

Vice President Elect's report on the American 2008 IPMA-HR conference, 18- 22 October.

1. The IPMA-HR.

IPMA-HR is the International Public Management Association for Human Resources and represents the interests of American HR professionals at a federal, state and local level of American government. The IPMA includes all levels of public sector HR professionals. The goal of the IPMA is to provide information and assistance to help HR professionals increase their job performance and overall organisation function through the provision of cost-effective products, services and education. IPMA-HR has a long and storied history, dating back to the Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt. The photograph below shows the grand opening of the 2008 conference by the Mayor of Las Vegas and Pam Kannady – IPMA-HR president.



2. 2008 conference – Las Vegas

The location of Las Vegas was chosen by the current IPMA HR president Pam Kannady. This was a very personal choice of venue as Pam was married in Las Vegas and it is a city dear to her heart. However, there are also practical reasons for the choice of Las Vegas as a conference venue – the city boasts some of the best and largest hotel and conference facilities in America. The Flamingo hotel, where the 2008 conference was hosted, is central to the Las Vegas Strip and has facilities of gargantuan proportion. The Flamingo

Hotel is 30-storeys high and it takes over 20-minutes to walk around the hotel perimeter. In all there were approximately 600 conference delegates including visitors from overseas HR associations: England and Northern Ireland (PPMA), Canada, British Virgin Islands, South Africa, Sri Lanka.



The Flamingo Hotel

The Flamingo Hotel was one of the first built in Las Vegas and dates back to 1946 when Bugsy Siegel, the owner, established the site as a casino and hotel. Bugsy named the hotel in memory of his girlfriend who was renowned for the length of her legs – and was not named because of a predilection for wildlife. Bugsy was closely associated with the American mafia and had a colourful and somewhat chequered life. The current Mayor of Las Vegas presided over the opening ceremonies of the IPMA conference – including making a very dramatic entrance with two Las Vegas showgirls thereby carrying on the tradition of colourfulness and controversy - the Mayor's 'helpers' were not expected!

3. Conference content and format

The main conference covered three days – Monday 20 October to Wednesday 22 October. However pre-conference workshops were staged on 18 and 19 October and there were social networking opportunities on those days including a Sunday golf tournament.

The structure of the conference was a daily key note speaker – usually who addressed the delegates for one and half to two hours. Following the keynote speaker there were a variety of smaller concurrent sessions comprising of workshops, mini-master classes and round table discussions. I have a CD ROM of all the conference handouts that I will ask Carol Sands at the PPMA office to make available to PPMA members via the PPMA website. I have taken photographs of the conference, exhibition and key IPMA-HR members and these have also been sent to the PPMA office so that PPMA members can see what the IPMA conference was like.

In addition to the conference speakers there was also a full exhibition with American trade suppliers to the HR public sector. Not dissimilar to the UK, the exhibitors provided a range of goods and services covering: e-HR systems, employee health care, payroll, HR

consultancy, retirement planning, pay and benefits, training and development and recruitment advertising/talent pools.

The pre-conference workshops were held on Saturday 18 October and Sunday 19 October and covered topics including: pay banding, arbitration processes and skills and competency-based pay. It was interesting to see the degree of pre-occupation American public sector HR professionals with pay systems, pay bands and the linkage between pay and rewards. This had considerable resonance with our own UK struggles with pay and rewards – including our own arbitration process for the national pay awards for 2008 and the ongoing discussion about total rewards. It was clear that no one in America has ‘cracked’ the secret of pay and rewards. I suppose this is not surprising because if someone had ‘cracked’ this complex code I’m sure we would have imported it to the UK.

4. Keynote speakers

The conference commenced each day with a leading HR academic keynote speech.

(i) Dr Peter Cappelli – Talent management a business imperative.



Dr Cappelli is a professor of HR who lectures at Wharton Business School. He is recognised as one of the world’s most authoritative thinkers and speakers on human capital management. His work focus is on human resource practise, performance management and public policy for employment.

Dr Cappelli’s speech focussed on the very topical issue of the workforce and demographic time bomb. Just like the UK the USA has real issues about the retirement of the baby boomer generation over the next decade or so and the issues this has in terms of knowledge management and organisational performance. He also spoke about the difficult issue of recruiting and retaining key senior managers – the war for talent.

Again, with issues strongly resembling key problems in the UK, the US public sector has found it difficult to grow their own senior talent and had fallen into the trap of hiring in expensive talent rather than having internal succession programmes. Reminiscent of the UK, the US has seen the demand for senior executives spiral whilst the laws of supply and demand have kicked in. This is not just a private sector phenomenon in the US – it’s hitting the public sector too and the headhunting of senior public executives from one organisation or agency to another is rife.

Dr Cappelli drew upon IPMA research evidence to reflect that the majority of US government agencies undertake no workforce planning, or future projection of workforce

skill and resource requirements. He stated a view that workforce planning is not always successful as trying to forecast future business needs is very difficult – especially when there are so many variables involved. Dr Cappelli advocated predicting talent pool needs however – no planning or future needs prediction was - in his view – unsatisfactory and unwise.

(ii) Dr Denis Kimbro – what makes great people, great?



Dr Dennis Kimbro (right picture)

Dr Dennis Kimbro is tireless educator, author and university professor. He is a researcher and lecturer on the subjects of management, entrepreneurship and human potential. He is renowned as a powerful motivational speaker and deals in a very direct way with issues of discrimination and disadvantage. He has written and spoken about how can impoverished black Americans pull themselves out of poverty and realise their potential.

As you would expect from the above introduction Dr Kimbro's keynote speech to the IMPA-HR conference was extremely powerful and motivating. He received a 5-minute standing ovation at the end of his address and clearly had moved a number of the packed audience. His keynote speech about what makes great people great was delivered with power, humour and considerable insight. Refreshingly, Dr Kimbro underlined everything he said with words of wisdom that ultimately it is the individual that is responsible for their own destiny, i.e. no blame but individual responsibility – even when faced with adversity.

This was truly inspirational and powerful stuff. Dr Kimbro has preacher-like qualities including a booming voice, a big personality but most of all a genuine passion for what he does. It's tough to keep an audience of 600 people fully engaged for 90-minutes but he achieved this task with aplomb.

In terms of what makes great people great he included a range of concepts in his speech – but most of all the themes of relentless passion for the job and self-belief came through most strongly. He identified the need for the great person to identify what they are better at than other people. He advocated developing that talent quickly and with all possible enthusiasm – he described this as one's own unfair competitive advantage.

(iii) Dr Donald Kettl – Making Government work in an era of wicked problems



Dr. Kettl, University of Pennsylvania, focuses on public policy and public administration. He has published a wide range of articles and books, including *System Under Stress: Homeland Security and American Politics*; *The Transformation of Governance* (winner of the National Academy of Public Administration's 2003 Louis Brownlow Book Award for the best book in public administration); *Deficit Politics: The Search for Balance in American Political Life*, 2nd ed.; *The Global Public Management Revolution: A Report on the Transformation of Governance*; and *The Politics of the Administrative Process*, 3rd ed. (with James Fesler). He is a regular columnist for *Governing* magazine, which is read by state and local government officials in the US.

Dr Kettl's keynote speech for the IPMA-HR conference focussed on what he described as new and 'wicked' problems. Why wicked? This is because they are of national or international proportion, very complex, hard to forecast, hard to respond to and the consequence of failure to deal with the problem is bleak. He cited 9/11, Hurricane Katrina and the current economic meltdown as wicked problems. In the UK too we've had our fair share of wicked problems – the same economic meltdown (reflecting the globalisation of economics) 7/7 (terrorism attack) and we've been known to have the odd hurricane or whirlwind too!

In his exposition, Dr Kettl, described how government agencies and their associated boundaries often prevented an adequate response to the wicked problems. Unfortunately rather than help to respond to the situation those boundaries only serve to hinder effective mobilisation of government agencies to deal with the problem. We've had our fair share of this in the UK too – most notably the Victoria Climbié tragedy.

To overcome the wicked problems Dr Kettl advocates greater inter-agency agility and collaboration. He also extols the virtues of emergency planning – including scenario planning.

5) Other workshops, presentations and round table discussions

A variety of professional development sessions were also delivered each day after the key note address. These are shown in the tables below:

Monday 20 October workshop sessions throughout the day

Leadership secrets of Government HR officers	Mentoring for workforce development	Emotional intelligence and 'servant' leadership	Strategies for compliance with GASB #45	Measuring return on investment in the public sector	HR transformation – prizes and challenges
Second career -from public sector to private consultant	Workplace experience for American war veterans	Personnel issues that go bump in the night	Local Government pay and performance	Conducting internal investigations	
Pay for performance – building an engaged workforce	Leadership succession planning	Oklahoma health mentoring programme	Workforce planning in the real world	HR transformation – building capacity and work performance	

Tuesday 21 October workshop sessions throughout the day

Best practise in on-boarding (induction)	Automated recruitment	Employment branding best practise	Managing presenteeism	Legal update	Career branding in the State of North Carolina
Feedback from IPMA innovation award recipients	Attracting baby boomers to 'encore' careers in public service	What works in leadership development	Major city HR directors round table discussion	State level Government HR round table discussion	Local Government HR directors – round table discussion

Wednesday 22 October workshop sessions throughout the day

Performance management – IPMA benchmark survey results	Workshop – are you delivering for your Government?	Managing difficult conversations	Measuring employee engagement	Guidance and policies for employee blogging	
Wells Fargo – lessons from a first class employer	A blueprint for effective on-campus recruitment	Controlling yourself and others – avoiding work place retaliation			

6) Reflections and conclusions

Globalisation really came home to me as a concept when attending the IPMA-HR conference. Although I was over 5,000 miles from home the issues discussed and the problems encountered could have been from next door. The ageing workforce, business continuity planning, leadership development, workforce and succession planning, rewards and performance management are all topical issues – whatever side of the Pond you are on.

Before I went to Las Vegas maybe in my naivety I thought the US would hold all the answers to my HR problems. It would be the key to unlock my complex problems. However, this was not to be the case. In fact in many ways we are just as developed in UK HR practise and understanding as our American colleagues.

I was shown exceptional courtesy and made to feel very welcome in Las Vegas. I am sure I will stay in contact with American HR colleagues for years to come. We networked and we swapped ideas and case notes, as well as business cards.

It was a privilege to represent the UK and I am very grateful to the PPMA for the opportunity to fulfil an important ambassadorial role. IPMA-HR is very keen indeed to maintain those contacts - including exchange visits between the UK and USA. I believe keeping an external, international perspective is essential to the development of the PPMA as a public service HR association.

Dean Shoesmith - Vice President (Elect)

24 October 2008.