



## YS UP GOVERNANCE AND BOARDS PODCAST

### Episode 20 – Organisational Transformation and Change Management with Kylie Sprott

#### Transcript

##### Intro:

Welcome to YS Up Governance and Boards podcast brought to you by 3YS Owls Governance Consultants. Covering hot topics in governance, risk, latest regulatory changes and issues keeping directors and executives awake at night. Here are your hosts Ainslie Cunningham and Deb Anderson.

##### Ainslie Cunningham:

Welcome to another episode of YS Up. Today, we're joined by Kylie Sprott. Kylie is an international leader with over 25 years of demonstrated experience and achievement across a variety of industries, including IT, engineering, environmental services and legal services. Kylie focuses on innovation and how this applies to people, culture, technology, and business growth. Her creativity combined with her extensive M&A skills and global experience make her a unique business contributor.

##### Ainslie Cunningham:

Kylie's experience spans Australia, New Zealand, United States, United Kingdom, Ecuador, and Asia. An expert in culture mapping, Kylie has conducted the due diligence and led the integration of over 25 organisations globally. She has worked in businesses varying in size from 100 staff to over 8,000, both private and publicly listed. Kylie has led several multidisciplinary teams, including technology, human resources, and marketing. Utilising her broad experience, Kylie currently works in the capacity of Chief Transformation Officer of a publicly listed legal services business and serves on two boards.

##### Ainslie Cunningham:

In addition to her work commitments, Kylie is a keen philanthropist and works closely with the Smith Family in the capacity of leader of Corporate Champions and is the ambassador of Rainbow House Iligan Orphanage in the Philippines. Kylie has also recently joined Willow International as the Australian ambassador. Willow International is an organisation that is focused on restoring the lives of human trafficking victims and putting an end to this global epidemic.

##### Ainslie Cunningham:

A well-respected communicator in the business community, Kylie is an accomplished keynote speaker and regularly publishes articles on her blog and LinkedIn. Kylie has a Bachelor of Arts in politics, film and media. A postgraduate in business and has studied strategic human resources at both the Australian Graduate School of Management and Harvard Business School. Kylie has formal qualifications in organisational change management from University Technology Sydney and is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Kylie is an avid traveller, not at the moment probably, and music buff. She enjoys politics, motherhood, and the occasional glass of red wine. Welcome Kylie.

**Deb Anderson:**

Welcome Kylie.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Thank you.

**Deb Anderson:**

When do you find time to sleep?

**Kylie Sprott:**

I like to be busy.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

So, tell us a little bit about Kylie Sprott.

**Kylie Sprott:**

So, after that very long introduction, thank you very much. So, I very happily work at QANTM, which is an intellectual property organisation. So, I've been there since November last year so that's my main role and also work on a couple of boards. But probably my proudest achievement is being the mum to two wonderful children. So, Ruby who's 14 and a half, and Hamilton, who turns 12 on Saturday so yeah, two amazing kids, and so I love being their mum. So that keeps me very busy as well. Trying to do their maths homework is always a bit of a challenge. It's very different to when I was at school, but yeah, I love watching how they're growing and developing their own personalities, and love going to their sporting events and just being involved in what they're interested in. So that's a really good part of my life and a nice balance to the corporate world.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

Yes, absolutely. How has home-schooling treated you?

**Kylie Sprott:**

I have to say, I didn't really enjoy the home-schooling. I know some people really loved it. And Ruby was very self-sufficient and she really got on with it because she's in high school and quite disciplined and organised. Hamilton, not so much. And I realised it wasn't really going very well when he said to me one day, "Do you think you'd be considered to be an essential worker?" He said, "Because I heard somewhere that if you're an essential worker, it means I can go back to school." And so, I realised at that point, maybe things weren't going so well from his perspective either. So, I contacted the teacher, who's a great guy, and we had a chat about it and he went back to school and things improved dramatically after that.

**Kylie Sprott:**

So I really feel for those people in Melbourne at the moment who are having to take on that home-schooling again, because it's really challenging when you're trying to do that and look after your family as well as do your work during the day. It's an incredible juggle. And I think in particular, if they're really young in primary school, it would be really hard.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, absolutely. So, a massive amount of M&A activity in your world. Kylie, tell us a little bit about that. I think it was 34 M&As.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Actually, I've lost count. When I put it into my bio that it was 25, I reckon it would be over 30 now so probably 30-35.

**Kylie Sprott:**

So I should probably write them all down again so I can keep a tally, but you kind of lose count after a while because I'm not sure if you can include the ones that I've been involved in from a board perspective as well. I really only put the ones there that I've actively been involved in doing the due diligence and the deal and the integration. So, I started off doing that when I was working in an IT company a long time ago, and they were really keen to get the culture perspective in terms of doing these acquisitions. We did five acquisitions, small little ones that they were okay, but they were kind of low risk and then we did two mergers. One of which went really well because we're very culturally aligned. And even though there was overlap with the client base, it actually went really well.

**Kylie Sprott:**

The second one didn't go so well. And the core difference was the culture. It was significantly different, and it just caused all sorts of problems from the board level down. So that was a really good baptism by fire, I think, because I got to see firsthand what a really good one looks like and what a really terrible one looks like. And I think the culture piece can sometimes be underestimated. I think people get a little bit kind of get that deal fever about trying to get the deal done and it's really exciting at that point, so you start to gloss over things, but the culture piece is often the one that really brings it undone in the integration stage.

**Kylie Sprott:**

And it's really important if you go ahead with the deal for everyone to be very clear upfront what it's going to look like after the deal is done. And I think the culture thing is a really critical piece. So yeah, so I started off doing that long time ago now when I was in the IT company and then I had... With another IT company, we did a small one there and then a larger one. And then I worked for a large global engineering company. We did a lot there, really small ones to really big ones all over the world. And what was interesting was also the ones we didn't do. There were plenty that we walked away from and rightly so. And I think some of the ones actually got over the line, we really should've walked away from as well.

**Kylie Sprott:**

So lots of learning experiences and of course, where I'm now, we've also been on the acquisition trail so it's really a core part of most companies' growth strategies is they have the organic growth, but also the growth through M&A. So, I think it's a really normal part of doing business nowadays, but again, it can be incredibly successful or it can be an absolute nightmare. And I think the culture piece is the one that I would say is a critical one that sometimes is forgotten.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

So how do you think that piece could be done better?

**Kylie Sprott:**

I think it needs to be part of the due diligence process. So again, it's good to look at the numbers. It's really good to focus on those. It's really good to look at the client piece and obviously, to see where the overlap is and where the synergies are. I think all of that's really great also for the synergies from a cost perspective, really helpful, but the culture piece often isn't covered in the due diligence phase. So that's really about going in there and really assessing in a really practical way methodically what your culture is versus the company, the target's culture. And when I've done it myself, what we've done is use the McKinsey 7S model to say, "Okay, what are the seven aspects and how do we map those out?"

**Kylie Sprott:**

And generally, it's really helpful to know where the gaps are, because if you can see the gaps, you can assess whether or not they're too big to overcome, or if they're small, then you put in place a strategy as to how you're going to address those but it means you're very transparent about that upfront at the beginning. I think when M&A tends to fall into a bit of strife is when there are suddenly surprises in the integration phase for both sides of the organisation. So, things that haven't been disclosed either in the due diligence phase, or weren't even asked in the due diligence phase, but

also expectations. So, if you do the culture piece, then you're constantly going into that people element rather than just focusing on the numbers, so I think it's really important.

**Deb Anderson:**

I think, like you said, everybody's so keen to get the deal done that the culture piece does get missed, doesn't it?

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yes. And I think some organisations are desperate to get M&A over the line, because it helps them in terms of growing their revenue and EBITDA and some companies get into a bit of a rhythm where they're constantly doing the M&A, and so it kind of becomes part of their culture in terms of doing it. But you do see that white line fever when they want to get the deal done.

**Deb Anderson:**

It's the confidentiality behind it too. So, you don't get to go to grassroots and talk to the staff until a later stage in the process.

**Kylie Sprott:**

That's right. But you can pick up some things, even from the senior leaders. You can look for clues. And some of the companies I've been involved in, they will make sure that I go along to a lot of the dinners and with the senior executives and the board of the target to just suss out what their views are in terms of culture without explicitly saying, "I'm here to assess you culturally." of course.

**Kylie Sprott:**

And often, in those kinds of environments where people are a bit more relaxed is when you see what they really believe and what the culture really is.

**Deb Anderson:**

And they don't necessarily hold back from telling you stories, do they?

**Kylie Sprott:**

Especially after a couple of glasses of wine, it can get very interesting.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

Yeah, absolutely. And I think too, sometimes those synergies that are anticipated in the beginning aren't actually necessarily there or never really actually come into fruition later on in the integration phase either.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yeah. I think the other thing that I've seen happen a lot, particularly with smaller acquisitions, is often, they haven't invested in technology and that gets sometimes missed in the due diligence phase so they don't really look to see exactly where they're at with their technology and that's actually quite an expensive piece. So, when you start to bring them into the company, you need to actually then have this significant investment in technology. So, a lot of those synergies are wiped out by having this other investment they hadn't accounted for. So that's also a really important part, I think, is having a really good look under the bonnet to see exactly what they have in place and understanding how much it will cost to get them up to your level.

**Ainslie Cunningham**

Yeah, absolutely. That's a really critical piece, I think.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yeah. Well, even worse is if they're much better than you are in terms of technology and then they may have to make some sacrifices to come back a little bit. That can also be really negative.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

Yeah. Or just finding the right balance between the target and the acquirer.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yeah. That's right. Yeah.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

Because sometimes too, you might actually see them doing it a better way, so you think there actually is a possibility to have a blend of processes and systems and people.

**Kylie Sprott:**

That's right. Yes. Look, I think the best-case scenario is when you can be really open, both parties can be really open and look for the best possible way forward rather than it just being our way or the highway. But again, I think also a very dangerous thing that happens is that when you bring in an organisation, you say, "Nothing will change, just continue on as you are and business as usual," that good old phrase, that's very dangerous because if you do need to then make some changes, whether it's in people, programs or technology or processes, they usually throw that back at you and say, "You told me it was business as usual and that nothing would change and now you're trying to change our business." So, I think having that transparency upfront is really important, so everyone knows exactly what they're getting into.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

So, your role as chief transformation officer for QANTM IP at the moment so a recent role and how has that sort of gone for you with obviously COVID at the beginning of the year?

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yeah, well, firstly, I have to say, I'm really proud to work for that organisation. They're an amazing bunch of people. They're really, really some of the smartest people I think I've ever come across in my career and they do really good work and they have a fantastic culture. So that's probably the thing that's most pleasing from my perspective is that culturally, I feel very aligned to the organisation and right from the first meeting with the then CEO, but all the members of the board just felt very aligned to them and they brought in a CEO who I've worked with before and we're also very aligned, feel very aligned to the executive team. So it's a beautiful thing when you have that kind of synergy where you feel completely aligned culturally, because it also gives you a bit more, I guess, freedom to know that you can be a bit more creative in terms of trying things.

**Kylie Sprott:**

So I came in and I think I'll start on the 31st of October, so really the 1st of November and it was really like trying to get my head around the business and understand exactly what they had in place. And then I started putting together some draft plans which were really starting to come together very nicely when the CEO started in January and of course, then COVID hit and we'd started to get some traction on a number of different things, but we were still really just getting to know the business and starting to put together the plans around transformation when COVID hit. And from a difficulty perspective, it was challenging to continue to make those relationships work because I was no longer able to travel to Melbourne and Sydney and the bulk of our people are in Melbourne. And so that was a bit of a disappointment because I'm very much a people person and I like engaging directly face to face.

**Kylie Sprott:**

But by far, the biggest challenge was the fact that most of our people had not worked remotely before and they didn't necessarily have the technology in place to do that effectively and our managers hadn't been trained as to how to manage people remotely. So, this was a big, massive burning platform. So, within two weeks, we had to mobilise a workforce that had never worked from home to all working from home. And it was a bit of a scramble at first, to be honest with you, but then what happened was the CEO and I realised this is a great opportunity for us to really push through some technology changes so we did a rapid deployment of Microsoft Teams.

We did that within three weeks which would normally take three to four months. And we also refreshed our entire fleet of hardware, which desperately needed to be done, but we did that very rapidly as well.

**Kylie Sprott:**

So, we had this really big change happen in a very short space of time. And I think the organisation was a little bit shocked at how quickly things moved, but I'm really proud of the fact that we did that at pace and that it was such a great outcome so that people could collaborate and communicate and have really good tools at their disposal. So, the productivity didn't really drop. And the other thing which was fantastic that I'm also really proud to be associated with is we have these amazing people and cultural leaders in QANTM and their focus on making sure our people were really supported in terms of mental health and resilience during that time was just phenomenal, really good communications, really good programs, lots of access to webinars and one-on-one assist programs with our employee assistance programs, really, really leading stuff that a lot of other organisations in our industry weren't doing.

**Kylie Sprott:**

So, our people were incredibly well-supported, had the right tools. So, actually in a way, even though it's a really negative thing for our people to be kind of distanced from each other, we achieved a lot in a very short space of time so I'm really proud of that.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

Yeah. That's phenomenal.

**Deb Anderson:**

Important in Melbourne too, going through the second wave.

**Kylie Sprott:**

I know. I really feel for them.

**Deb Anderson:**

I just feel for them.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yeah. I sent them a little note this morning after other members of the executive team. Our CEO sent one last night just saying that, "We're all thinking of you," because he's in Sydney and of course, I'm in Brisbane and I just reiterated it and said, "We'll do whatever we can to help you." And again, that's the culture piece. I think working for an organisation where our CEO has openly stated our number one priority during COVID is to try and make sure all of our people still have a job and to keep them safe. So, it hasn't impacted our productivity. People know that we're trying really hard to make sure they're all right. And the senior executives and the principals all took a pay cut for six months. We didn't bring that further down. We just wanted to make sure we had a bit of a buffer there so that if anything did happen now, people would be safe and not all organisations have handled it that way so again, culturally, just very proud to work for that company.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

Yeah, absolutely. And I think too with being a public listed entity and ASIC now focusing more on remuneration practices, especially off the back of COVID, it's in the spotlight.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yes, exactly. Yeah. And again, it's an interesting one because in some ways, I would say that we're working harder than we've ever worked. And obviously, coupled with a pay cut is always a bit of a challenge because trying to articulate that in a way that makes it compelling but I think there's a real sense of everyone being in it together and banding together. So, I think there's a bit of a bonding experience that comes from that. Obviously, some people weren't thrilled to bits and that is a bit challenging when you've got your own personal commitments about having a pay cut. But

I think if it means our people can be retained for much longer and hopefully, we can ride through the storm, then it's a really positive thing.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

And how's everyone in Melbourne holding up?

**Kylie Sprott:**

I think they're all a bit sad about having to go back into the lockdown and I think they're frustrated as well because in some ways, it's worse than it was the first time around. I think they feel a bit isolated from the rest of Australia, especially from Queensland because we're virtually having very little impact on our lives now. I did explain to them. I think there's a bit of a sense of fear actually in Queensland at the moment. I think we're watching and there's a nervousness that it could be coming our way. And seeing what's happening in Sydney and New South Wales, I think that there is a bit of a fear starting to sweep through Queensland, but yeah, I really do feel for them and particularly hard when it's really cold and wet and you're just stuck inside. Yeah.

**Deb Anderson:**

I think also for their mental well-being. I think there's curfew between eight and five.

**Deb Anderson:**

And then they're only allowed out for a maximum of one hour to exercise and you have to go to the supermarket on your own so you don't even have that support.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Well, I think it would be particularly challenging. I was talking about this with a friend this morning on the drive here. It would be particularly challenging if you were in a home with people that you weren't very well connected to like if you weren't particularly well connected to your partner or you weren't having a great relationship with whoever you're sharing that space with, to then be locked into that environment 24/7 with very little time away from it would be really challenging. And so I think that's the other thing, it would be hard enough if just having the lockdown, but then if you were in an environment where you were either very lonely, no one was with you, or in an environment where you weren't particularly close or enjoying the time with the people you are confined with, I think that would be really hard.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

Yeah. That's sort of the vulnerable members of the community are the most hard done by at the moment.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yeah. I think there's all those links to domestic violence and mental health as well. So, there's yeah, lots of challenges that come with this.

**Deb Anderson:**

I think we're going to see lots of studies coming out of the back of this aren't we?

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yeah. I just think it's also interesting from a psychology perspective, because I don't know about you, but I found when we were in lockdown, it was just myself and my two children at home and I found it really hard not to have face to face interaction because most of my ideas come from talking to other people and chatting with them and I get energy from being around other people and that's not really possible through video calls. It's just not the same. And after a while, as much as I love my kids, there's only so much you can talk about Fortnite and the Vampire Diaries, that it's starting to be something a little bit heavier so I was really keen to get some way of having that engagement.



**Kylie Sprott:**

So, my work around was I ended up paying my personal trainer every day to meet me at the park so I could at least have one adult conversation. And then I realised I could go by the coffee shop home and get a takeaway coffee and most of the time, I'd lurk around hoping to see one of my friends there. And sometimes, I was lucky enough to do it, but I became friends with the barista and had another adult conversation. So as long as I had a couple of face to face interactions every day, I was okay, but I think without that, I would have definitely really found it incredibly challenging.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

Yeah, definitely. It's just bringing back a flood of memories really.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yeah. Our poor friends in Melbourne. Yeah. I really feel for them.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

Yeah, absolutely. So, tell us a bit about your philanthropic activity.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Oh, look you know, I was actually talking about this the other day with someone. It was interesting because I think for a very long time, I've always been a bit of a sucker for anything to do with children or animals. I've always donated to the Smith Family. I've always sponsored kids with the Smith Family for... Gosh, it must be 20 years now, maybe 25 years, I'm donating regularly and sponsoring children through the Smith Family and the RSPCA because I love animals so I always donated to those things and then World Vision as well, just because that was always a personal thing. But I hadn't really done much more than give money to be honest with you.

**Kylie Sprott:**

And I had this very interesting moment where the penny really dropped for me because I grew up in a family with two boys. I was the middle child between two brothers. So, I was probably a bit of a tomboy really, so I didn't really understand when women were putting their hands up and saying, "I am finding this really hard. I'm not getting the opportunities." So, I didn't really understand what they were talking about. I just think it's not that hard, just give it a crack. Really, you need to try a bit harder or put your hand up properly and ask for things. So, I didn't really understand what they were talking about, to be honest with you. And I worked in this company where we actually had some projects that were in developing nations and we, as an executive team, went to Papua New Guinea, once to see an education program that we'd sponsored.

**Kylie Sprott:**

And so because we were the visiting dignitaries, they put us right down the front of this particular program which felt a bit silly because we'd never met any of these people so I don't know why we were special enough to be down the front. And I was sort of towards the centre because I was the only woman in the executive team as usual and I didn't think anything of it, just it didn't seem weird to me. And anyway, there were probably about a hundred students, 80 to a 100 students. Most of those would have been women and most of them had their children with them and the other, say 15 to 20%, were disabled men or really elderly men. And they said to them, "We're just going to choose six of you to stand up and tell our visitors here what you got out of this particular program."

**Kylie Sprott:**

And this woman stood up and she had her daughter with her and she said, "I'm very grateful for doing this training because it's the first training I've ever had in my life. And I learned that it's not okay for my husband to hit me every night." And to be honest with you, even now, when I think about it, just makes me feel incredibly ill to my stomach and I remember looking at her and the shame that swept over her face and her head went down, her daughter's head went down and all the women's heads went down, all the children's heads went down, and I realised every single one of them was having this domestic violence issue every single night. And that was such an epiphany for me because really, I was no better than these women. I just happened to be born in a different



country and different coloured skin. And not to say we don't have domestic violence in Australia, because we do, but I'd never encountered anything like that because purely, the virtue of where I'd been born in my family.

**Kylie Sprott:**

And there's nothing to do with me being anything special. It was literally the fact that we had these different circumstances as to which country we'd grown up in. So, I realised at that point, there was no point in them putting their hand up and asking for opportunities because it just wasn't going to come to them. So it was a really strong epiphany for me that if you are fortunate enough to find yourself in a good position where you have influence and you have a voice, then it's really important to use that voice. And so that was a really, a bit of a turning point for me. And at that point, I decided to definitely start to get more involved in projects where I could actually make a bit of a difference. And as much as I'm very proud of the work I've done from a corporate perspective, I think there's a different degree of satisfaction that comes from making a difference in someone's life in a personal way through some of those different efforts.

**Kylie Sprott:**

And so, as a result from that, I've really been passionate about taking opportunities when they've come my way. So, the Smith Family approached me about being the leader of The Corporate Champions, and that was a great boost to me. I was really proud to be associated and I thought it was funny at the time because I thought that it was because I'd been a sponsor for so long that they kind of did some profiling exercise with their sponsors, but it was because they saw me speak at something, which was very flattering and so very happy to... I sometimes get to MC their events and I get to go and speak to their graduates. But one of the best things of all is that, as I said, I've sponsored children through the Smith Family for very long time, but I got to actually, through having a deeper association with them, become a mentor to a university student who was the first person in her family to go to university and the wonderful Indie.

**Kylie Sprott:**

And I have to say that's probably one of the proudest things for me was because I got to actually see her and talk to her and to have a face to face relationship with her rather than just giving money to a faceless student. And that was a huge thing for me and I'm so proud of her. She's graduated. She's now doing really well in her corporate job and she's really become a member of our family. To be honest with you, I think of her as another one of my family, so she knows my mum, she knows my brother, she knows my kids really well. She sometimes stays at our house and looks after my kids. So, she's a beautiful person and that's really comes from the relationship with the Smith Family.

**Kylie Sprott:**

So, I was also asked to be the ambassador for Rainbow House Iligan, which is an orphanage in the Philippines. And the founder of that orphanage, again, just an ordinary guy who was asked to go there and help rebuild some buildings after a typhoon hit. And anyway, when they were doing some of these buildings, he noticed these young children wandering around with no clothes on just with no one looking after them and it turned out their parents had been swept away in this typhoon. They were two and three and he just saw this. Someone has to do something about this. And so, he built an orphanage to house some of those children, and again, they've all gone on to have a great education and they're now giving back to their community all the time. So just really proud to be associated with that. And the other one... There's two more. Sorry, I feel like I'm talking a long time here.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

No. That's okay.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Of course, the Oranges Toolkit, I'm a non-executive director with them and they're associated with Camp Quality. And I love the work that they do because it's all about building resilience and optimism in corporates and sporting teams and all sorts of different ways with people, but all the

profits from the Oranges Toolkit get reverted back to Camp Quality, which is of course, for children who are very ill with cancer so that's fantastic. But my most recent one that I'm very pleased to get involved in is with Willow International. So, a very good friend of mine in the US is on their board and they're an anti-trafficking organisation. They focus on globally making sure that this stops in terms of slavery and trafficking for young women and children. And so they've asked me to be the ambassador for Australia so it's right in my sweet spot and it has to do with women and children, and it's all about education and making sure they have a different life.

**Kylie Sprott:**

So, all of those things are very, I think, very fulfilling from my perspective and something that I think is interesting is that it's all about modelling, I think, with your children. And I'm so proud of my daughter, because she is now actually volunteering for the Smith Family and she does this reader to reader program every Monday and Tuesday afternoon where she helps a young child with their reading. And you can't see them again, it's all over the internet with the using the PC, but it's just wonderful to see her also starting to give back and I feel very pleased that she's obviously seen what I do and thinks it's normal so that she's setting up a really good start in the philanthropy space as well, which is really pleasing.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

That's really nice to hear, isn't it?

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yeah. I'm very proud of her. I'm proud of both of them actually. They're both wonderful.

**Deb Anderson:**

So how did you get experience in Ecuador? How did it come about?

**Kylie Sprott:**

That was actually with an acquisition with a company that I was working in. I actually wasn't involved in the due diligence of that one, but I was involved in the integration of that business. I have to say, I thought the people there were just fantastic. They were just lovely. Unfortunately, the acquisition didn't work out so well. It was actually a really great example of cultural differences. So as you may be aware in Ecuador, sometimes things aren't always done in the same way that we would do things and that didn't strangely enough come out in the due diligence so unfortunately, yeah, that ended up being a bit of a disaster because it's allegations of fraud there and bribery. So, it was interesting because you can stumble into those countries without fully understanding exactly what you're getting yourself into. And I think that phrase "Business as usual" perhaps is a little bit dangerous, particularly in that scenario.

**Kylie Sprott:**

But I have to say that my visits there were very enjoyable. And one of the things that I remember quite fondly is that myself and a colleague were going to the airport there and there were supposed to be a driver to pick us up. And our other colleague who is... He's actually Colombian. He was waiting for us at the hotel and he'd organised this driver and I'm quite tall and I've got pale skin and there was no sign of the driver at the airport. So, I was just standing outside, looking around, trying to see where this driver was. And my colleague had gone off to try and see if we could call our other friend. And anyway, there was just this sort of group of people started circling around me as if I was from outer space because I look so different to them. I was probably twice their size.

**Kylie Sprott:**

They're really tiny and they all had dark hair and dark skin, dark eyes and I just looked like a complete outsider, which I guess I was. But it did feel a little bit disconcerting because I looked so different and I felt really, really... What's the word? Out of place. But it was funny from my perspective, because of course, being Australians, we just went, "Oh, it's okay. We'll just jump in a cab." So we jumped in the cab. We finally got to speak to our friend from Columbia who was running the hotel, who had kittens when he knew we'd just jumped in a cab and not with the driver that was supposed to be waiting for us. And then to make it worse, the cab driver just abruptly stopped while

we were talking to Edgar. And I think he thought we were going to get kidnapped or something would happen.

**Kylie Sprott:**

And anyway, what happened was just happened to be an accident just ahead of us and it was one of the cab driver's friends so he jumped out to make sure he was okay, came back to us. There was no drama. We got to the hotel. Everything was fine. But I think there is obviously quite a bit of danger there, so you have to be very careful, but I had a lovely time. I really enjoyed getting to know those people and it was just a bit of a shame how it all worked out in the end. Yeah. It's some good lesson about due diligence.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

So, with going through so many DD's, what's your sort of top three tips to make them come off really well?

**Kylie Sprott:**

I think the people, it is the first tip is I think really being very, very clear about that culture piece, because unless you're going to keep them as completely separate entities under an umbrella, then that's really critical. But even in that scenario, you really need to make sure there's a good fit in terms of the executive and board with the people that are coming into the organisation, the senior people. So, I think that's number one. Number two would be, make sure you have a really good look under the hood in terms of the technology, just because of, again, I've seen it cost millions of dollars that wasn't planned for in terms of trying to then get them up to a certain standard.

**Kylie Sprott:**

And I think the third one is to talk a lot about the integration during the deal and talk a lot about what's coming so that there are no surprises. I think it's really disappointing when there are surprises on both sides and just eroding that trust is always going to have problems. So, I think if you can build the trust by being really transparent and having no surprises at all, I think that really helps a lot.

**Deb Anderson:**

So, Kylie, you wrote an article, I think it's on your website, Perfectionism, Procrastination and the Power of the Pomodoro.

**Kylie Sprott:**

A little bit of alliteration there.

**Deb Anderson:**

What inspired you to write that article?

**Kylie Sprott:**

Oh, well, at the time, I was coaching this chief technology officer and he and I were talking about how perfectionism can be quite crippling and I certainly have perfectionist tendencies and he said that... Basically, we talked about the whole idea that often, perfectionists so busy trying to see what the end result looks like in their head, that they can't quite start until they know exactly how it will be perfect and also this fear of it not being perfect means they don't quite start, so often, they will have these ideas or projects that don't actually get completed or they don't actually start and it has this kind of cycle, which makes it worse because you keep procrastinating because you can't see how it's going to be perfect. So, you get into this terrible cycle where you actually start to doubt yourself and you find it harder to get things done.

**Kylie Sprott:**

And we were talking about this Pomodoro Technique, which is often used by software developers, which is all about sprints effectively and about removing distractions. And the Pomodoro is actually

Italian for tomato. So, you might remember long time ago in kitchens, it was quite fashionable to have those little tomato egg timers.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yeah. Our mums probably have them. And anyway, so the Pomodoro is about the egg timer and effectively, what you do is for 25 minutes, you set a timer. You remove all distractions, so you remove your phone. You don't answer any phones. You don't answer texts. You don't look at emails. You just do one task. And it's really powerful because in a way, you're tricking yourself because you got 25 minutes. That's no big deal. I can do 25 minutes. Whereas, if I said to you, "You're going to sit down now and do six hours of work on this particular piece of work." Most people feel a little intimidated by that.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Whereas, with 25 minutes, you're just saying, "Okay, just 25 minutes of your time and just focus on one thing." And what happens is because you're just focused on one thing, you don't have these other distractions which are making it harder for you to get things done. It's amazing what you can get done at 25 minutes and often what happens, it kind of tricks you into a state of flow and because you get so focused, you start to really enjoy it and you lose track of time. But when the buzzer goes off or the egg timer goes off at 25 minutes, then you're supposed to have a five-minute break and that's considered to be one sprint. And so, you go through this kind of process of seeing how many sprints you can do in a day, which are really focused pieces of work.

**Kylie Sprott:**

So if you need to do something, which is really painful, let's say it was a tax return or it was doing some kind of report that you weren't particularly interested in, it's a really good technique because it makes you start and because it's only 25 minutes, most people go, "Okay, I can handle that." Next thing you know, you've gone through a really difficult piece of work and you've done it in these little sprints. But often what happens is after you've done... I usually find after two or three sprints, I don't want to have the break. I just want to keep going because you're in that state of flow. So, it's a really powerful technique. And I've spoken about it at conferences and I've written the article and talked about even with people I work with now, and it's just a really good way to help you stay focused.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Because generally what happens, and I don't know about you, but the phone can be your friend, but can also be your worst enemy because you feel compelled to check out Instagram or Facebook or LinkedIn and you want to see the news, see what's going on and then next thing you know, you've lost an hour. And when you're really busy an hour is gold, right? You can't really afford to waste your time. So, I just think it's a really good way to keep you focused on what's actually important in the day. And I don't know about you, but I had that little screen time app going on my phone which tells me at the end of every week exactly what my screen time is and my goal is to keep on reducing it every week. And so far, I'm tracking really well and a lot of that is using the Pomodoro to make sure I don't get distracted with the phone.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yeah. It's all about keeping disciplined and focused. And as a perfectionist, you then actually have... You start, it's probably the right way of putting it, rather than getting kind of caught up in trying to figure out what the end is, you just do little chunks and next thing you know, it's done.

**Deb Anderson:**

Great advice.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

Yeah, absolutely. I think we'll be using that one.

**Deb Anderson:**

We will adopt that one.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yeah. You can even use it with things like housework and also, I've used it for everything under the sun. It's really amazing. It's just tricking your brain.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

Yeah, definitely. I do you use something similar for housework. I always ring my sister and I go, "Okay, now we're going to start in the kitchen and then we're going to start, go to the lounge room and now we're going to go to the bedroom."

**Kylie Sprott:**

Oh really?

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

And so, we stay on speaker and wander through the house together because then we're like... She does her housework. I do my housework and yeah.

**Kylie Sprott:**

That's fantastic. I love it. I often play music too.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Yeah. That's the thing. It distracts me.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

So is there anything you want to leave our listeners with today, Kylie, before we wrap up or...

**Kylie Sprott:**

I just want to say thank you so much for the opportunity and I'm really grateful that you allowed me to talk about QANTM, but also the other organisations I work with. I probably should give a quick plug also to position partners that I'm on their non-executive director board with and also Queensland Futures Institute. I'm also their ambassador. I forgot about that. So Queensland Futures Institute is actually a body which brings together the top universities and also all the politicians and government representatives as well as large corporates together to really try to shape Queensland to be a better place, so very pleased to be their ambassador as well. But yeah, position partners have been on their board for probably, gosh, it must be five years now. I'm very proud of them. They're an amazing organisation which does very, very good work and they're run very well.

**Kylie Sprott:**

They have a great CEO and a great executive team there and a great chair. But thank you so much for letting me talk about all the things I'm passionate about because it's nice to have someone interested in what you're doing and your life's work so thank you very much.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

Absolutely.

**Deb Anderson:**

Truly inspiring. Thank you, Kylie.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Thank you.

**Ainslie Cunningham:**

Yes. Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure to have you on our show.

**Kylie Sprott:**

Thank you very much.

**Outro:**

That's all for today. Until next time, happy podcasting. And remember if you're enjoying the show, check out our other episodes and all things governance at [www.3ysowls.com.au](http://www.3ysowls.com.au).