

Interview: Insights on creating a high – performance workforce

Lyn Iacumin talks to QSI about her recent appointment as Senior Branch Manager, Service Delivery at ActewAGL. In this role, Lyn is accountable for the delivery of construction, maintenance and emergency response services for ActewAGL's electricity network.



Through her 30 years' experience across the utilities industry, Lyn has gained exposure to all facets of business management. She has managed several large and diverse businesses ranging from retail services to the operation, maintenance and construction of infrastructure services.

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QSI: 1. What prompted you to take on the role at ActewAGL?

Lyn: I was attracted to this role (Senior Branch Manager, Service Delivery) because ActewAGL Distribution is focused on improving its leadership and processes – something that I am interested in given my background and strengths in change management. Also, I find working in the distribution sector most fulfilling because these businesses are at an interesting point where they are trying to transition from the traditional 'public utility' operating model to a more 'commercial' model.

I was also familiar with ActewAGL having worked with AGL/Jemena for 12 years and was comfortable knowing that the organisation's values aligned with my own.

QSI: 2. Effective leadership is a necessary asset found in all successful organisations. What do you think makes an effective leader in electricity distribution?

Lyn: Effective leaders are good at listening, developing an improvement plan to address issues or improvement opportunities; selling the vision and plan; building internal support and ownership of solutions; ensuring that improvement opportunities are delivered by the people.

QSI: 3. What are the challenges of being a female leader in a predominantly male industry?

Lyn: A key risk for female leaders working in the infrastructure industry is that the incumbent workforce feels that a female leader does not know the business or that they cannot relate to business issues. I experienced this issue during my early years when I moved to distribution (from retail); however, as I established a track record,

this was less of an issue.

I also managed to overcome negative perceptions by explaining to the workforce that I was not there to do their job – as a leader, I am responsible for creating an environment that enables business development and improvement.

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QSI: 4. What are some of the key strengths that women in leadership roles bring to the table?

Lyn: Women in leadership roles can create a positive environment by communicating extensively and building relationships that are open to new ideas, and committed to achieving a shared objective or outcome. Women are more likely to create a sense of teamwork.

QSI: 5. You entered a business that is in transition in terms of structure, capabilities and processes. How do you build an engaged workforce that understands and supports change?

Lyn: Firstly, leaders must understand the reasons behind resistance to change. They must also be able to explain the value of the change, and encourage the workforce to take ownership of the transition. It is important for leaders to invest the time in having periodic and direct meetings with their staff to understand concerns and build support.

QSI: 6. What are the key priorities for ActewAGL’s Service Delivery in the next five years?

Lyn: A key priority for Service Delivery is developing a consistent approach to work practices in order to ensure the safety of our workforce and customers. Another priority is to embed a continuous improvement culture that identifies and delivers enhancements to business practices.

Earlier this year, we established a Front Line Improvement Team that identified nine key areas to improve: communication, job scheduling, materials availability, technical procedures, work method statements, IT access, incident investigations, tolls and equipment and customer communications. The Front Line Improvement Team will also manage the implementation of the business improvement areas.

With regards to developing a high-performance business, we are also looking to build the capability of our leaders by using a Leadership Assessment Framework. The Leadership Assessment Framework will contain the key competencies and personal attributes the business wants and needs its leaders to have. Once we have identified these, we will source tailored training that includes theory and practical learning. As part of the training, I hope to have leaders go through workplace scenarios, which allow them to reflect on their management styles and results in personal growth and confidence.

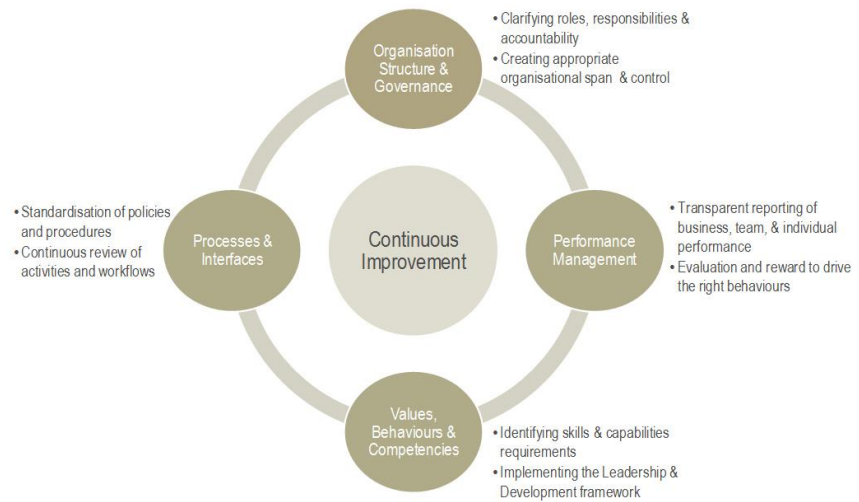


Figure 1: There are a range of key initiatives underway to build a high-performance business (click diagram to enlarge)

QSI: 7. Your previous company (Jemena) manages a network services business that competes as a contractor for capital and maintenance works, but your new role oversees an incumbent workforce. What aspects of your previous experience would you like to bring to ActewAGL?

Lyn: A key attribute that I would like to bring is greater transparency. This includes transparency of performance – including improving information around what we are doing and how we are performing. I also want to improve ActewAGL’s understanding of the true cost to deliver our services and projects.

Another feature that I would like to adopt is improving accountability of tasks in order to improve control. Marchment Hill’s organisation review helped clarify accountability for ActewAGL’s section managers – now we need to build the capability and autonomy of these roles so that our section managers drive business performance.

Marchment Hill Consulting would like to express our appreciation to Lyn for making herself available for this interview to share her insights and experience with us.

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