you think the workforce will look like in 10 years?

LM: I saw my first intelligent agent at Stanford 10 years ago – an AI that's designed to replace HR professionals. There have now been AIs deployed for years across the US – and probably elsewhere – that interview potential candidates by their resumes. They have lie detectors and personality-type engines built in and they filter for who gets interviewed by a human and who doesn't.

That technology has moved exponentially in the past 10 years and I believe we'll soon have "the company of one" – an entrepreneur with every other function done by an AI. And we'll have a market where every customer feels like everything is personalised only for them – yet the market for that company will be millions because of the ability of AI to target you and make you feel special. I don't like that vision of the future very much but I think it's inevitable we'll get there.

JO: I'm actually very optimistic about the future. There's so much interest in purposeful and meaningful work – young people are going to follow their interests and go to places where people are doing things that are good for the planet and good for others. They have a foot out the door – not because they don't like the place where they're working but because they're looking for people to connect to and work with who have the same dreams and visions. In Australia, we're lucky that you can dream big about the future that you want.

DY: Ten years isn't very far away. If we're serious about climate, we need the infrastructure and we have nowhere near



enough engineers to help us build solutions. How do we get more apprenticeships and not be so focused on university to address this massive deficit of engineers? The other thing we're thinking about at Lendlease is human-in-the-loop. From a knowledge-worker perspective, we need to develop critical thinking – not simply believing what the AI gives you.

If there was one thing you want people to take away from tonight, what would it be?

JO: Invest in yourself. Know yourself a lot better and you will be better for your people – and your companies and organisations will be a lot more successful. Thinking that everybody else has to be fixed and do better is a projection. Be the best version of yourself, using all the tools available to move forward. Don't just ride the wave, drive the future.

LM: Talk 20 per cent; listen 80 per cent.

DY: If you feel like you're out of control, someone else is just in control – and that's a good thing. That's leadership. 🦋

Identify future-thinkers

“Where are your outliers? Go to the corners of your organisation – not to find the people who are breaking the rules, although they might be – and bring those people together. Ask them, ‘What can we do? What could 2030 look like? Let’s start designing it now!’”

– JAN OWEN

You're invited...

Our next Think. event will be at Brasserie 1930 at Capella Sydney on 25 March. For more information about tickets, visit thinkbyqantasmagazine.eventbrite.com.au
Enquiries: rsvp@mediumrarecontent.com