DRIVING PERFORMANCE THROUGH DIVERSITY

Understanding the reasons that diversity and inclusion are critical in business.

By Sally Queitzsch
Diversity & Inclusion Specialist
Johnston & Goldsmith

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE:

A DISCUSSION OF THE FACTORS THAT HOLD US BACK
AND HOW WE CAN CREATE A PATH TOWARDS CHANGE

What are the current experiences of diverse groups in Australian workplaces, and how do the concepts of fairness, change and difference matter to society and the economy at all levels?

This ThinkPaper examines why diversity and inclusion is important in the workplace and what challenges can pop up on an organisation's 'D&I journey'. It offers insights into best practice diversity and inclusion thinking and snapshots some exciting trends and changes in Australia in this space.

Diversity and Inclusion is imperative in business because businesses cannot sustain themselves independent of the challenges their employees and customers face. It is imperative for industry and organisations because diverse people and inclusive practices offer competitive advantage and improved performance; but understanding why diversity and inclusion (D&I) is important requires us to articulate the macro forces that shape our workplace behaviour and performance. It requires us to examine our very personal feelings about change, power and opportunity.

Australian society

No one could argue against the notion that Australia is a society with a "have a fair go" culture of fairness[1]. A dominant modern identity includes part world war comradery, part dusty work horse and spots of cricket, laid-back dismissiveness and larrikinism. Carried in this glossy identity however are a plethora of social and political privileges. Fairness doesn't always translate into the experience of everyone, least of all minority or marginalised groups that struggle for acknowledgement, rights and access to opportunity.

Indigenous Australians bear a disproportionate amount of disadvantage in terms of education and employment opportunities and health, translating to reduced life span[2]. Barriers (racism) for Indigenous Australians can begin on public transport on the way to an interview, at the interview, from colleagues at work, from customers, from managers and more[3], resulting in getting passed over for opportunities and feelings of not being welcome and hard work not being recognised. In 2012 in Australia it was recorded that 18.5%[4] of the population had a disability and for this sizable portion of Australians, the main issue at work was not ability, but access to opportunity, negative attitudes and misconceptions[5]. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people struggle to exist in company

data and therefore have their existence recognised or experiences acknowledged, yet population surveys have shown that 15-43% of gay and transgender employees have experienced some form of bullying, harassment or discrimination in the workplace[6].

IN AUSTRALIA IN NOVEMBER 2014
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than men

Women's (aged 20-74) labour force participation was more than thirteen points lower than men's in 2013-2014[7]. This is impacted by a disproportionate burden of care for children, elderly parents and/or relatives with a disability[8]. Women with both children and parents to care for have been coined sandwich generation women[9]. But it is not just family life or inflexible work structures impacting women's participation. Gender stereotypes about men's and women's work held by parents, teachers, peers and society greatly influence the subject choices and careers young women in Australia "choose" or are funnelled into[10]. Once into work, this entrenched diversion, combined with the devaluing of work in highly feminised industries and an obvious stroke of workplace discrimination, is contributing to a growing gender pay gap. In Australia in November 2014, women were paid on average 18.8% less than men[11]. In all industries combined, the gap is most prevalent at manager level at 28.9%[12]. Adding to these barriers and disincentives for women, we know sits higher time stress[13], a heavier (than men) load of household work[14], more experiences of sexual harassment (14.8% of women compared to 6.6% of men in 2012[15]) and continued discrepancies in leadership opportunities and top positions[16].

Busting the myth of fairness and supposed cultural support for "the underdog" means dismantling the myth of meritocracy. Persistent beliefs include that "only the best person for the job wins positions here". This is underpinned by a belief that if no diverse people applied then there aren't enough with talent or they simply don't want your roles (an alternative may be rethinking your definition of fair as it applies to recruitment and promotion). It is understandably comfortable and reassuring to assume people are given the same opportunities in our businesses, or that changing stereotypes should be beyond the agenda and scope of business. Embracing diversity is good for future societies and business because it bridges the gap between the inherent privilege of a dominant Australian myth and identity, and the reality. These social identities and gaps play out in our workplaces and bring all challenges with them. Productive diversity offers an improvement and expansion of our identity in the global citizenry and marketplace.

The Australian economy

It is no secret that we have an aging workforce[17] co-occurring with steady youth unemployment. In January 2014, 12.4% of Australian youth aged 15-24 were unemployed compared to 6.0% for people aged 15-64[18]. The underemployment of women (working in low paid, part time or casual work) and migrants (for example having to retrain as our systems don't often recognise overseas qualifications) and the casualisation of the workforce also has economic impacts, costing Australia in unrealised productivity[19]. A paper by Ernst and Young in 2013 estimated that if the burden on the government purse of women's lower superannuation (due to time out of the workforce) was reduced by 10% it could conservatively save $2 billion per annum today and $8 billion per annum in 2050[20]. Goldman Sachs and JBWere suggest boosting female labour force capacity could produce lower average interest rates over the course of the economic cycle and boost GDP significantly[21]. No organisation or family lives in a vacuum on the periphery of these forces and understanding our place and role in it is only a first step towards becoming an employer that addresses or plays competitively into the needs of the local economy.

Industry

Each industry has its own quirks, sub-cultures and challenges, but let's take a look at the toughest

environments. When we look at gender diversity and specifically women's participation, the finance sector has 57.02% women, yet one of the largest pay gaps at 37.83%[22]. Gender diversity in mining sat at 14.7% in 2014 but this includes highly feminised clerical and sales roles[23]. Construction also offers fantastic rewarding work for women but no child care is available to allow mothers to work the common 6am shift and cultures in the industry have been strongly resistant to gender, cultural and sexual identity difference[24]. Electricians are the largest trade group in Australia, though with only 1.3% of them identifying as female in 2011, government support soon followed to work with employers to harness the benefits[25]. Mining, resources, technology and construction in Queensland have shown commitment to increasing the number of women, engaging in high profile awards programs[26], conferences that target the retention of women in engineering study[27] and mentoring[28]. Understanding D&I trends and issues at an industry level helps to isolate relevant learnings that can be shared and what change industry leaders are driving.

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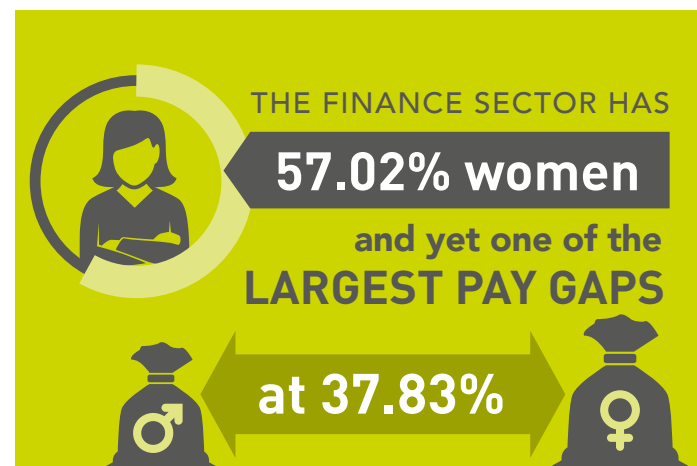
The organisation

From diverse workforces, business gains clear performance benefits; higher morale, improved public image, more satisfied customers, more creative problem solving, reduced turnover and intent to leave, less absenteeism, and increased sales, marketshare and exports[29 30 31 32]. Boards with gender diversity have been shown to produce more innovation[33], higher financial performance[34] and more transparent and accurate financial reports[35]. Of further interest to shareholders, customers, governments, local and global communities and employees is a company's triple bottom line. More

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YOUR ORGANISATION. IMPROVED.

ONLY 7 OF THE TOP 200 COMPANIES are headed by a woman

&

22% of ASX200 company directors are culturally diverse

closes the gap between the organisation and the community or customer it serves. By mirroring the difference within the community D&I improves not only public image but also service quality through an improved ability to understand what is valuable to customers.

Rather than recruiting for difference alone, what is required is the freedom to be diverse and present diverse thought that translates into company benefits and benefits for all employees. Companies that invest in reducing discrimination and the effects of stereotyping, and embracing diversity and difference, are ensuring innovation performance and potential is readily available.

The person

The health, wellbeing and engagement of all groups and individuals is critical to a high performing organisation. It's also a legislated responsibility of any employer.

Health, wellbeing and opportunity of a diverse employee

Non-inclusive workplaces are known to have particularly significant impacts on diverse individuals, not least of all for feelings of isolation and stigma[42][43]. This results in homogenisation of behaviour, or what some call "covering"[44], hiding aspects of your personal self that denote differences to the dominant culture. One third of gay staff who undertook the Australia-wide Same Same Gay and Lesbian Census in 2008 reported that they conceal their sexual orientation from their employers and co-workers[45]. Feeling well and feeling safe at work is important because no one in a toxic or unsafe environment can thrive or innovate. A workplace that acknowledges a person's sporting or health commitments, difficulties at home, caring responsibilities or disabilities, will allow employees to "bring all of themselves to work". Even highly successful Harvard graduates can have unique definitions of success that position work as balanced with personal aspirations[46]. This fosters feelings of respect, safety, acceptance and more that translate into loyalty. As a very clear example of the health of women at work, a business is directly impacted by women who cannot present to work for having experienced domestic violence, and a manager's response to the need for leave could be central to her gaining access to support services[47], and ability to return to work sooner or decision to disclose. This issue costs

diverse workplaces result in better social responsibility performance and stemming from that, reputation[36].

Yet only 7 of the top 200 companies are headed by a woman CEO[37] and 22.2% of ASX200 company directors are culturally diverse[38]. Role modelling and visibility of difference at leadership levels is critical to driving D&I change because it reinforces for a diverse talent pipeline that the company values diversity and success is possible; "if they can see it they can be it". For all leaders though, demonstrating their commitment to D&I and innovation concepts and agendas is paramount for change.

It is in the organisation and the people who work there where social norms, economic forces and industry challenges are made manifest and fought. Constructed gender norms influence the way we think about leaders, how we construe and appraise ability[39], penalise female leaders' assertiveness[40] and therefore recruit for leaders. Our perceptions (stereotypes) also influence how employers pay. In a first-of-its-kind study by the University of Melbourne in 2015, lesbian women were found to be paid up to 13% more than heterosexual women by employers, because employers had perceived lesbian employees would be more productive and less likely to be out of the workforce caring for children[41].

One of the underpinning reasons D&I is important and beneficial for an organisation is *difference*. The representation of diverse employees in a workforce

between an estimated $2.7 billion to $3.2 billion to the Queensland economy[48].

Health, wellbeing and opportunity of men

Considering men through the prism of diversity can also paint an alarming picture. Male-dominated workplaces such as construction (which struggles with high rates of suicide and depression[49]) and community safety such as police and ambulance (which has high exposure to risk and trauma[50]) are looking to gender health and wellbeing activities and D&I to build risk aversion, resilience, diffuse conflict and offset common male coping systems (silence).

If women's labour force participation is to be unlocked in the coming decades, and the burden of care and domestic life is to be shared, male partners and fathers play a central role. Men need flexibility too. Research by Diversity Council Australia focussed on this in 2012, showing that having the flexibility to manage family and personal life was one of the five most highly valued job characteristics for men, and for young fathers it was the third highest[51]. Men's ability to work flexibly allows them to follow personal priorities, be active fathers and achieve greater psychological wellbeing[52]. But, like women, "men" are not a homogenous group, they are all varieties of incomes, locations, skills, interests, attitudes, sexualities, spiritualties, cultures and ages. Digging deeper and collecting robust employee data may reveal a pay gap between gay men and heterosexual men, for example, as was also uncovered by University of Melbourne in 2015[53]. In the broad spectrum that is gender diversity, men also need targeted strategies that address issues for them, their working partners and their colleagues.
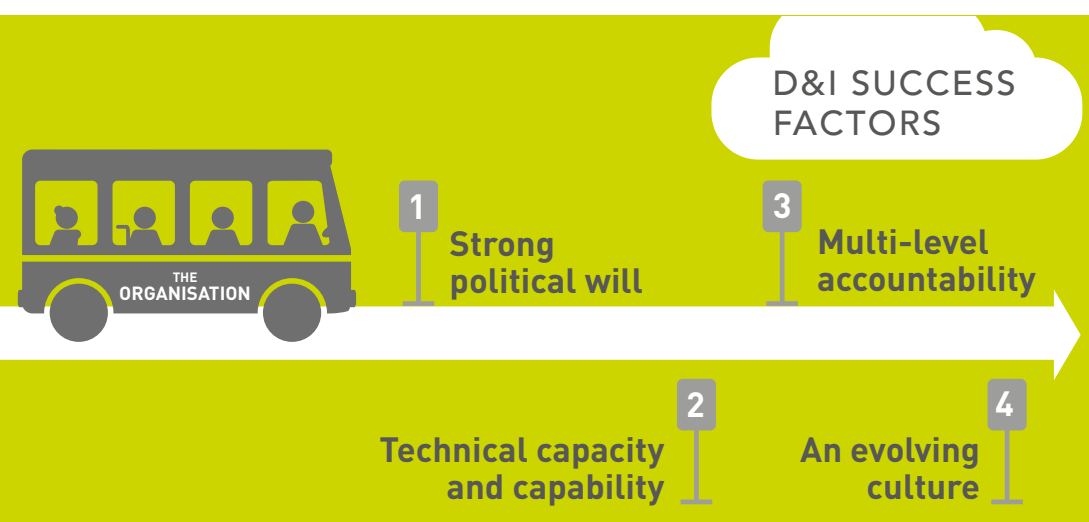
The path forward

While inclusion of wealth of diversity can seem challenging, there is a science to embedding strong and sustainable D&I practice in organisations. There are four critical elements to the successful implementation of a diversity strategy. The list below builds on the work[54] of an organisation called InterAction, who support over 160 US based humanitarian non-government organisations in this area:

Muster political will – Successful D&I requires clear top down support, and for all parts of the organisation to be in agreement about necessary change. Like branches from a tree, the following three elements can grow from an organisation's political will.

Build or buy technical capacity and capability – The organisation's readiness for D&I can be assessed by the availability of policies, structures, tools, resources, expertise and capital. To accelerate the successful impact of your D&I strategy, get your data, policies and processes in order through leveraging people with the right knowledge and expertise in designing and implementing D&I interventions.

Ensure accountability – Where the organisation 'walks the talk' with integrity, and there is no say-do gap, D&I interventions will have an impact. There is no silver bullet for D&I, and one off solutions don't create long term change. Rolling out unconscious bias training won't fix structural barriers to diverse employees' participation. Engaging the organisation so that individuals at every level feel personally accountable for making the new world different is critical to the success of D&I strategies.

Shift the organisational culture – The informal beliefs and codes of the organisation provide a scaffold for change. Good D&I approaches foster supportive cultures where diverse people are encouraged to participate in a range of meaningful, targeted opportunities (such as technical roles and leadership), and the organisation addresses the indicators that limit participation (such as unhelpful attitudes). The end result should be a culture that values welcomeness, trust and fairness (shared power).

D&I SUCCESS FACTORS

THE ORGANISATION

1 Strong political will

2 Technical capacity and capability

3 Multi-level accountability

4 An evolving culture

Preventing D&I resistance

This domain is all about education and sharing power. First it must be uncovered what investment the most resistant groups and individuals have in maintaining 'the way things are done around here'. Changing the hearts and minds of individuals is the bread and butter of the psychology, workforce engagement and change management fields. All of these domains position individuals as priority stakeholders in the implementation of change. So what are resistant people investing their time and energy in?

People overtly (eg verbally challenging change, "Where is the research that proves women will use our sports club if we put in toilets for them?") and implicitly (such as not showing up for meetings and workshops on D&I) resist change when there is a shift in power, expertise or threats to resource allocations. Shifting these mindsets about access to power is done, by firstly education (about social, economic, organisational and person-level challenges to improving D&I, all discussed above), secondly empowerment; handing over a piece of the D&I pie that most engages them. The greatest change agents can often be borne from sharing power with resistant or key individuals. The Australian Centre for Social Innovation calls this co-design[55], where stakeholders share the design of how the change will look like for them, when it will happen, and who will benefit (tip: make sure there's something for everyone). Change must be for everyone in the business, lest the organisation end up with an unbalanced strategy or resistant pockets of disgruntled employees from not being included on the journey.

Parting thoughts.

The D&I journey may seem like a treacherous path for some managers. D&I change confronts people's beliefs and desires on many levels; what it means to be Australian, be successful at work, be male or female, or what we want for our daughters and sons. Now is an exciting time for organisations as they embrace D&I, particularly in traditional or male-dominated workforces. National conversations in Australia on D&I are getting courageous and lively. There are many case studies available that show D&I award-winning work underway in Australia and in shifting persistent issues for companies with the toughest issues[56]. Some of the best trends in D&I include where organisations are reaching beyond embracing flexibility, to offering progressive leave arrangements (domestic violence leave[57][58], leave for fathers[59] and people caring for elderly dependents, or donated leave for sick colleagues[60]). Others are blazing ahead with caring responsibilities being proudly visible via onsite creches[61], or via free local childcare for employees[62]. Some are experiencing a slow pace of change and are calling for positive discrimination[63] or employing the use of quotas[64][65] (tip: best if developed by the company, for the company), to support change where targets aren't shifting beyond natural growth. All of these progressive organisations have one thing in common, they flexibly harness the differences of the societies they serve and employ, they create space for employees to bring all of themselves to work and they have the confidence to do so because they have a clear vision of why it is important.

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About the author:

Sally Queitzsch is Johnston & Goldsmith's Diversity and Inclusion Specialist. Sally holds 10 years of experience delivering innovative and cutting edge workforce attraction, retention and development programs. She is a seasoned social policy analyst and has a passion for improving diversity participation using corporate collaboration, media strategies, research and early invention strategies.

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Connect with us:

Contact us for a confidential discussion to maximise the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce:

Fleur Johnston, Managing Director

t: +61 7 3844 0124

m: +61 0423 632 000

e: fjohnston@johnstongoldsmith.com.au