



The Forge: Lives in Leadership Podcast - Australian Defence College

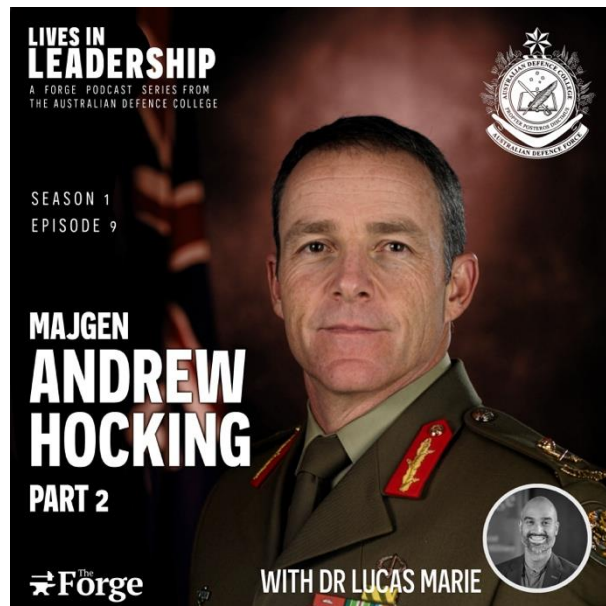
SHOW NOTES

Episode Summary, Highlights and Full Transcript

SEASON 1: EPISODE 9

Guest: MAJGEN Andrew Hocking (Part 2)

Host: Dr Lucas Marie



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<https://theforge.defence.gov.au/lives-leadership/episode-09-majgen-andrew-hocking-part-2>

Lives in Leadership explores leadership in demanding environments, featuring insights from experienced practitioners drawn across Defence, government, industry, and academia. Through sharing compelling stories and perspectives, the podcast explores military leadership, ethics, culture, and service in the Profession of Arms. The podcast focuses on insights in joint and integrated appointments at the operational and strategic level. It complements existing single-service professional military development platforms



S01E09 – MAJGEN Andrew Hocking – Part 2 - Episode Summary

Duration: 20 minutes

Key Themes: Crisis Response, Adaptive Leadership, Cultural Intelligence, Strategic Communication, Risk-Taking in Leadership

Overview: Dr. Lucas Marie continues his Lives in Leadership Podcast conversation with Major General Andrew Hocking about organisational learning in the ADF and lessons from Hocking's March 2022 Vanguard paper, "Preparing for the Future: Key Organisational Lessons from the Afghanistan Campaign." Hocking describes the value and limits of structured roles like warrant officers for speaking truth to power, and argues learning must be open, public, and hardwired into implementation. He recounts the political and career risks of publishing the review publicly, notes it contained 90 recommendations with 89 agreed by the Chiefs of Service Committee. Hocking discusses difficulties implementing whole-of-government lessons and stresses building cross-sector trust before crisis. He advocates integrating social science expertise, citing a NATO experience where a cultural anthropologist helped counter groupthink and improve influence-focused planning.

Key Topics Discussed

Warrant Officers and Truth to Power The conversation opens with a discussion about the unique role Warrant Officers play in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) as institutional truth-tellers who can speak directly to leadership. Major General Hocking emphasises that while this structured role is valuable, leaders shouldn't rely solely on it and should seek diverse perspectives from people who can offer genuine difference and challenge.



The Afghanistan Vanguard Paper (March 2022) Major General Hocking discusses his paper "Preparing for the Future: Key Organisational Lessons from the Afghanistan Campaign," which drew organisational lessons from the 20-year campaign. The paper called for more adaptive whole-of-government approaches, iterative and inclusive strategy-making, campaign design that accounts for complexity, and command structures that prioritise human and social factors over purely technological solutions.

Courage in Publishing The episode explores the institutional and personal courage required to publish critical lessons publicly rather than on protected defence networks. Despite the risks—including potential career impacts, the fall of Kabul occurring during the publication process, and an impending election—both defence leadership and the political class supported making the document publicly accessible so lessons could be learned by future generations.

Implementation and Accountability Of the 90 recommendations in the paper, COSC (Chief of Service Committee) agreed to 89, implementing a comprehensive accountability framework with designated owners, timeframes, resources, and reporting mechanisms. Major General Hocking notes the paper has already achieved meaningful traction, including the integration of cultural anthropologists into defence work and enhanced campaign planning education at the operational level.

Whole-of-Nation Response Major General Hocking discusses Australia's remarkable ability to come together across sectors and jurisdictions during crises, describing it as a source of national power. However, he notes the challenge is maintaining this integration during business-as-usual periods when organisations return to siloed approaches and emphasises the need for "whole-of-nation" thinking that includes private and philanthropic sectors, not just government.



Social Science Expertise in Defence The episode concludes with an exploration of why genuine social science expertise matters in military planning and operations. Major General Hocking shares a compelling story from Afghanistan about recognising that warfare is fundamentally about influencing human decisions, not just tactical execution, leading to the integration of a cultural anthropologist into planning staff. He identifies cultural clashes, ego, discomfort with tension, and Australia's tendency to avoid the "storming" phase of team development as key barriers to better integration of social scientists.

Key Insight: "Not all tension is bad tension"—embracing diverse perspectives and productive conflict is essential for optimal strategic outcomes.

Memorable Quotes

On National Unity and Strategy: *"I don't like the word "whole of government". I think "whole of nation" is better. Because [the] private sectors always got a role to play. So, as the philanthropic sector, everybody's got a role to play. It's not just government."*

On the Nature of Warfare: *"At the end of the day, this is an influence game... So, there's no point in being an expert in tactics or let's bring it up a level or operations and strategy, unless you're also an expert in the people that you are trying to influence."*

On Embracing Productive Conflict: *"Not all tension is bad tension. If you keep trying to remove tension from leadership groups and fora, even national level fora National Security Committee, if you keep trying to remove the tension from that, then you're probably going to come up with a suboptimal result because it's through the tension, the storming that you get, the norming and the additional performing."*



About the Guest

Major General Andrew Hocking brings a uniquely diverse leadership perspective shaped by decades of service across operational, strategic, and whole-of-government contexts. His military career spans command positions across multiple brigades, operational deployments to East Timor and Afghanistan as both planner and battle group commander, and teaching at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. Beyond traditional military roles, he has led significant defence reviews on recruiting, retention, and veteran support, and served secondment to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Perhaps most notably, he served as Deputy Coordinator of the National Bushfire Recovery Agency during the devastating 2019-2020 bushfires that coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic—a crucible experience that tested his leadership across military, governmental, and community stakeholders during one of Australia's most challenging crises. Now working as an organisational coach and mentor, Major General Hocking draws on these varied experiences to help leaders across military, public, and private sectors navigate the critical transition from tactical to strategic leadership, emphasising the importance of adaptability, humility, and sustainable balance in senior roles.

Resources & References

Lives in Leadership Season 1 Episode 8: [S01E08 – MAJGEN Andrew Hocking – Part 1 - Podcast](#)

National Bushfire Recovery: [National Bushfire Recovery Agency](#) (Lessons Learned)

The Vanguard Occasional Paper Series: No 2 March 2022 [“Preparing for the future – Key organisational Lessons from the Afghanistan Campaign”](#)



S01E09 – MAJGEN Andrew Hocking – Part 2 - Time Stamped Highlights

Timestamped Highlights

0:30 - The Role of Warrant Officers Discussion on the unique institutional practice of warrant officers in the ADF who serve as truth-tellers and facilitate hard conversations with leadership.

1:30 - Introduction to the Afghanistan Vanguard Paper Overview of Major General Hocking's March 2022 paper "Preparing for the Future: Key Organisational Lessons from the Afghanistan Campaign" and its call for adaptive, human-centered approaches to strategy.

2:21 - The Courage to Publish Publicly Major General Hocking reflects on the institutional and personal courage required to publish critical lessons in the public space rather than on protected networks, including the career risks involved.

4:31 - Publishing During Crisis Discussion of how Kabul fell between the penultimate version and publication, and the political courage shown during an election period.

6:13 - 90 Recommendations and Implementation The paper contained 90 recommendations; COSC agreed to 89 with a full implementation plan including accountability, timeframes, and reporting mechanisms.

10:06 - Australia Comes Together in Crisis Major General Hocking describes Australia's remarkable ability to unite across sectors during crises as a source of national power but notes the challenge of maintaining this during business-as-usual periods.

11:26 - Whole-of-Nation vs. Whole-of-Government Advocating for "whole-of-nation" thinking that includes private and philanthropic sectors, not just government agencies.



13:33 - Afghanistan 2007: The Influence Game Story of recognising massive groupthink in NATO headquarters and realizing that warfare is fundamentally about influencing people, leading to the integration of a cultural anthropologist within 10 days.

16:04 - Barriers to Social Science Integration Discussion of cultural clashes, ego, and the discomfort that prevents military organisations from fully integrating social science expertise.

18:03 - Not All Tension is Bad Tension Key insight about embracing productive conflict: Australians are good at forming teams but often avoid the "storming" phase, backing away from tension before achieving optimal performance.



S01E09 – MAJGEN Andrew Hocking – Part 2 - Full Transcript

[00:00:00] **Dr Lucas Marie:** My name is Dr. Lucas Marie, and welcome back to the Lives in Leadership Podcast. This episode continues our conversation with Major General Andrew Hocking. If you haven't yet listened to part one, I recommend going back to catch the first half of our discussion. It sets the stage for what we'll cover today.

Okay. Let's jump right back in.

Something I do find lovely about the ADF is the role that Warrant Officers actually play in this regard. You know, it's a wonderful sort of institutional sort of practice that you don't see in academia, and you don't see in other sorts of industries. But, you know, not saying that it works beautifully every time, but it is lovely to have this role of someone being, you know, a bit of your ear in the room. A bit of speaking truth to power, a bit of having those hard conversations and sort of making it their role to do so.

[00:00:56] **MAJGEN Andrew Hocking:** Totally. Yeah. It's structured into the organisation in some way. But, I do say to people in my own personal view, don't just rely on that. There's some downsides to that as well, and how power flows, who writes whose report. All that stuff is real. So go to the people that connect with you and offer the difference to you. And you can find them anywhere, it just depends on you.

[00:01:29] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Andrew, in March of, 2022, you published a Vanguard paper titled Preparing for the Future Key Organisational Lessons from the Afghanistan Campaign, and it draws from organisational lessons, from this campaign to prepare the ADF for future challenges.

I found the document fascinating to read. You know, your highlighting a need for more adaptive whole of government approach to tackling future conflicts. And you know, you wrote about strategy must be iterative and inclusive, and that campaign design should, you know, account for more complexity and command and control should take more seriously some of those human or social factors rather than placing so much reliance on, you know, technological capabilities.



What do you think are some of the challenges for implementing some of those recommendations? And I'm actually interested if you were to update, this paper today in 2025, is there anything you would add or revise?

[00:02:20] **MAJGEN Andrew Hocking:** Such a great question and, you know, I, I did have a good hard think about it and like I'm really proud of the institution to have the courage to publish something like this, in the public space.

And again, without breaching privacy, that was a big conversation upfront, where initially it, the, the vision was that would, it would be about defence lessons and it would be published on the, I think it was the DRN or DPN, the protected network. And, and again this, and I was lucky, the Secretary at the time and the CDF at the time were open to challenge and, and early on a discussion that was, I don't think I can do that.

You know, Defence does not work in isolation here as part of whole of government. And if you really want lessons to be learned from this as opposed to just producing something, we've got to get it out there. Um, in the community so that it can be read by whoever wants to read it over the next 10, 15, 20 years, however long it becomes relevant.

And credit to both of them. Um, yeah, they, they've supported me in that without, and it came with risk, including me. I had a very hard conversation with my wife and said, you don't, you do know that what I'm about to do, and if I do it properly and honestly, and plain speak. Then there, there's risk that comes with it career wise.

And it'll never, you'll never know that it's had an impact. Because nobody would attach it to this endeavour. But there was genuine risk. Um, and, but again, I look back on it and go now, well, my duty is to the country here and, and future generations if, and I'm not, I'm not saying it's that profound, but so I had to call it how it's, but to your question.



The fact that we are part of an organisation that was willing to let a Two Star General off the back of a 20 year campaign, that was highly political, both from an alliance perspective and internally to Australia perspective. Kabul fell between my sort of penultimate version and publishing. And to have a political class that I honestly thought that the minister at the time would say, no, the, the timing is not right to publish this. The election was, was on in February was, it was published, I think, and then in

[00:05:14] **Dr Lucas Marie:** March, so yeah,

[00:05:15] **MAJGEN Andrew Hocking:** March.

[00:05:15] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Yeah.

[00:05:15] **MAJGEN Andrew Hocking:** And I thought, no, no, this isn't going to get through, the timing's wrong. I was really proud to be part of a country that, that if it really wants to, and it's really important enough, it is willing to take some political risks, some institutional risks, reputational risks, and do something like this.

So, to your question, you know, what are the risks in implementation? If it was in the D on the DPN, I would say to you, it won't be implemented. And it's almost back to the very first question that, that you asked: is, and an early part of our conversation is that one of the great forcing functions in a democracy is getting something out there so that you can be judged on what you do with it or don't do with it.

So, in this particular paper or review, there was 90 recommendations. And I initially wrote it with no recommendations, I wasn't going to put recommendations in it.

[00:06:25] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Right. Just lessons and then

[00:06:27] **MAJGEN Andrew Hocking:** Yeah. Just that for people to reflect on.

[00:06:29] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Yeah.

[00:06:30] **MAJGEN Andrew Hocking:** But then through discussions and iteration and listening to people, it was like, no, we've got to sharpen this up a little bit to try and drive it forward.



Um, so ultimately it went to COSC. Um, 90 recs. COSC agreed to 89 of them.

[00:06:49] **Dr Lucas Marie:** for those that don't know, COSC is a Chief of Service Committee.

[00:06:51] **MAJGEN Andrew Hocking:** Yeah, Chief Committee of Service Committee. Yeah, which also has the Secretary and I believe the Secretary, yeah. And a few others on it. Uh, Associate Secretary. Yeah. It's not just a military committee. And better still, the discussion went because one of the topics in the paper or in the review is how do we learn at the institutional level? It's really hard. There's ego, there's politics, there's all the things that we just spoke about that can close down learning.

Um, and so it's funny, like one of the recommendations in it, we actually, we had to bring it to life in terms of, well, how are we going to hold ourselves account to this. One was publishing publicly, and the second thing was the COSC recommendations came with a full implementation plan of who's accountable for each item, um, a timeframe for it to be delivered, the resources required, and a report back mechanism in the COSC.

And as you'd imagine over the years, I've watched this and gone, I'm not sure if this is really going to make a difference. But it's funny, I'm sitting here with a Cultural Anthropologist, which the paper talks to. I'm a coach on the campaign planning elective, which is trying to teach students at this college how to do operational level warfare.



And that's one of the observations in the paper is that we're good at the tactical. We're not bad at the strategic, but we're, we are pretty void at the operational. So, I actually think that give or take, the traction has already been had. Is it a hundred percent? No. But what do we learn? What's the key? So, what to that? The key so what is, if we really want to learn at the institutional level, we've got to open ourselves up, not just to our own views, but to everybody else's views, government's views, et cetera, et cetera. And then we've got to find hardwired ways of implementing things.

The whole of government piece was a little bit more tricky, because COSC really dealt with the, the ones that were defence related. So, I was lucky enough to be invited to Prime Minister and Cabinet for about a three hour whole of government learning session. It was two hours, but it went a little bit longer. It was DEPSEC level to discuss the whole of government aspects of this paper and that was a great opportunity. I felt privileged to do so, but I'm less confident that the nation has ways, across government, to implement some of this learning.

[00:09:54] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Right.

[00:09:55] **MAJGEN Andrew Hocking:** Um, it's just not as structured to do it.

[00:10:00] **Dr Lucas Marie:** The pathways to that sort of reform is a bit more challenging.

[00:10:03] **MAJGEN Andrew Hocking:** More challenging, yeah. That being said, um, you know, it talks about whole of government strategy making in particular, and yeah, one thing I learned from the bushfires is that Australia, I can't comment on other nations, but Australia comes together in crisis. It's, like almost a national value. It's a source of national power. So it's being beyond national pride. It's a source of national power. We come together in crisis, across sector, across jurisdiction, across government. So it can be done, absolutely it can be done. But very quickly, the nation goes back to BAU and goes back to its business as usual.

[00:10:56] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Business as usual.



[00:10:57] **MAJGEN Andrew Hocking:** Goes back into its stove pipes. Its jurisdictional levels. Its sectoral divides. So as we think about and contemplate even the geostrategic situation of the world at the moment, anything that we can do to short of crisis to bring Australia together - I don't like the word whole of government, I think whole of nation is better - because private sector's always got a role to play. So as the philanthropic sector, everybody's got a role to play. It's not just government, um, but ways that we can, uh, build that cross sectoral, cross jurisdictional trust so that when crisis hits, it just comes together a little bit in more of a flowing way is a great investment.

In my view, I would love to see that done in the strategy space. How are we preparing Australia for conflict, for example? Um, you know, that's, that's edgy enough, it's crisis enough that, that the time might be getting right to build something

[00:12:11] **Dr Lucas Marie:** that mobilizes us in that way.

[00:12:14] **MAJGEN Andrew Hocking:** That the connects, the stove pipes, so that our opponent, whoever that may be, can't exploit the boundaries of those stovepipes.

[00:12:26] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Yeah. Nicely said. I just have one final question, and it's more one that I'm very interested in. In that Vanguard paper you highlighted the need for more social science expertise, particularly in planning and strategy teams. You know, we spoke off mic about what that could look like in JOC (*Joint Operations Command*) or other sorts of institutions like that; particularly with people who understand local social human systems and context.

From my own experience working with Defence, I've noticed that while there's a growing appetite for, you know, social science expertise or understanding ADF culture or its people, or how to work better across different teams, particularly as defence moves into more integrated or joint operations.



The ADF often turns to psychologists, entrepreneurs, consultants, contractors rather than social science, like experts like anthropologists or sociologists. And I'm curious on your thoughts on what role do you see for genuine social science expertise in defence thinking and what might be holding the organisation back from drawing more deeply on these sorts of disciplines?

[00:13:33] **MAJGEN Andrew Hocking:** Such a good question. Years ago, it might have been 2007, I was a lead planner in Afghanistan in the NATO Headquarters. Don't want to mention the Generals that I was working for, but the senior US General I was working for in plans that were sort of two to five year time horizon.

And there was a little bit of a "kill your way to victory", theory of victory that that was present at the time. Um, but I think we were realising the limitations of that theory of victory in the cultural and historic backdrop of Afghanistan. Probably learning that lesson too late.

And I was with the General one day talking to him about something and it occurred that the conversation broadly went, "Hey sir, you know, look around the room. We we're, suffering from just massive group think"

We were all the same type of people. We need somebody in here that at the end of the day, this is an influence game. Like all war, you you're either influencing whoever that political leader is to ceasefire or not to ceasefire; to go to war or not to go to war. So, to not be an expert in understanding how to contribute to influencing that decision. And even at the tactical level, you are influencing an opponent.

I used to say to people when, in fact, in my headquarters, I used to have the picture of who it was that I'm trying to influence up. So, we knew that this was a human endeavour, but it was executed sometimes through violence. But sometimes through otherwise. But ultimately, it was about convincing somebody to fight or not to fight. So, there's no point in being an expert in tactics or let's bring it up a level or operations and strategy, unless you're also an expert in people that you are trying to influence.



And it was a real obvious break in the thread credit to the general that within 10 days there was a cultural anthropologist on the staff, which probably answers your final question there, which is, you know, what gets in the way of doing that? A couple of things. And without being rude to you, Lucas...

[00:16:00] **Dr Lucas Marie:** No, I'm, I'm not precious about it. I'm interested in what you think is happening.

[00:16:04] **MAJGEN Andrew Hocking:** Well, at the table it is a clash of cultures. Isn't it? Straight away. And, that can make people feel uncomfortable. It can make them feel de-powered. "I am the Deputy Chief of Staff Operations". "I'm a Two Star General, who's this academic that is coming in and talking to me about the cultural landscape".

So, you know, good organisations with good leaders (and this Four Star was absolutely a good leader in that regard). Give permission and sit comfortably with that tension. So, I think it's the tension that gets in the way, the ego that gets in the way, the ease of just thinking about the world in your way of doing things that gets in the way. There's three big things, but there's probably 20, but again, back to coaching, and this, this comes up a lot in coaching, is that...I've just finished it, what they call a team coaching course. It's a little bit different to individual coaching.

In essence, it said in Australia, whether it's in business, the military, or other walks of life in the forming, storming, norming paradigm. There's evidence to say that Australians are good at the forming but often don't power through the storming into norming and performing. They get uncomfortable with it and they back away.

And I think the military's uber vulnerable to, "we're uncomfortable having you in the room, Lucas". So, we back away before we push through it, push through the storming in order to get that value add that we can't get for ourselves. So, you know, what's the takeaway? Not all tension is bad tension.



If you keep trying to remove tension from leadership groups and fora, even national level fora National Security Committee, if you keep trying to remove the tension from that, then you're probably going to come up with a suboptimal result because it's through the tension, the storming that you get, the norming and the additional performing.

And that could be the difference at an operational or strategic level, which is sort of back to the point in the paper. We've got to build some fora in the country that allow that diverse challenge in order to optimise whole of government. Strategy and plans and iterate it regularly. Let's not wait till crisis before we start exercising that collective muscle.

[00:19:04] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Andrew, that was wonderfully said and it's been lovely speaking to you today. Thank you so much for joining us today on the podcast.

[00:19:10] **MAJGEN Andrew Hocking:** Pleasure. I got a lot from it. Thank you.

[00:19:18] **Mr Mike Richards:** This episode of Lives in Leadership is copyright Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Defence 2025. It is licensed under a Creative Commons by attribution non-commercial no derivatives. 4.0 international license. Additional rights beyond this license can be arranged by contacting the.forge@defense.gov.au.

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