

Is it working for you?

Experiences as a customer and employee with two public organisations



Peter Geyer

I spent time as a Centrelink customer and employee of the Australian Electoral Commission

Peter Geyer (INTP) is engaging in a reverse sea change, back to the basalt plains of western Melbourne.

peter@petergeyer.com.au
www.petergeyer.com.au

Mr Rudd said the quality of government service was more important than the delivery mechanism.

Matthew Franklin

I. Workplaces

Workplaces, when you get to have them, are a large part of people's lives, and sometimes deaths. They are places where people meet others similar to them, or different: friends, life partners, enemies.

A work environment is where you can find, or lose, yourself, according to what you're required to do and how that might affect others. Other people's workplaces are where you go usually for functional reasons: to pay a bill or eat a meal; to seek finance or help, or a range of consumer activities.

When I started work in the late 1960s, I took the recommended trail for people of my social and religious background, and sat for the public service exams. I was even allocated to a 'Catholic' department, Customs and Excise. There I met two people who each claimed to be the 'token' Protestant, and two Jews, but no women in senior positions.

What was it like to work there? Well, I didn't encounter that sort of question (a 'climate' survey) until two decades later in another public organisation, Australia Post. Some, at least, of its then management viewed as traitors those persons who were prepared to say that it wasn't all that thrilling to work there; on occasions, it was actually dangerous.

These days there are 'preferred employers', organisations whose work environments claim adherence to various worthy social and ethical principles. Additionally, there's much talk about work-life balance: a confusing phrase, given that the contents of 'balance' in any activity can vary quite a deal, sometimes to the point of being quite nebulous.

James Lardner (2007) reported on what might be the prevailing way of looking at organisations and workers at any level: downsizing determined by the fickleness of markets, and bad decisions made by well-paid executives. There are the empty promises of gaining work through 'life-long learning', part of a 'callous treatment of workers and work life'. And there needs to be 'respect for our non-material and non-individualistic selves.'

That's not entirely what I'm writing about here, but it's definitely a part of it: you can judge how big this part is for you and others you know.

2. Getting to this

*It's that I leap and then I look
At all the chances that I took
Feel the air, miss the catch
Then I have to swing back*

Jonatha Brooke

In 2007, after 14 years of working for and by myself, I spent some time in offices of two public organisations – Centrelink and the Australian Electoral Commission – as a 'customer' in one and an employee in the other.

I thought I needed assistance, and Centrelink seemed to be the place to start

I came to Centrelink because I discovered I couldn't teach MBTI Step II courses with the status they'd had since 1998: informally accepted by the distributors as equivalent to accreditation courses, and so attractive to those wanting to use Forms K and Q. In fact, the term 'accreditation' was not generally used for these sorts of courses, in Australia or elsewhere.

I thought that offering this course would help me work out my direction after I'd ceased to offer MBTI accreditation in mid-2006. This was one of a raft of changes directed by the MBTI publisher, CPP Inc, on how the MBTI was to be sold and used in Australia.

Unlike the negotiations to cease offering accreditation programs, the status of my Step II course was never discussed, and no communication was made with me. Unfortunately, that has been the regular experience over the years from a number of players in the MBTI game. Indeed, my client was communicated with after my course had been advertised and, suitably confused, passed the information on to me. After some international negotiations I managed to run this course, but only on the agreed basis that it was to be my last.

With Step II courses out of the question in future, I thought I should consider doing something else, perhaps closer to home. And I thought I needed assistance, not knowing how to go about it. Centrelink seemed to be the place to start. I thought I needed some sort of safety net at any rate, although I was unsure whether that was what Centrelink was about.



Photo: Peter Geyer

3. Un/employment

*You've got to help me
I can't do it all by myself*

Van Morrison

Centrelink is one of those places about which you hear stories of oppression – sometimes to do with the Job Network, other times with other benefits systems that the organisation implements. I had come across some of those stories while accrediting people who were in the Job Network, as well as in the previous system.

My only experience with unemployment was before MBTI – three weeks in 1985, when I needed temporary jobs in order to complete my Diploma in Education. This was a very depressing experience, even for that brief time. I received no payments from the then Commonwealth Employment Service, but I hadn't requested any.

In searching for jobs I found some people made judgements about me that impaired my search: that I was overqualified (BA Hons), and so would supposedly be bored by menial tasks; that I wasn't the right age or gender. Wanting to earn some money to pay the rent, etc, wasn't a consideration.

A decade or so later I observed my then partner arguing with a staff member at her local Social Security office. She had been 3 minutes late for an appointment, which meant the sanction of rescheduling; yet the clocks in the office were clearly not the right time, which I pointed out. A long line extended from another point somewhere, waiting for service, polyglot and perplexed; or, at least, it seemed that way to me.

It was with these things in mind, together with Foucault's 'discipline and punish' observations of organisations (Rabinow 1984), that I picked up the phone and rang Centrelink to see if they could help me and to see what could happen, thus beginning a 3-month encounter.

Here's how it went.

4. Centrelink

I decided to take a look-and-listen approach to the whole process, as I was aware that this organisation might not have my sort of person in mind. I thought that I should remain open so I could find out where I stood, somewhat like a social anthropologist, who observes without judging.

Isabel Myers has similarly recommended using perception in dealing with others and judgement on yourself. This process minimised a lot of potential tension and even made the experience interesting.

*Don't it make you feel just like an
undercover Sigmund Freud?*

John Cale

The call centre

Ringling Centrelink, rather than turning up at an office, was apparently the right thing to do; they didn't want you there until basic processing was completed. I was asked various questions, and discovered that my name and address was already on record. I hadn't put it there, so I was uneasy about that.

I didn't know whether I was eligible for anything. If I was to find out I wasn't, then that would be that; I would have to think of something else. There were lots of questions and I did my best, but some didn't make sense, or appeared irrelevant to my situation. I could hear the woman I was talking to struggling with my variance from the usual script.

It seemed I had to know what I was applying for in order for the conversation to proceed; no ambivalence here. I settled on Newstart, but had no idea, really. It made the woman more relaxed. Call centres are places of prescription, rather than knowledge.

The discussion was left unfinished – a combination of me, her dodgy computer connection, and a 45 minute limit. Someone would ring me at a specific time the next week.

That call, from a casual, gum-chewing woman, completed the process. I made adjustments to what I'd previously said, because I now had more accurate information. I was then given a time to attend the local office. As confirmation, I received several letters from various addresses, overlapping in content and purpose.

I later discovered that the call centre interview (only the first, not the second) was sacrosanct, including typos and incorrect information, however inadvertent.

The office environment

I was naturally keen to be on time, and so was disconcerted to enter the office and see a number of people queued before an enquiries desk on which there were two computer screens, but one person attending. The queue and the empty station was to be the pattern throughout my visits, and I wondered why they just didn't simply dismantle the other screen and not delude people into thinking there should be another queue. It would have reduced the prospect of tension anyway.

The appointment time didn't have the literal importance of the past. My attendance was recorded and I went to sit in a waiting area, a collection of orange chairs organised in an elliptical shape, with assorted newspapers and periodicals on a large coffee table. A television hung from a wall nearby, watched by no-one.

A few weeks later this quite comfortable arrangement was changed to a theatre-style order facing towards the TV, which still no-one looked at. Under this system it was very difficult to get a chair to sit on, and the relaxed atmosphere that had come with the elliptical style disappeared. The staff members to whom I mentioned this seemed unaware of, or oblivious to, this change, and blind to the implicit meaning in how Centrelink's customers were perceived. It was a very strange thing to do.

The office itself was new. (The previous building had burned down following a fire in an adjacent Charcoal Chicken outlet.) Entry was through two parallel automatic doors that required you to walk through at an angle.

I decided that I would take a look-and-listen approach to the whole process

It struck me that
a different reality
existed outside
its doors

The waiting space was some way from where Centrelink staff sat in small clusters in open-space format.

You could also see, in the distance, what might have been enclosed offices, one wall of which had a fan-like display of flags: Aboriginal, Australian, Centrelink. The need for the latter flag escaped me entirely.

Every so often a neat, often casually-dressed staff member (predominantly female) would come out and call a first name, and someone would go off with them for their appointment.

Appointments

I liked the informality of this process, but it didn't work when there were two people with the same name. This happened to me twice.

My first meeting came out of a confusion of Peters. The woman I spoke to began by asking me whether I'd completed certain documents, which I hadn't, due to it being a first visit. She became quite stern very quickly and unconvincingly apologised when she discovered I wasn't the person her screen identified. I hoped the other Peter had his papers in order.

A resultant effect was that you could drop out of the system and so sit there for much longer than you wished, because there was no record you were still there. A book was therefore essential to pass the time. Waiting was around 45 minutes in any case. This could, and did, extend to a couple of hours.

Appointments had to be made for everything, so if you were going to lodge documents or present them to be photocopied, you had to queue up, have your name taken and wait for someone to call your name and then copy the document. You would then receive a document that said you had provided a particular document.

Appointments of any kind involved a staff member entering data into a computer. At times when they were pounding away, I wondered what they were writing about; it didn't appear to be simple data input. One appointment in particular involved quite a bit of this activity.

I'd asked for clarification about my payments. Dissatisfied, as this issue had gone on for several weeks without resolution or explanation, I asked that the staff member record my dissatisfaction and register my request for a meeting with the manager. The former request involved her mostly not typing at all, even though she said she was. The latter request wasn't entered at all.

Eligibility

There were strict financial criteria to be satisfied before Centrelink was going to allocate you money (it's not really 'given' to you) from a relevant benefit: single parent, pension, my category, etc. These criteria were simple and clear to them, although it struck me that a different and unacknowledged reality existed outside its doors. A full benefit rested on the level of amounts held in bank and other accounts; that they might have got there by credit card transfer rather than actual earnings was irrelevant.

The amount specified also indicated that you had to be completely bereft of your own safety net before asking Centrelink for help, which seemed to me to be a recipe for financial, psychological and social disaster for the people concerned. But rules are rules.

Tax and other documents I provided led to my not receiving a full benefit, even though my recent income wasn't exactly high. This appeared to be related to my taxable income for the previous financial year (just into five figures). I couldn't get any staff member I spoke with to explain this in any way; I don't think they knew. But I got the idea that I had this stated amount in my pocket, or under a mattress somewhere.

Job seeking

After I was processed, I received a Health Card and a diary in which I had to record my attempts at getting work, presenting it at fortnightly intervals on a specific day and from a particular queue. Any benefits would be calculated from this report. This was agreeably presented in Centrelink colours, with a version of their financial view of the world part of the process.

Any money earned in the two-week period had to be listed. This was deducted from your established benefit amount. A couple of consulting hours easily accounted for the benefit. That was OK to me. I knew before I started talking to Centrelink that any benefit offered by them wouldn't even cover mortgage payments; I just needed some help to get me going again.

I was encouraged to apply for all sorts of positions, which I interpreted as a response to people over the years saying there were no jobs for them. If you did this, some staff members displayed genuine enthusiasm, notwithstanding any improbability of job success.

They weren't keen on you seeking jobs commensurate with your skills, such as the work I'd been doing for a decade and more. This was seen as trying to bolster my business; I was simply trying to earn money.

It seemed to me that staff members, and the organisation as a whole, had no idea what a business is, let alone that there are a variety of ways business might be transacted. Their definition was what it was, apparently. Technically I was 'in business', but that was about as far as it went.

I thought that if you were serious about meeting all these requirements, essentially all the time in the week would be taken up with internet job seeking and preparation of resumes and covering letters. Perhaps that was part of the purpose.

Job Network

Part of the process was being allocated to a Job Network provider, whom you were invited to select. As I didn't know much about the three providers in my area, including which would be better for me, this was a false choice. I don't know how anybody could make such a selection, frankly.

I eliminated one because I'd been on their casual teachers list for a year and hadn't got even one phone call.

My choice sent me to a place where a man cheerfully stated that my age and qualifications would preclude me from serious consideration by local employers, and

presented reasons and examples to bolster his statement. Nothing much had changed, then, over two decades. (I heard that statement again earlier this year from a non-Job Network job provider, who apologised for the fact and acknowledged its error, but said it was a fact nonetheless.)

As fate would have it, I met a representative of the third Job Network provider that same day in a social setting. It seemed that he might be more on my wavelength. I requested a transfer to his organisation and thought it would be a formality.

But I found I was owned by the provider I had initially selected for a minimum period of time. This was made clear to me by a senior staff member there, who put me in my place very swiftly, disparaging my resume, essentially dressing me down. This was a humiliating experience; he didn't change his approach when I reflected that back to him. A negative example of ISTJ, I thought.

I never entered that place again, posting the relevant transfer papers instead. Centrelink were helpful in getting me transferred, which I appreciated.

You will never get everyone to behave to the same standards unless you take away their powers of thought.

Jean Cheshire

Staff skills

Staff struggled with my particular case. I think they had a singular notion of things and I didn't easily fit into one of their templates.

People skills were not evident. Apart from random outbreaks of mild abuse, the staff members were relatively genial, although without insight into the personalities of others, or their own, for that matter.

In our discussion, one woman complained to me of headaches. I asked what colours she had on her computer screen. She didn't know that brightness in screens, colours and otherwise, could trigger headaches.

A staff member of the Job Network provider put me in my place, dressing me down

It shocked her when I said that was rubbish and propaganda

I asked if she was an extravert, which she seemed to be, but she didn't know the term at all.

It seemed that a lack of personal awareness might be a prerequisite for the job, which I suppose makes sense in a way. No-one I met appeared to prefer anything other than SJ, and a couple were completely devoid of nuance or humour. I tried to be casual, open and friendly in my dealings and this worked for the most part, but sometimes I wondered what I had struck.

Not only did no-one have much idea in dealing with someone who wasn't an employee or a company, but there were different views between staff as to what data was acceptable and how it should be presented. One, in a pleasant exchange (we shared the same birth date), said that she was worried about the way that some of her colleagues treated people, in particular the lack of trust, or its swift evaporation at any rate.

It all comes down to 'he said; she said'.

Jonatha Brooke

Systems and service

The Centrelink system, as a whole, appears rigid, inflexible and inefficient.

From an organisational and structural point of view, it's probably so large that it's essentially unmanageable, and it manages itself by imposing constraints on those it deals with. One Job Network provider I encountered refused to walk into his local Centrelink office, even though it was close by, because of the way people were treated by those within.

This view, of course, is from the customer's perspective, but Centrelink, like lots of organisations, public and private, seems to use the word 'customer' just because that's what you do these days. Airlines have 'Customer Service Managers' on board to give you the idea that they're interested in looking after you – but it's actions, rather than titles, that are important, as it is here.

Customers spent an incredible amount of time just waiting; a large proportion of your time could be spent in just sitting around, which didn't help the job search, or caring for people. Everything was by appointment, so you waited. And if the computer system went down, you might have to go through it all again. There was no alternative strategy, like a pen and paper, for instance.

One time, after waiting for nearly two hours, a young woman came to the waiting area and said that as the computer was down, we could all go home and come back the next day. Although she appeared kind and friendly (which a subsequent conversation confirmed), there was no real recognition that the failure of Centrelink's internal systems might be taking up others' time or causing them stress.

I refused to leave, on the basis that I'd already been there for hours, hadn't been spoken to, and did not want to spend the time doing this again. I also found it very stressful, as indeed I did the whole process.

She then asked if I wanted to see a social worker who would see whether I was able to work. I found this very strange, but it demonstrated to me that Centrelink simply wants to see whether you're able to work, and implement the law. They're not aware of, nor do they care about, your mental state or personal situation: it's all about which benefit you are eligible for.

I had an interesting and lengthy discussion with this woman. She made it possible for someone to see me, for which I was thankful.

I found she believed that Centrelink had been established because Australians were concerned with cost and distribution issues regarding welfare and other benefits (my words). She was shocked when I said that was rubbish and propaganda as far as I was concerned, and I didn't recall a reasoned discussion going on in the community at large.

(Then again, I don't listen to talkback, read tabloid newspapers, or watch commercial 'current affairs' shows, so maybe I missed something.)

I found that counselling and other facilities for customers or staff were not available, nor was training available to help staff deal with personal issues (their own or others). One would think that knowledge and understanding of people would be useful, but apparently not.

There was also little appreciation of the world outside. The reporting system for jobs required you to attend on a specific day. This was OK if you didn't have work, but staff in general found it hard to understand that if you did have work, then locating a nearby Centrelink might not be high on the list of things to do, or even feasible, particularly if break time was limited. One would have thought that observation of queues in their own building and their own internal processes would have told them of the difficulties there, and that having a job might be the highest priority.

It also seemed that, whatever was contained in computer files, information on a person's individual situation didn't feature highly. As I was attending Centrelink for financial reasons, I was startled to be informed that, as I had just turned 55, I could do volunteer work instead of a job search. I thought this was insensitive, because I was after work, and because it was a judgement on my age. I did wonder about the point of providing information to an organisation that doesn't use it. The response was that they had to say it to me, so that was that. No nuance there.

In this time and afterwards, friends and associates recounted instances of alleged bullying or threats from Centrelink staff at various offices. These were mostly to do with single mothers and students. Some were personal experiences, directly told.

One, recounted to me this February, was a single mother wrongly accused of having money in a trust fund. A similarity of names (without examination) had been sufficient to cut off her benefits and deliver threats. These occurrences might be rare in such a large organisation, but they shouldn't happen at all in a democratic country.

Tell me the truth for a change.

Jonatha Brooke

Complaints

As time went on, my equanimity faded away a little, and I wanted to complain about the service, expecting it would be taken care of as part of the normal scheme of things. Instead, I was directed to Centrelink's website and complaints brochure.

The website would be taking up my time, not theirs, and the brochure was a box-ticking arrangement with around a line and a half allocated for comment. This sort of process is about managing complaints, not dealing with them, or even recognising them. As a manager, I would like to know directly about problems with a process managed by my staff.

As mentioned earlier, I requested a meeting with the manager of this office regarding my not receiving a full benefit and their understanding of my income. The staff member to whom I made the request confirmed with me that the meeting had been arranged. On arriving, however, I wasn't surprised to discover that not only was the manager elsewhere, but that I had been allocated an ordinary meeting. I got to see a Team Leader (an improbable title to my way of thinking, although it's everywhere), and she was humourless and unhelpful.

You could stay in the process forever if you wished, and this was attractive in the way that, as many readers will appreciate, sometimes you don't earn money for a while. I taught an ENFP consultant once who indicated he managed to get benefits over the summer months.

But I'd had enough. I couldn't get anything meaningful from this organisation regarding my situation and they didn't seem to either care or have the ability to explain their decisions. I'd picked up some work in the meantime (none locally), so I hadn't been getting benefits anyway. My diary would be full with the next visit, so it seemed a good time to stop, for my own health more than anything else.

The woman I handed my diary to was the one who didn't type what I had requested, including the meeting with the manager. This didn't seem to bother her. When I said I would stop, she said 'this means you won't be getting any benefits'. Well, yes.

As time went on, my equanimity faded and I wanted to complain

I wrote a letter to the manager, explaining my concerns. It remains unacknowledged.

My Health Card was cancelled, as expected, but from a date several days before I'd come in to cease my connection with Centrelink. I wonder what would have happened if I used the card for those days: I would have been entitled to do so when I did it, but retrospectively I would not have. That's probably an appropriate time to finish the personal story.

*I'll swing till there's no net below
Then I'll let go*

Jonatha Brooke

Centrelink is an **introverted** organisation: standards and requirements are set by them in their own language.

It's a **sensing** organisation, because of its attention to literality.

Thinking is its preferred decision-making mode, because it's an impersonal system which has its own rationale.

And it's a **judging** workplace, because the rules and systems in place don't allow for curiosity or flexibility (Bridges 2000).

Its inferior function comes out in the way it treats certain of its customers. Essentially, though, it's an unconscious organisation where people work but don't think about what they're doing, otherwise they would not be there. Unless it pays the bills and they are stressed as well because they know what goes on.

5. Australian Electoral Commission

During my Centrelink experience I applied for temporary work with the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), something I had enjoyed for a decade or so until the late 1980s. Politics in general has always been of interest and I liked observing how Australians voted, willingly or otherwise. So I was pleased to receive an offer of election-day employment at a polling booth.

The AEC provided training, a couple of hours on a Saturday. Materials were handed out and explained. 20 or so people turned up, many of whom knew each other. I sat next to a man from Minneapolis. Having visited there a couple of times, I at least had something in common with someone there. I didn't really introduce myself to anyone, as I find that quite daunting.

Other than some terminology and a process or two, little had changed since I'd last been involved in this sort of activity, which was gratifying. A few questions of detail were asked, and it was interesting how much literality was required for the responses.

Pre-poll

I'd also received a bonus, in that I had an offer of AEC work in the week before the election. This came at the right time, as a project I was working on for an overseas company (developing a Jungian questionnaire) was abruptly halted; no warning or explanation. The way of business, I suppose, but I don't like that approach to work and life.

So I wandered in to work in an office for the first time in nearly 15 years. The office space was well-used and a bit cramped, with lots of paper and boxes and some work being done in the tea room at times. It didn't have the pristine appearance of the Centrelink office, but it was more welcoming.

The permanent staff provided a cheery environment; not being an extravert, I couldn't manage how to do what they were doing. Individual timesheets were produced and explained; fairly much like the flexsheets I'd seen and used in various government departments. There was a lot of familiarity about the set-up.

The pre-poll work was essentially sorting and associated tasks; something I like doing. You needed to be able to count and to know the alphabet. Some knowledge of Victorian geography was an occasional advantage. It took a bit of time to be sure of a couple of processes, as well as the uncertainty of new people, but the management was genial and helpful.

I didn't introduce myself to anyone, as I find that quite daunting

There was a lot of technical discussion and decisions to be made and some attention to detail. I suspect I was the only intuitive in the room. (There was another P.)

Several people were involved in the task, almost entirely female (one other male, who'd just completed VCE or Year 12). They were a mixture of people, retired or on some form of benefit, who needed the extra money. Apart from age, I felt I stood out a bit in the temporary group, although, as time went on, I found myself welcome in the general and random discussion that occurred around the working table.

Some of these people said they had had Centrelink experiences of the threats and bullying type, which was disappointing, but interesting. Local and regional schools were discussed. I learned that one secondary school had a separate place for students who were troublemakers (as defined). A teacher friend of mine said the place was known by his peers as the *Gulag*.

I wondered why this was acceptable on any grounds, but the school concerned had a reputation for 'discipline', well-received amongst many parents. The discipline includes a 'two-brick' policy, which defines how close together students of different genders could sit. A former principal had expressed derisory and demeaning behaviour towards some parents.

A principal elsewhere was known to take male students to get their hair cut, a practice that met with general approval by those listening to the tale, until I suggested that maybe a person in his position had better, more productive things to do, perhaps involving education in some form. This gave me insight into what a conventional view of education might be.

One of the workers, a woman perhaps around 30, expressed the view that you could do anything you put your mind to, so therefore you could do any job. She was skilled in practical ways, possibly preferring ESTJ, and was surprised when I said that there were several things I couldn't do, including things that she'd described as easy for her.

She was applying for a job (successfully) at the time, and observed of herself that

she usually tried to take over a bit in whatever position she was in. Often this meant she didn't keep the job. I admired her confidence and abilities, to be quite frank.

We operated as a team, but nobody told us to do that. If someone finished a task first, they started helping someone else or asking if help was needed. Technically, I suppose it was a 'self-directed work team', not that those working would have been aware of it. But we didn't need a label, we just did the job. Management was essentially hands-off and trusting.

Polling day

Polling day was meeting more people I didn't know. There was a preponderance of teachers, including a young woman with no interest in politics. Presumptions that most teachers prefer judging would be supported by the people at work at the booth as well as several observations that indicated that being organised and attending to detail were teacher characteristics.

The polling booth was run by a primary school principal, a bit of a martinet, and well-known to many there. But he gave praise to us at the end of the night, and it was genuine.

My role was to coordinate voters and answer questions, so I was on my feet nearly all the day. It's a role I enjoyed: you could engage in short-term banter with people coming in to vote and make them laugh a bit. I can never say the same thing twice, anyway, so changing things made it interesting.

There were people who also needed some form of assistance, whether for reasons of physical or mental disability (the area has a number of places for the latter) or old age. One elderly woman came in and said to almost everyone in sight that she'd won a significant prize, which aroused some friendly scepticism, but was actually the case.

A number of Sudanese came in. One of them was voting for the first time, and the others turned up to see what it was like. I hope the beauty and simplicity of Australian voting, with pencils and paper and no armed guards, was welcoming.

I suppose we were a 'self-directed work team', but we didn't need a label

The organisational types were the same, but their approaches were different

Local member (and then Speaker of the House of Representatives) David Hawker arrived to vote and to see how things were going. Coming up to me for a brief and agreeable chat, he didn't make himself out to be anything special or presume anything. His wife came up shortly afterwards and we exchanged pleasantries about the day. I was impressed, particularly as I'm not a voter for his side of politics.

A lot of young people came in through the day to vote for the first time, some clearly excited, others less than thrilled. One of the former, cool rather than excited, sported a T-shirt that said *Disembowelment*, which seemed a kind of introverted feeling statement. A couple of 'Kevin 07' T-shirts also made an appearance.

I also learned that the local greeting was an expressive, even exuberant 'How are ya goin?!?', with a grin or smile attached.

Given the location's status as a tourist town, there were also lots of voters from other parts of Victoria, and interstate as well.

After the booth closed, counting began with the same notion of teamwork I'd experienced during the week, where people just contributed without overt direction, and we finished early as a result.

Post-poll

I was fortunate to be asked to work after the poll, essentially similar work, although mostly in a rented office in another part of town. Some of the people there I hadn't met before, although they had other tasks. I found this environment at times a little different, as there seemed to be greater presumptions about how people naturally behaved, albeit in a good-natured way.

That doesn't mean I didn't find it difficult at times, as this was largely an extraverted feeling expression that was fairly naïve in presuming that everyone looks at life in one way. 'Meaning well' without considering consequences for others can be dangerous. I managed to get myself back to the other environment, where I quietly worked away until my time there was done, and people there said their pleasant goodbyes, as we'd genuinely enjoyed each other's company over a few weeks.

The AEC has its own rules and regulations to enforce, and also has to explain them to the general populace at election time. So the organisation would be introverted, but having to be extraverted at that time. There were lots of telephone discussions and other contacts between offices. The discussions were about detail: what the electoral law is about, what its limits are – so sensing, thinking and judging are also orientations for the organisation.

At the same time, legislation and guidelines had to be interpreted, so there was flexibility within limits. Customers were helped as much as possible, and management praised staff regularly, before, on and after polling day.

6. Conclusion

There probably wasn't much difference between the types of people I encountered in these two organisations, but there was a difference in how the work was approached.

The organisational types were the same, as you'd expect of government instrumentalities, but their overall approaches were different. Perhaps that's due to a difference in task, or at least its interpretation. It may also be a consequence of the AEC being a smaller organisation that is dependent on temporary workers at its major events. It was a better world to be in, at any rate.

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