

is being an  
attractive employer  
enough?



The public sector as an employer is yet again regarded as one of the top ten sectors in terms of attractiveness by Randstad's Annual Employer Branding Survey.

It is seen as offering a majority of the key employment aspects employees look for, yet the sector reports that it is continually challenged to attract, recruit and retain the best and brightest candidates in the market.

The key facet that is often missed is the need to align the employee value proposition (what the employer offers) with the employer value proposition (what the employee offers in return).

Public sector organisations have significant advantages in relation to flexibility, career opportunities, work/life balance, benefits, diversity and inclusion. Many organisations refer to similar elements, however only in the public sector are these aspects part of the whole sector's DNA.

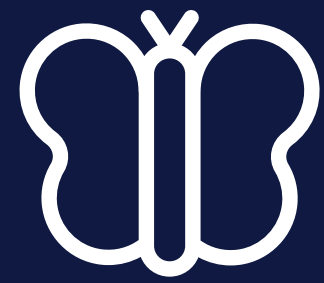
This uniqueness is often the leading-edge of recruitment and retention initiatives, however they sometimes fall short of being able to effectively capture the interest of great candidates and convert the advantages into high-performance outcomes.



what australians will want when choosing an employer.



**1st**  
work-life  
balance



**2nd**  
company  
culture



**3rd**  
salary and  
benefits



**4th**  
career  
progression



**5th**  
purposeful  
work



# why can't the advantages be realised?

In a post-covid world according to Randstad's research, the top 5 considerations for employees when considering a new employer are currently work/life balance, salary, culture, career and purpose.

Many in the public sector argue they cannot compete with the private sector on salary and try to make up the difference with some of the other benefits. Recruitment and retention efforts then lead with these benefits (balance, flexibility and job security), seeking to differentiate themselves by appealing to those who want to avoid the perceived pitfalls of private sector employment.

In doing this, the sector is seen to be very attractive to a wide range of people (which is good for diversity) but this approach doesn't effectively discern between those for whom these factors are of primary importance and those for whom these factors are an added benefit to a purposeful and fulfilling career.

This doesn't mean the sector won't attract good people looking to make a meaningful contribution, however to be a "first choice" employer the sector should ensure it is clear on how these factors can be leveraged to attract and engage great people.

The missing piece is accountability. When an employer offers benefits, it does so with the intent of gaining a return on these benefits, and the public sector readily recognises that improvements can be made to holding employees accountable for outcomes.

A better connection needs to be drawn between the offering of these benefits and the high-performing outcomes that will result.

# what needs to change to turn these offerings into high-performing outcomes.

Many organisations say they offer similar benefits and value propositions as the public sector, but few have these benefits so entrenched in their DNA that they can be truly realised and experienced by employees. This is the core difference.

For example, in the public sector flexibility and balance are within reach of every employee and not based on external client needs or business performance. Caveats which are often imposed in the private sector.

Let's look at each of the three core perceived benefits offered in the public sector and discuss what might need to change.





High performing organisations recognise the importance of balance in an employee's work/life because it gives them perspective and a different viewpoint.



### work/life balance

The value of promoting work/life balance is that an organisation allows its employees to take time out from work and do other things. The benefit is that employees have an opportunity to refresh, recharge, and reconsider some of the challenges in the workplace, and come back with a new perspective to approach and overcome challenges. At least that is the theory.

In practice, public sector organisations often do not attach any conditions to work/life balance and fail to ask for anything in return. This means employees are often not held accountable for delivering the core components of their role, but are still being offered the benefit.

Public sector organisations would benefit from ensuring that employees are held accountable for delivering on their employment commitments if they make use of work/life balance provisions available in their workplace.

This would allow the organisation to gain a return from the benefit, not only in terms of productivity and value, but also through access to a high-performing talent pool for whom work may not be the primary consideration in their life.

This accountability could be jointly agreed with the employee as part of their development plans to ensure not only are they meeting current role requirements, but have the opportunity (should they choose) to map out a career path.

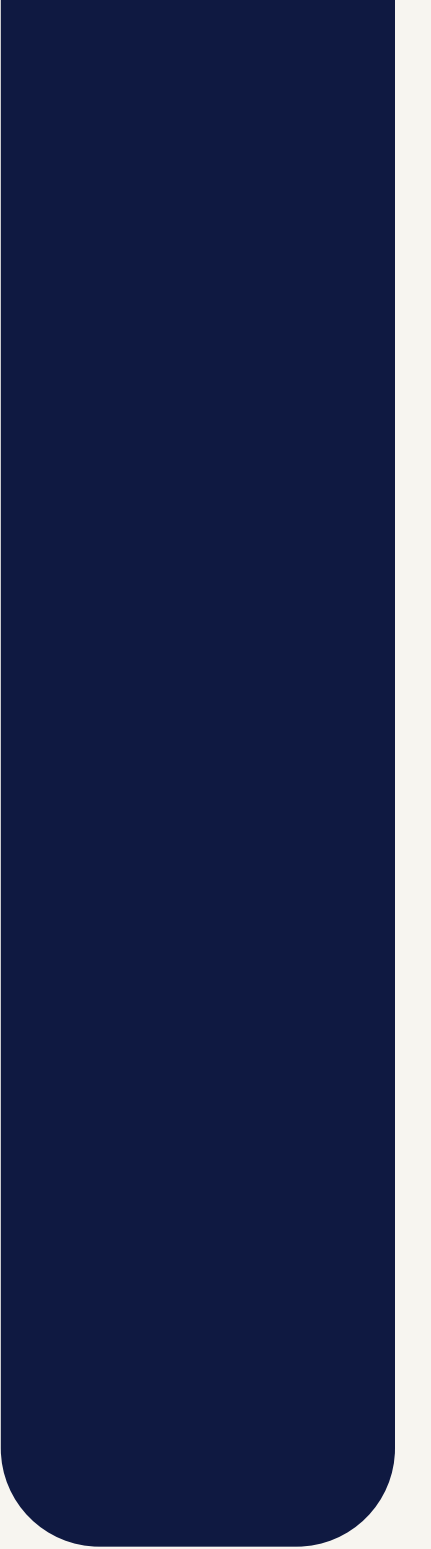



# flexibility.

Flexibility is slightly different to work/life balance as it refers more to where and when work is done. As with work/life balance, a well-implemented flexibility framework will allow organisations to appeal to a wider range of good candidates with offers of meaningful employment that allow employees to meet their out-of-work commitments. It means organisations are not wed to employing everyone on a full-time contract.

Flexibility is also a core plank of diversity and inclusion initiatives. Organisations where every employee is expected to always put work first can foster homogenous thinking and deter great candidates for whom a 9-5 office/workplace role is simply not possible.

Public sector organisations need to focus on ensuring flexible arrangements will work for the individual, the manager, the organisation and the team. This means flexibility in the context of deliverables and looking at outcomes and objectives rather than needing to observe employees actually working.





Many public sector organisations have approaches to work where managers and team leaders need to see their people working to believe they are working. This approach does not drive a high-performing organisation...merely one that will probably get the job done.

In our work with public sector organisations where we have helped them define their employee value propositions, we hear constantly that what engages and drives employees is the impact they can have in their roles, and how being able to hold an impactful role with a flexible arrangement is very attractive. Research shows that engaged employees are productive and using flexibility not just to appeal to a broad talent pool, but also to actively engage them, is an important driver of high-performing organisations.

Offering flexibility without any context (expectations, commitments, accountabilities) will simply result in people doing work from different places and in different ways. This will lead to scepticism about how productive people really are, and eventually those taking on flexible roles will not be seen to be serious about their roles or their careers.

This means individuals who have the potential to make tremendous contributions to public sector organisations are marginalised and limited in their career opportunities.

By defining clear outcomes and expectations, and looking at what employees bring to the table rather than how they bring it, public sector organisations will provide the platform to transform the positive elements of entrenched workplace flexibility into high-performance outcomes.



# job security.

Almost all of the people we speak to when working with public sector organisations point to job security as a key reason people join and stay within the sector.

The issue is that job security can often breed complacency, which then leads to lower performance.

Security can be leveraged to drive high performance when it is used as a support for innovation and calculated risk-taking.

This is the challenge faced by many public sector organisations that have an inherently risk-averse approach to their work. This is driven partly by probity and concerns of dealing with “other people’s money”, however some of this risk aversion is driven by a political motivation not to fail.

Job security can only be a high-performing talent attractor when it is used to foster permission to innovate and try new things regardless of the outcome. If it is not used in this way, top candidates will see this as an invitation for other applicants to apply for a role that will allow them to cruise – which is hardly motivational for someone with a firm purpose and career path in mind.

What needs to change is the effective management of risk and performance in the context of job security. In other words, if you perform in your role, you have security, and you have the opportunity (and even permission) to try a few new things. This will lead to innovation and improvements – core tenets of high-performing organisations. If you don’t perform in your role, then potentially you will be disciplined which will challenge your job security, or see you moved to another division where future employment may not be guaranteed.



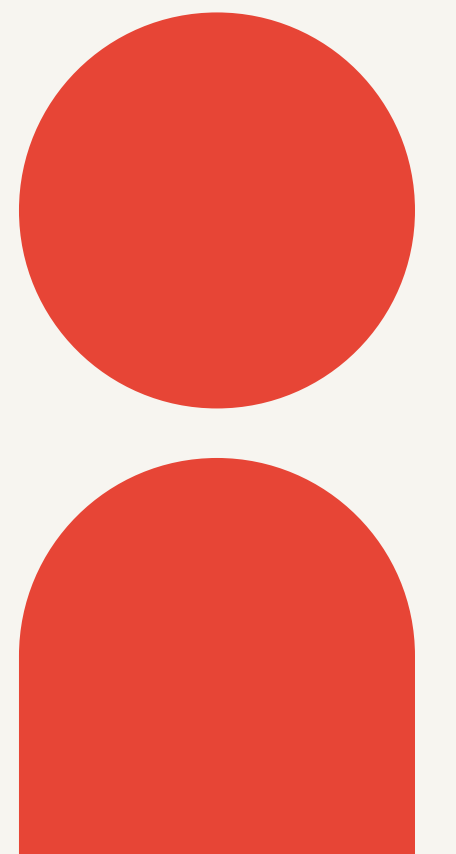
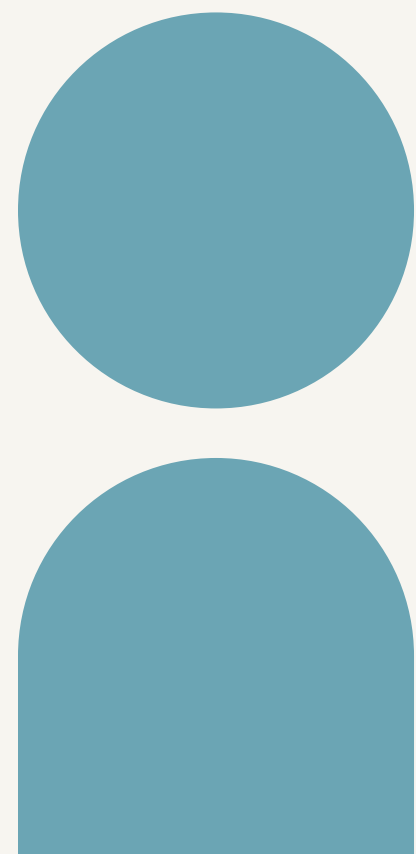
the need to overlay purpose, opportunity and impact

The three key aspects discussed above will not on their own be enough for the public sector (federal or state level) to attract, recruit and retain the type of people who will work to transform the sector into a high-performing one.

There are already a number of high-performing public sector organisations that have implemented the above recommendations to great effect in combination with insight into the opportunities they offer, the driving purpose of their department and the impact employees can have in their work. They harness the size of the public sector, highlighting mobility as a pathway to many careers in one place.

When combined, the benefits, available opportunities and purpose of public sector employment cannot be matched in the private sector. Opportunities that leverage an employees' skills, interests and career goals in an organisation with purpose and impact, offered in a flexible, diverse and secure environment with a market competitive salary and benefits package is an almost unbeatable proposition.

This is the often-unrealised power of the public sector brand and why it is seen as such an attractive employer year after year.





**the one key takeaway  
– accountability**

As discussed, employees in a post-covid environment seek work/life balance, salary, culture, career and purpose. They expect employers to provide a safe workplace where they can be productive, one that supports them, accommodate the changing world around them and provides career opportunities.

These elements play to all the strengths of employment in the public sector and is an offering when effectively communicated that cannot be beaten.

The core component that needs to change is accountability. Employees at all levels need to be held accountable to make the decisions they were employed to make, and undertake the work they were employed to undertake.

They will outperform other organisations when they are engaged, able to work flexibly, feel they have some balance in their lives, and believe they have purpose.

Focusing on just the benefits is only half the equation, and one that doesn't equal high performance.



# meet malcolm peak.

Malcolm is a recognised leader in employee value proposition development and employer branding. He previously headed Randstad's HR Consulting practice in Australia and New Zealand and his company, Peak Corporate Solutions, now partners with Randstad in the delivery of employer branding solutions to clients.

He has worked with a number of public sector organisations, including the South Australian Public Sector Commissioner, the ABS and is currently undertaking a project with the federal department of education skills and employment to develop their EVP, while also partnering with the APSC to develop a whole of sector graduate EVP for the public sector.

In January, Peak Corporate Solutions was recognised as one of the top 10 employer branding consulting organisations in the Asia-Pacific by HR Tech Outlook magazine.



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