Red Tape Reflections

15 September 2017
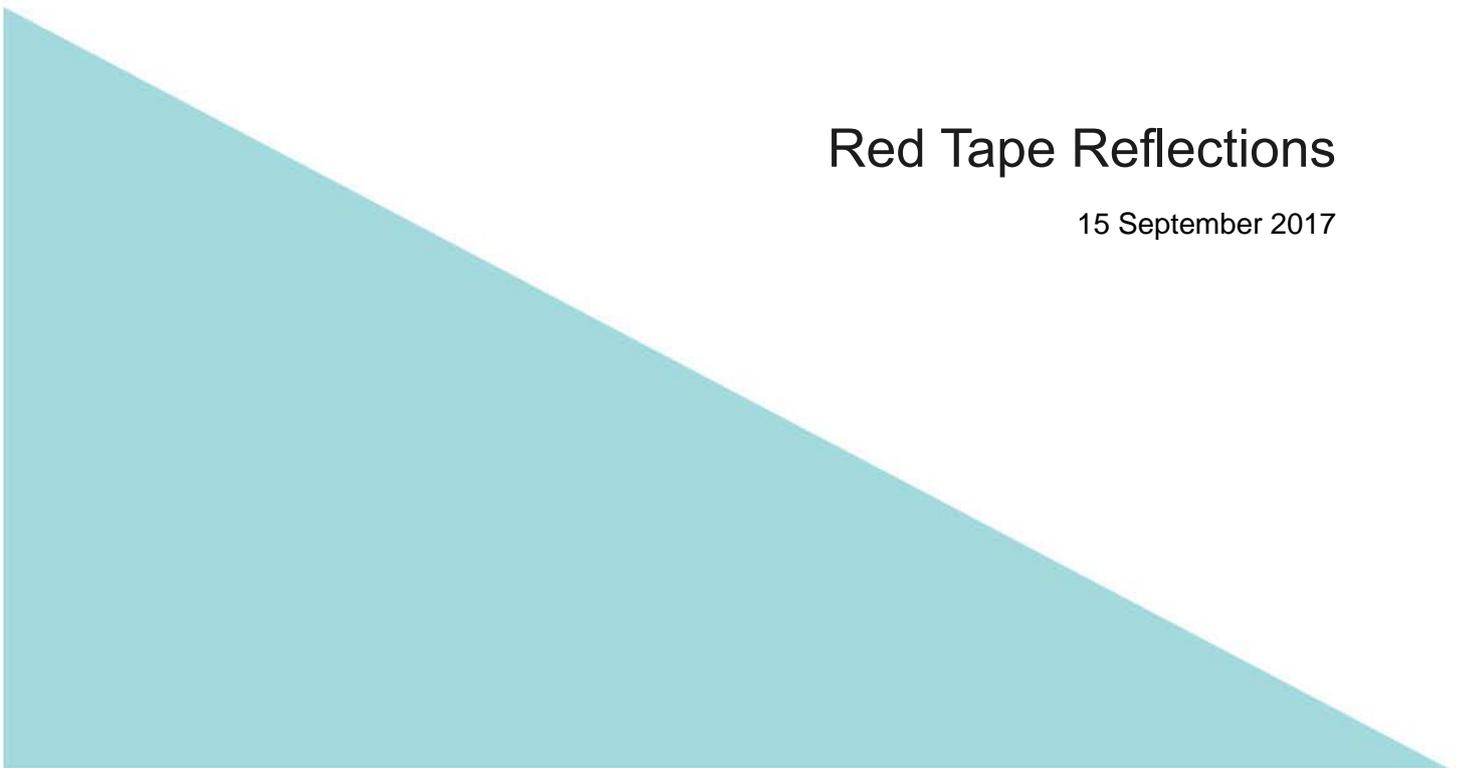
1. Introduction

On 15 September 2017, the Department of Finance (Finance) hosted an event - Red Tape Reflections. The event brought together members of the <u>Red Tape Rebels network</u>, their invited guests, and senior executives from entities represented on the Deputy Secretary Working Group on Internal Red Tape. The purposes of the event were to:

- reflect on the red tape reduction achievements to date;
- identify red tape that has survived the efforts; and
- identify ongoing red tape reductions within entities.

Remarks by panel members included key red tape reduction within their entities. These involved reforms to whole-of-government policy or processes. Examples included changes to the <u>Protective Security Policy Framework</u>, the use of <u>shared merit pools</u> and <u>enhanced inter-agency mobility arrangements</u> under the Public Service Act employment framework, and the <u>simplification of guidance material</u> across a range of topics.

The Australian Public Service Commission presented data from the <u>2017 APS Employee Census</u>. This included staff responses on "the level of action being taken within your entity to reduce red tape" and views around culture and innovation, which are key enablers for red tape reduction. Additional data was collected from rebels by questions, using an online survey application (PollEV). This report reviews the data and outlines some observations from the event, as areas for individual and entity attention going forward.

2. Observations

The panel discussions demonstrated that red tape issues have been and continue to be addressed within entities. A common focus of red tape reduction has been improving corporate processes within entities. Whilst this is a highly valid area to focus on, entities' core or externally facing functions often receive less focus as an area for red tape reduction efforts. A question for consideration is whether there would now be greater benefit in focusing red tape reduction on the broader use of staff time. For example, if most time is spent providing policy advice, is there a standardised methodology used in your entity?

Additionally, you may find that issues identified within your entity are also common across your broader portfolio. There may be benefit in establishing working groups with entities in your portfolio to develop holistic and transferable solutions. To further reduce red tape, the event discussions suggest that Red Tape rebels:

   a. Actively drive a shift in red tape reduction within your entity, to move away from internal areas such as Human Resources (HR), to core business functions which constitute the main focus of staff time;
   b. Review the communication strategy around innovations and red tape achievements within your entity, to ensure that staff are aware of improvements when undertaking work related to a new process, policy, communications or products; and
   c. Consider whether there is common ground across entities within your portfolio to improve ways of doing things at a more holistic portfolio level.

3. Review of the 2017 APS Employee Census data

The census data presented at the event included information on the level of action being undertaken by entities[1] to reduce red tape. As you can see in slide 1 below:

- 46 per cent of staff (highlighted in green) indicated a positive level of red tape reduction is occurring within their entity.
- However, one in five staff indicated that they "don't know" the "current level of red tape reduction activities" in their entity.
- Additional insights from the census included that senior executives and staff from smaller entities were generally more likely to rate their entity as being highly active in reducing red tape.

<u>Slide 1:</u>
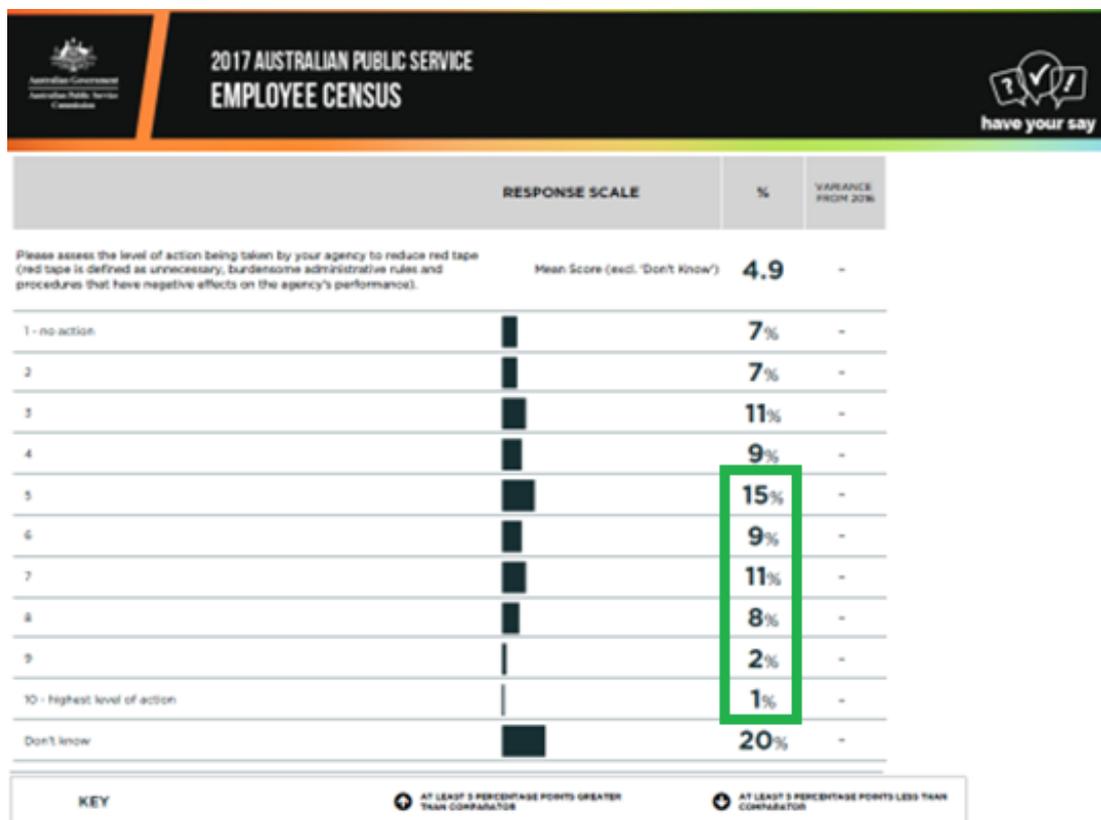
Innovation is generally considered a central aspect of red tape reduction. As you can see from slide 2 below, the census data indicated that innovation is occurring and is generally well supported across the APS: 50 per cent of staff indicated that their entity had implemented innovations within their work area over the past 12 months. Around 80 per cent of staff also indicated that their supervisors encourage them to contribute and improve the way things were done.

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[1] The APS Employee Census uses the term agencies rather than entities.

Notably, most staff (62 per cent) indicated that current innovation efforts in their entities had been focused on internal process matters. Internal processes could include, for example, financial delegations, approvals and corporate or recruitment processes. Only 15 per cent of staff indicated that their focus had been on products, which might include for example computer software or systems. Only 14 per cent of staff indicated innovation in relation to communications. Nine per cent of staff indicated that the innovation focus had been on policy, which may include internal, portfolio and whole-of-government policies.

Slide 2:
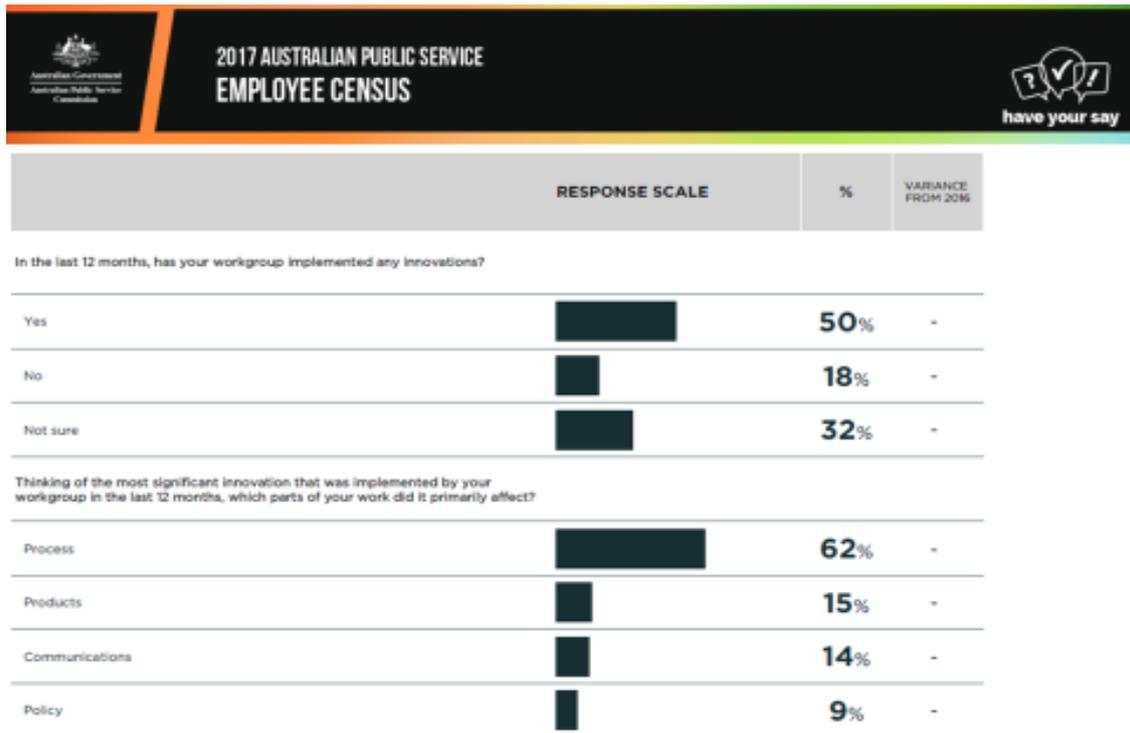
Following on from the APS Employee Census data analysed above:

- If we focus on internal process matters, will we achieve the most effective outcomes in our future red tape reduction or innovations?
- Should we shift our focus, for example, to the core or externally facing functions of our entities, where the majority of staff time is spent (such as support to Ministers and delivery of outcomes for external stakeholders)?
- Are we directing sufficient focus to communicating the innovations and related red tape reductions within our entities, particularly to APS level staff?
- What steps can we take in our entities and portfolios to improve the communication of red tape reductions and innovations?

4. Review of Red Tape Rebels event activity

To complement the census insights, an activity was conducted on the day, in the form of a survey that asked rebels three questions. The graph below illustrates the results of the survey, focusing on the top two responses for each question:
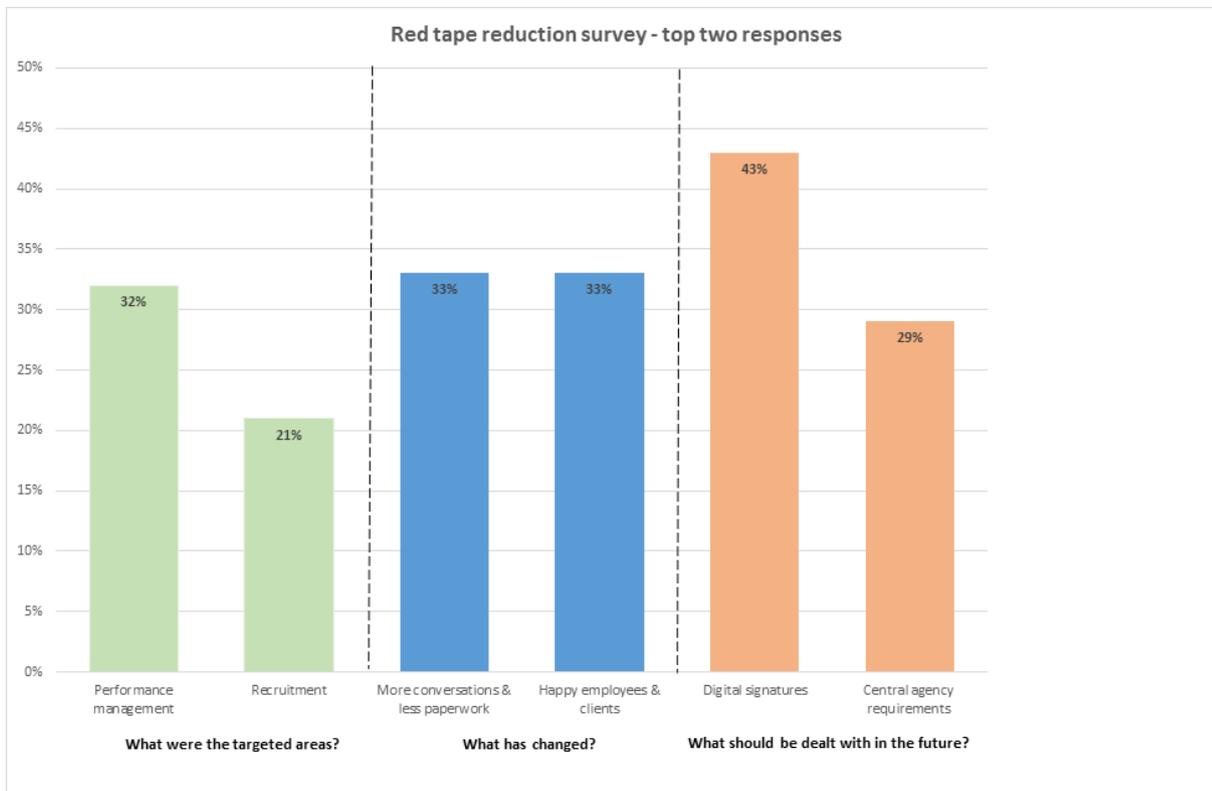
The strongest focus of past red tape reduction efforts, had been on internal HR related areas – 32 per cent of attendees suggested *performance management* as the strongest area of focus, with the next strongest being *recruitment* (21 per cent).

This HR focus however, was not evident when rebels were asked what the focus of future red tape efforts should be, the top issue being *digital signatures* (43 per cent). This suggests an appetite to move beyond the current focus on corporate or HR related red tape, and to focus on more holistic/core business functions that impact multiple areas of an entity. It was not clear from the responses whether this desired shift in focus could be attributed to existing red tape achievements, although the results would support this inference. When asked what had changed because of past red tape reduction, rebels were evenly split on *more conversations and less paperwork* and *happy staff and clients* (33 per cent each).

In summary, this survey would suggest:

a. An awareness of red tape reduction focusing on matters internal to entities; and
b. A desire to achieve and communicate successes in entities' core business functions going forward.

5. Concluding remarks

The ongoing challenge in the reduction of red tape lies in each entity through:

- Identifying the priority areas for improvement;
- Establishing resources needed to implement the improvements; and
- Effectively communicating the new way of doing things within and across entities.

Entities should look at joining GovHack events, which bring together government bodies, academia, private industry and the public, to build working prototypes and find solutions to the red tape challenges around data availability and use.

Entities should also look at collaborative opportunities with bodies like Data61, in developing new or improved solutions and products to reduce policy related red tape and ease the compliance burden across relevant regulatory areas.

In some cases, interagency or public-private collaboration can help to improve innovation or reduce red tape. The National Innovation and Science Agenda (the Agenda) provides a unique opportunity by bringing together several parties including the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Digital Transformation Agency and Data61, but there is room for more parties to get involved. The Agenda's Business Research and Innovation Initiative and the Digital Marketplace are finding ways to improve government procurement practice, and the prototypes and solutions they develop may be of real interest to your entity.