



LEADERS & THE FUTURE

Providing you experience,
knowledge and advice from industry
leaders throughout the Hunter.

The Leading Agenda is a collaboration between:



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INTRODUCTION

Over the last four years Barr Planning and the University of Newcastle have partnered together to provide Leading Agenda events throughout Newcastle. These networking events have become a platform where industry leaders, business managers, MBA & WiMBA students meet to discuss the role of Leadership in driving the future of the Hunter.

Due to the pandemic and the cancellation of in person events, the Leaders and the Future article was developed to continue to provide this guidance and knowledge.

This article has been produced with the contribution from previous Leading Agenda guest speakers, obtaining their current perspectives and future trend expectations as leaders in the Hunter.

The following questions were asked:

- As a leader what has been the biggest challenge your business has faced in the last few years?
- What are the future trends that you predict that will affect us globally, nationally and regionally?
- What advice or actions are you implementing to respond to these trends?
- What are the skills you think business students need to develop to meet these challenges and realise these opportunities?

NOTES FROM THE AUTHORS

STEPHEN BARR

Director of Barr Planning

Stephen has been involved in the development industry in the Hunter for more than 25 years and during this time he has been both an owner and director of consulting businesses. In his role he has had the opportunity to see the region grow through his involvement in major projects including work at Newcastle Airport, major tourist facilities, employment generating industrial development, residential developments and affordable housing.

Stephen has also had the opportunity sitting on a number of boards in the Newcastle area, providing the opportunity to consider the strategic direction of the Hunter through the eyes of these organisations.

"Our partnership with the University has provided a unique opportunity to hear from local leaders and the challenges and successes they have faced in delivering for the Hunter. It's a privilege to be able to deliver these events with Newcastle University which is a key pillar of the Hunter and the MBA students they produce. The opportunities in front of the Hunter currently will see this region being a significant focus for the next decade."



SONIA VILCHES-MONTERO

MBA & WiMBA Program Director Senior Lecturer in Marketing The University of Newcastle

Sonia works with industry partners to identify the drivers of consumers' responses to marketing strategy. She is particularly interested in Social Marketing, Omnichannel Integration, Retailing, Social Media, Branding & Advertising strategies. She is passionate about postgraduate education and collaborative program management.

Sonia teaches Marketing Management and Planning, Brand Development and Marketing and Consumer Behaviour to MBA and Master in Marketing students. She also supervises PhD, DBA and Honours students within Newcastle Business School.

"Our partnership with Barr Planning continues to grow both in scope and impact. Over the years, our Leading Agenda events have looked into the trends that influence the development of the Hunter Region to share insights, success stories and advice that support local industry with leading through change."



CONTRIBUTORS:

Thank you to all contributors for providing their experience and knowledge as industry leaders.

Listed below alphabetically

- Alexandra Joy
- Belinda Smith
- Bernadette Inglis
- Greg Budworth
- Morven Cameron
- Peter Cock
- Steve Meyn
- Tim Hanna
- Viv Allanson

We are looking forward to continuing the Leading Agenda events face to face, now that restrictions are easing and hearing further from our leaders of the region.



THE RESPONSES RECEIVED



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA



“Covid showed us all how meetings, advice, business deals can be done over the likes of Teams/Zoom etc. and yes this is good in a sense but equally it means that a client or customer can easily deal with someone on the other side of the globe for some of the services we deliver.

Hence the criticality of the client relationship and human factor that we all need to invest in...”

**STEVE MEYN,
MANAGING DIRECTOR PKF NEWCASTLE & SYDNEY**

STEVE MEYN

Managing Director PKF Newcastle & Sydney



As a leader what has been the biggest challenge your business has faced in the last few years?

The labour market for good quality people continues to be a challenge which means you have to think differently about attraction and retention strategies as well consistently work on culture and the like. This together with the continued influence of technology into what and how we deliver services means an investment in a different group of resources and taking our people and clients on a journey as to how the balance and integration of technology and the human factor need to meet and play their part in what we do. So we are looking at a change in resource mix, training techniques, client delivery models all of which yes can drive efficiency but equally making sure at the heart of what and how we do things is knowing the client and holding a solid relationship.

What are the future trends that you predict that will affect us globally, nationally and regionally?

The world is getting smaller when it comes to the business model. Today competitors aren't just on your doorstep. Covid showed us all how meetings, advice, business deals can be done over the likes of Teams/Zoom etc and yes this is good in a sense but equally it means that a client or customer can easily deal with someone on the other side of the globe for some of the services we deliver. Hence the criticality of the client relationship and human factor that we all need to invest in. Beyond this the importance of ESG for businesses will continue to maintain momentum. No longer is it profit at any cost, but rather taking a balanced sustainable view and this has impacts for certain industries, especially here in the Hunter. We need to be mindful of this with a reasonable proportion of the client base supporting some of those industries and so we have a responsibility to assist and play our own part in this. Finally, the advancement of technology and importance and power of data which we continue to invest in. Unfortunately so do the risks associated with this grow such as Cyber and we have seen many instances locally, nationally and internationally of these events impacting individuals and businesses of all scale. This is something that all need to continue to invest in.

What advice or actions are you implementing to respond to these trends?

The importance of truly knowing your customer/client and investing in the relationship beyond just the business. At the heart of any business is people and so for me getting the people piece right continues to be a focus. In this regard we continue to invest in soft skills, change the technical training to incorporate the technology aspects and looking at what we are doing around ESG and things like Diversity and Inclusion. In this regard we formed about 2 years ago a DEI Council made up of representatives across the business from different backgrounds, skills, etc to ensure that our people have a voice, bring new ideas to the table and lead from many levels. This together with a new resource mix of technology specialists has been and will be a big part of our future strategy. On the issue of Technology and Data, we have invested in businesses, technology and people including the likes of Cyber where we have invested into a formal JV with a provider in this space that is about our own risk management but equally the ability to assist organisations understand and implement risk management strategies. Finally we continue to see the transition of family wealth a big change in the business landscape which will continue over the coming ten years so we have equally invested in a business and are currently embedding some technology into the offering and processes around this.

What are the skills you think business students need to develop to meet these challenges and realise these opportunities?

Relationship, relationship, relationship – invest in your people skills around building these.

Technology – keep abreast of what is happening, how data can play a role, how new technology can drive business forward but equally managing the risks around this. You don't have to have all of the answers but surround yourself with people and skills who can help you/guide you.

ESG - Have an appreciation of what ESG and areas like Diversity and Inclusion are about and build these into whatever business you are involved with. There is growing demand on people and the responsibilities beyond just the financial outcome that we can't ignore. So knowing how to balance and manage this while getting the best out of people is important. I call this having the "nine ways to skin the cat" tool kit.



ALEXANDRIA JOY

CEO, UQ Power and The Valley of Joy



As a leader what has been the biggest challenge your business has faced in the last few years?

One of the exciting challenges was shifting my business model from a small business with employees to becoming more of a thought leadership practice model and moving a lot of my work online. This has proven to be very timely since the pandemic prevents me travelling to clients internationally and interstate.

What are the future trends that you predict that will affect us globally, nationally and regionally?

I believe organisations are possibly the world's most under utilised resource for solving many human, economic and environmental challenges. I also see that many have disengaged, burnout employees struggling to adapt to working from home and the new world post pandemic.

"...Soft skills are the way of the future – connection, collaboration, communication and care. Business will need to solve problems, contribute to the quadruple bottom lines and provide meaning for employees..."

What advice or actions are you implementing to respond to these trends?

I believe that most companies have failed to tap into and unleash the human power at their fingertips. And I'm on a mission to accelerate the evolution of a more conscious world through the vehicles of leadership and culture to help them make work work better for all.

I'm unique as a consultant and facilitator as I combine tradition with innovation, ancient wisdom with modern practice, I encourage new ways of being as well as equipping leaders with the necessary skills to shift their people, company culture and therefore the world. My work has proven that by nurturing engaging and uplifting people, companies can achieve sustainable, vibrant, high performance so that whether employees stay for 3 days, 3 months or 3 years they feel appreciated and valued, they deliver high performance and they grow and leave as better people. More engaged employees equals delighted customers and leveraged results.

What are the skills you think business students need to develop to meet these challenges and realise these opportunities?

Soft skills are the way of the future – connection, collaboration, communication and care. Business will need to solve problems, contribute to the quadruple bottom lines and provide meaning for employees.





"Creativity is a gift, try it, exercise it and keep practicing it, as it is a gift that cannot be bought. I used to say 'you can only be as creative as your boss is brave' and guess what...now I am the boss and I love to see creativity flowing within the organisation. It really adds a special flavor and is like a spring board to innovation..."

**VIV ALLANSON,
CEO OF MAROBA AGED CARE
SERVICE AND RETIREMENT VILLAGE**

VIV ALLANSON

CEO of Maroba Aged Care Service and Retirement village

As a leader what has been the biggest challenge your business has faced in the last few years?

The Global Pandemic is the biggest Challenge for sure yet Aged Care has been in the midst of the perfect storm for the last few years. The addition of the Pandemic to the mix of chronic underfunding, workforce challenges and the Royal Commission made what happened in Aged Care when Covid walked through the doors completely foreseeable. It was a disaster to say the least and yet Our National Leaders have learnt nothing and continue to feed older people to the lions.

"...The world has changed and will continue to evolve as we face the ongoing challenges of this Pandemic and prepare for more to come..."



What are the future trends that you predict that will affect us globally, nationally and regionally?

The world has changed and will continue to evolve as we face the ongoing challenges of this Pandemic and prepare for more to come.

Communications have been re-engineered with millions of people working from home...one has to wonder what will happen to the billions of dollars' worth of commercial real-estate now that we know people can be trusted to work remotely.

Global Warming is already impacting every layer of society and it will only get worse as we see first-hand the impacts in our region, Nationally and Globally. This is a real challenge for business leaders and corporations as our Prime Minister and his colleagues deny the science and the practical reality. It is time for strong Policy decisions to enable the business community to invest and commit to the needed changes.

Social issues continue to challenge our National Values and who we are as a Nation. Real Leadership is required from all sectors of the community to address and redirect the outcomes that we see every evening on our TV's. We all must not only declare our aspirations for "Social Justice" and doing "Social Good" we must roll up our sleeves and get active. Find something that you or your organisation can do. Remember don't look to be doing great things as Mother Theresa said "Do small things with Love". Now if we all did that we would see changes in Homelessness, Domestic Violence, Child abuse, Racism and our treatment of refugees. Now imagine if we all did small things to reduce our footprint on our environment, we would see a benefit. It is in your hands to change the world...One day and One person at a time!

What advice or actions are you implementing to respond to these trends?

For me personally it is vital that I walk the talk even when no one is watching. I take my responsibility for the environment and for people very seriously and will always lend myself to support others to make a difference. I am committed to ongoing learning especially as it relates to my profession and the Aged Care environment, it never pays to be yesterday's expert. I have sought out knowledge and best practice in sustainability so that Maroba can play its small part with commitment and common sense.

I continue to value strong trusting relationships with all in my sphere of influence. I have found the speed of Trust to be the missing ingredient in many business arrangements and transactions. Trust actually has helped us get through the Pandemic, as we relied on so many partnerships to get to the other side.

What are the skills you think business students need to develop to meet these challenges and realise these opportunities?

I highly recommend **Human Interaction** with all walks of life to experience firsthand how decisions impact the people. Working or volunteering with the marginalised and vulnerable can be a great leveler and provide insights into human behaviour that may never be discovered in a class room or text book. Always leave room for real thinking outside the box and be challenged by others who think differently than you.

Creativity is a gift, try it, exercise it and keep practicing it, as it is a gift that cannot be bought. I used to say 'you can only be as creative as your boss is brave' and guess what...now I am the boss and I love to see creativity flowing within the organisation. It really adds a special flavor and is like a spring board to innovation.



GREG BUDWORTH

Group Managing Director, Compass Housing Services



As a leader what has been the biggest challenge your business has faced in the last few years?

COVID-19 Pandemic. The pandemic has been a major disruptor and has required focus to innovate through technology and processes to deliver essential services (social housing management) while keeping staff as safe as possible, and complying with Health Orders that vary in NSW, QLD and New Zealand, where we operate. Usually, that has meant being ahead of government imposed health order restrictions in the earlier year of this near two-year pandemic, and lately in NSW cautiously behind the lifting of restrictions. The support for vaccination as the means of combating the pandemic, while managing the apprehension, anxiety and conflicting interests of various stakeholders.

Influencing public policy in favour of social and affordable housing. This is part of Compass mission. Government expenditure during the pandemic, and the resultant public debt, is now an obstacle for greater funding allocation towards social housing.

IT Security. The prevalence of hacking, fraud and identity theft has increased exponentially and has required ongoing security upgrades and restrictions on use of some platforms. Is now an area that requires constant vigilance as criminal actors change their intrusion strategies.

What are the future trends that you predict that will affect us globally, nationally and regionally?

Working From Home. Phase one of the pandemic created some movement in this area, coupled with available technology, but the Delta strain wave has accentuated this phenomena by the virus' own transmissible nature and the months of forced lockdowns. Compass has adjusted, and having staff working from home for most of the previous two years, has revealed its usefulness, although not without issue, and not without losing some of the virtues of face-to-face exchanges and organisational cultural development.

Climate Change. The growing sense of urgency to make public policy changes that ensure that we stay below the post-industrial era average temperature, plus 1.5 degrees Celsius, will increase disruption generally, and particularly our own region.

Insurance costs. Are generally increasing as a result of large losses due to natural disasters, but pandemics and international conflicts also contribute.

Population movements & immigration. Australia will likely see an upturn in immigration, and that usually comes without any real pre-planning on where immigrants will reside in this current 'housing supply crisis'. Regionally, the domestic diaspora from capital cities to the regions is already having an effect.

Technology. This is a well known fertile area for creating future trends. Likely that will accelerate disruption and opportunities: e.g. robotics, AI.

Globalisation. Another well-known phenomenon. Has taken a small hit during the pandemic, but will likely accelerate.

Scarcity. Food, water, power, and the like are forecast to become an increasing concern for developing countries.

What advice or actions are you implementing to respond to these trends?

Presently in the evaluation and collaboration phase of what might be a new-normal working environment.

Compass is a strong advocate for the UN Sustainable Development Goals and participates internationally to regionally in their promotion and alignment, and has its own climate change adaption policy in place as well. However, there is a lot more to be done in this area.

Currently exploring with other organizations, a collective virtual self-insurance model.

Advocacy will continue, and large scale development planning underway to address some of the need, perhaps without government funding support.

What are the skills you think business students need to develop to meet these challenges and realise these opportunities?

A good understanding of corporate-social responsibility trends. This concept is becoming more and more a feature of corporate behaviour. Gaining a good perspective on the balance between economic and community value mix will be more a feature of the future. It is not an area without controversy.

Aesop's Fable: The man, the boy and the donkey, is a good analogy for accommodating the abundance of new social norms, plus new management and governance improvements (or some fads), that demand accommodation within organisations. Simply, you can't spend your career trying to please every stakeholder and their wish-lists, as you set about achieving your strategic objectives.



BELINDA SMITH

CEO of Rapid Solutions



As a leader what has been the biggest challenge your business has faced in the last few years?

Integration of technology to support automation of business processes to increase our competitive edge and the customer experience. To do this whilst running the business as usual, with the common challenges of fierce competition, risk and compliance considerations and day to day operations, has been a steep learning curve.

"...Resilience, patience and compassion all come with practice and will help you be a better decision maker, avoid burnout and maintain your humanity particularly when there are tough calls to make or live with..."

What are the future trends that you predict that will affect us globally, nationally and regionally?

We'll see more process automation as customers want things more quickly, more cheaply and without human interaction. Demand for mass customisation of products and services will also continue to grow.

What advice or actions are you implementing to respond to these trends?

Relentlessly working to simplify our processes, structures and products, remain laser focussed on our core product and mission and continue to invest heavily in retraining and reskilling people as the business changes.

What are the skills you think business students need to develop to meet these challenges and realise these opportunities?

An adaptable mindset - whilst you may have a specialised field of interest or study, you will need a broader skill set to accompany it and a curious, can-do attitude to flex and pivot in the business environment. You also need to develop excellent self-care. Resilience, patience and compassion all come with practice and will help you be a better decision maker, avoid burnout and maintain your humanity particularly when there are tough calls to make or live with.



"If we've learned anything from the past two years it's how quickly things can change. When I consider this, I immediately think of the adage 'it's not what happens to you, but how you respond to it that makes the mark of you'. I believe that that how you meet challenges, how you self-reflect, listen, learn and move forward will be your greatest test. It's all about resilience..."

**BERNADETTE INGLIS,
CEO AT NEWCASTLE PERMANENT**



BERNADETTE INGLIS

CEO at Newcastle Permanent



As a leader what has been the biggest challenge your business has faced in the last few years?

There is no doubt that the current pandemic and other natural disasters in bush fires and floods have proven to be real-world tests which have challenged most businesses' operational and leadership resilience. Within our business we've supported customers experiencing hardship with support packages when they most needed them, we kept our branches open, and we rolled up our sleeves to literally help our local communities clean out mud from homes following flood devastation.

We are in an industry where regulators are introducing increased governance requirements and the major banks are using their size and scale advantage to compete aggressively for our customers' business. We're seeing it become increasingly difficult for smaller industry players, who don't have scale, to compete and remain viable.

We haven't allowed these challenges to deter us from our ambitious vision and strategy. In fact, we've made significant progress towards delivering both to drive benefit for our customers, and it could be argued that this progress has been partly driven by the challenges we've been presented – with challenge comes opportunity.

As a result, we enjoy a strong trust sentiment from generations of customers as they see our resilience proven over many years and our unwavering commitment to our 'here for you, here for good' ethos.

"...I have found the best way to navigate challenges or unexpected outcomes is to focus on what you can influence, to have a learning mindset..."

What are the future trends that you predict that will affect us globally, nationally and regionally?

I see the trend of digital transformation in our lives continuing, for example at Newcastle Permanent we've seen the pandemic fast-track customer preference towards digital and online banking for simple transactions, and this has been a common scenario played out across numerous industries.

Organisations are now required to have sound digital strategies at the heart of their long-term thinking. One of our greatest opportunities is to embrace customer-owned banking: as a customer owned bank, customers remain at the centre of our focus. As we move to adopt new technology, our core focus is to provide the banking experience customers want today and will need in the future.

In the future, rising to the challenge of continuous improvement will be critical. We will continue to work consistently to embrace change and challenges to deliver market-leading service and a better customer experience. This approach has been at the forefront of our strategy for the past 12 months and was valued by our customers; evident in our 92% customer satisfaction rating last financial year.

What advice or actions are you implementing to respond to these trends?

If we've learned anything from the past two years it's how quickly things can change. When I consider this, I immediately think of the adage 'it's not what happens to you, but how you respond to it that makes the mark of you'. I believe that that how you meet challenges, how you self-reflect, listen, learn and move forward will be your greatest test. It's all about resilience.

To be resilient, I think we must adopt a growth mindset, be adaptable and diverse in our thinking. We must be willing to invite different perspectives and advice, and communicate ideas. Being self-reflective and self-aware, while also dynamic, and ensuring you never stop learning from your experiences and the people you trust are all hallmarks of great resilience.

What are the skills you think business students need to develop to meet these challenges and realise these opportunities?

Every career will have highs and lows, and while challenges, opportunities, and even failures are inevitable, I think it is far more beneficial to see them as an opportunity to learn, to reflect, to reinvent, to challenge, and to build resilience.

It is important not to let setbacks derail or define you. I have found the best way to navigate challenges or unexpected outcomes is to focus on what you can influence, to have a learning mindset.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

TIM HANNA

Former CEO, Compassion Australia



As a leader what has been the biggest challenge your business has faced in the last few years?

The biggest challenge is always developing and maintaining a healthy culture where people in the Head office in Newcastle and six regional offices are aligned around a clear vision and purpose. It is this alignment amongst the 150 staff that facilitates the optimum impact.

"...I think the best skills to learn are strong thinking skills - critical and reflective thinking - adaptive capacity - ability to recover from failure well - relationship skills that help collaborative decision making rather than command and control..."

What are the future trends that you predict that will affect us globally, nationally and regionally?

I think the future trends are going to stretch us and we will need to be quickly adaptable. Some I can think of;

1. Leading in a climate of uncertainty - locally and globally
2. Navigating growing polarisation in many areas. We seem to have lost the ability to disagree agreeable and are much more ready to form into "tribes" who are prepared to dismiss, discount and cancel others who differ.
3. Growing nationalism in many countries around the world.
4. Political opportunism as opposed to long term transformative strategies.

What advice or actions are you implementing to respond to these trends?

Emphasis on culture building. Developing organisational and behavioural values well. Keeping the "WHY" front and centre and being very watchful for distractions that take away from the main game.

What are the skills you think business students need to develop to meet these challenges and realise these opportunities?

I think the best skills to learn are strong thinking skills - critical and reflective thinking - adaptive capacity - ability to recover from failure well - relationship skills that help collaborative decision making rather than command and control.



MORVEN CAMERON

CEO at Lake Macquarie City Council



As a leader what has been the biggest challenge your business has faced in the last few years?

Over the last few years, our biggest challenge has been to respond to the changing needs of our city. As a city we are growing, and the industries that contribute to the city's economy are changing. We have been working hard to support the city as it changes and at the same time creating an organisation that is flexible and adaptable to both lead and support the city as it changes.

Believing in people, and taking a people-centred approach to leadership and a strong business focus to the operations of Council has allowed us to respond to these challenges and to the speed of change.

What are the future trends that you predict that will affect us globally, nationally and regionally?

- The transition to a renewable energy economy.
- New technology will continue to change the way we work.
- Increased interest in participative democracy and localism, including living in regional Australia.
- The availability, security and accuracy of data will change the way we make decisions. We all have access to an increasing amount of data, however the ability to understand the accuracy and source of the data will be critical.
- People are looking for a greater sense of purpose in their work.

"...We are creating a culture in our organisation where we encourage people to get involved in any projects they are interested in, or passionate about. ..."

What advice or actions are you implementing to respond to these trends?

We are creating a culture in our organisation where we encourage people to get involved in any projects they are interested in, or passionate about. We are teaching our teams to pilot and trial new technologies and have a range of renewable energy projects underway. In local government we can benefit from people looking for a greater sense of purpose, as long as we can offer exciting modern careers.

Local government matters because of the role we can play as 'place-shapers' including striving to meet the needs that drive people's attachment to, and satisfaction with, the areas in which they live, work and visit.

As the closest level of government to any community, we are in a unique position to identify needs and make sure that those needs are met in an appropriate way. This is an exciting time for local government as localism and participative democracy continue to grow and create connected and empowered communities. I feel strongly that the time is right for us to reinvent local government. As the most trusted level of government we can step out from being the third (or lowest) tier of government to being the most relevant. It is our responsibility to imagine what's possible and work towards it.

What are the skills you think business students need to develop to meet these challenges and realise these opportunities?

- People need to be flexible and enjoy taking on new and different tasks.
- The ability to understand and interrogate data sufficiently to understand if it is accurate and can be relied upon will be increasingly important.
- Understanding the principles of trialling new ideas at a small scale and evaluating results will become increasingly important as the speed at which technology is introduced into our workplace increases.
- Stay engaged with your community and with all levels of government, you can shape the future if you take the time to understand how things work.

Consider a career in local government if looking for an exciting role with real purpose.



PETER COCK

CEO at Newcastle Airport



As a leader what has been the biggest challenge your business has faced in the last few years?

- COVID – no flights, no revenue, stand down of staff
- Drop in staff self-assessment of mental health by 27% from June 2020
- Getting the correct talent into the business to meet our strategic objectives

What are the future trends that you predict that will affect us globally, nationally and regionally?

- There will be a lot coming out the COVID, from work habit, office layouts, propensity to travel (leisure/work), global supply chains
- Regional political instability
- Regional economic diversification for the Hunter and northern NSW
- Continuing demographic changes

"...Continue to focus on getting the right people in your business, knowing that the technical skills required and roles they will be performing may change over time..."

What advice or actions are you implementing to respond to these trends?

- Diversify business across industries and look for natural hedges
- Continue to focus on getting the right people in your business, knowing that the technical skills required and roles they will be performing may change over time
- Ensure a flexible mindset and leadership style

What are the skills you think business students need to develop to meet these challenges and realise these opportunities?

- Critical thinking
- Approaches to learning and ways of acquiring new knowledge
- Resilience to change
- Be good at the foundation elements, certainly literacy, numeracy. Also other building block elements that will allow multiple specialisations across a career





THANK YOU