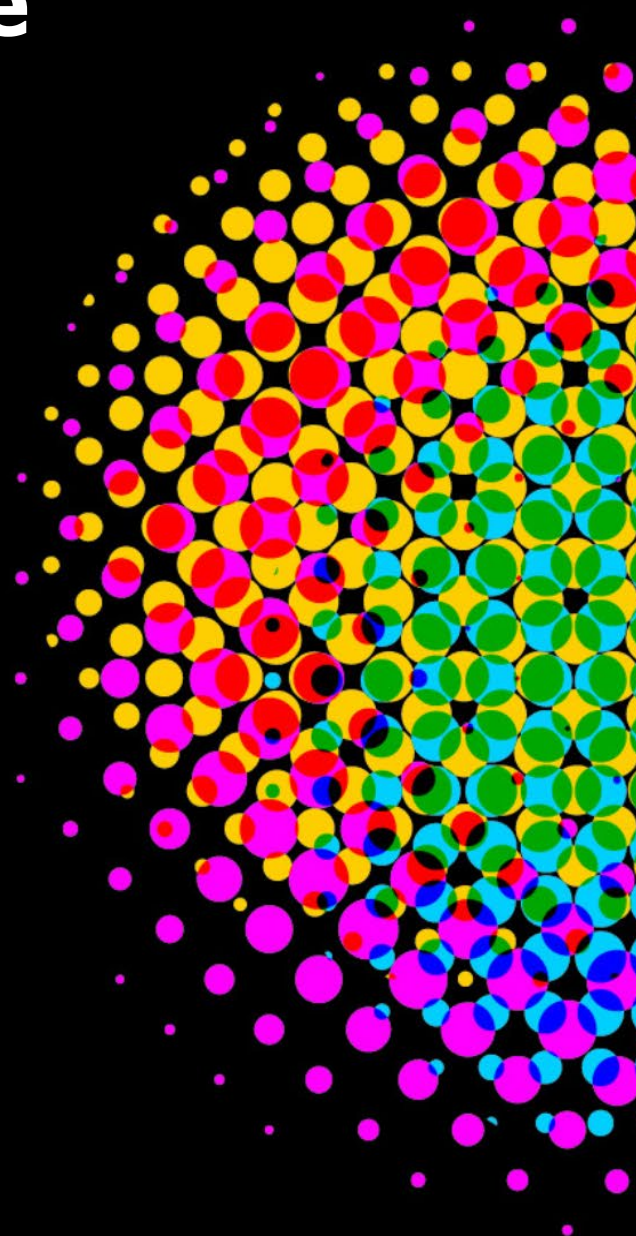# Navigating Australia's DEI Landscape for Impact and Sustainable Change

Australian HR Institute
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Futures Paper

October 2023

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About the Australian Human Resources Institute

The Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) is the professional body for Human Resource (HR) professionals in Australia.

AHRI sets HR standards of practice and certifies HR professionals across Australia against the internationally benchmarked Australian HR Capability Framework. AHRI also supports continuous professional development for HR professionals and line managers through formal and informal learning opportunities.

AHRI develops, collates and disseminates national and global insights on people, workplaces and business, and undertakes and supports specialist research. AHRI also provides its members with practical HR tools and advice to help them solve current workplace issues and prepare for the future, and brings together a community of committed, expert and supportive HR professionals.

About the AHRI Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Advisory Panel

AHRI's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Advisory Panel provides AHRI with strategic and expert advice on diversity, equity and inclusion practice in organisations, including policy direction, tools and resources, as well as the professional development and advancement of diversity professionals.

The Panel provides specialist knowledge to support AHRI in the development and maintenance of the Australian HR Capability Framework, AHRI's professional Certification programs and other learning tools and activities.

The members of AHRI's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Advisory Panel are:

- Dr Michelle Phipps FPCHR (Chair and AHRI Director)
- Rhonda Brighton-Hall FCPHR
- Liz Griffin FCPHR
- Fiona Krautil CPHR
- Mathew Paine CPHR
- Roman Ruzbacky MAHRI
- Barbara Sheehy MAHRI

Panel members current as at 1 October 2023.

Acknowledgement of Country

AHRI and the contributors to this paper wish to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this nation, who hold strong cultural wisdom and knowledges throughout these lands. We acknowledge the enduring spirit of Elders past, present and future generations.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of diverse lands, waterways and skies on which we gather, learn and live. We respect the profound resilience of the oldest continuous cultures on earth, with a deep spiritual connection to Country and our shared history upon it.

A relationship grows in positivity and strength when grounded in a foundation of truth and when we walk together with courage.

Contents

1. Foreword

The opportunity has never been greater for the diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) agenda to drive and sustain positive cultural change in Australian workplaces. Employers and leaders are prioritising DEI as they better understand the business and ethical benefits of DEI practices, which contribute to ongoing commercial success.

These changes have been accelerated by evolving social movements, growing employee and stakeholder expectations, as well as increasing engagement around DEI. Reflecting on this and understanding that there is a need to expand DEI expertise within workplaces, the employment of DEI specialists and expanded HR roles, has grown sharply.

Together, these drivers have led to improved DEI outcomes.

Recent AHRI research illustrates that DEI needs more focus on people living with disability and different abilities, people who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community and those from varied socio-economic backgrounds. Only a small minority of HR professionals have set employment targets to improve the share of people in their workforce who live with a disability or are neurodiverse, culturally diverse people, people who are LGBTQIA+ and women. And due to its complex nature, outcomes are more challenged when these identities intersect.[1]

Within this complex environment, AHRI's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Advisory Panel has developed this paper to support organisations, DEI specialists and HR professionals to build more productive and inclusive workplaces, and to contribute to the practice of DEI in Australian organisations. AHRI will also use the paper to continue to support ongoing DEI efforts and respond to the challenges ahead.

We commend this paper to leaders who wish to advance their understanding of DEI issues and practice in their workplaces, and DEI specialists and HR professionals who wish to confirm and challenge their own practice of DEI, to embed sustainable change in their organisations.

Sarah McCann-Bartlett
Chief Executive Officer AHRI

Dr Michelle Phipps
Chair AHRI Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Panel and AHRI Director

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[1] AHRI's The State of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Australian Workplaces 2023

2. Context, Purpose, Objectives and Outcomes

Context

The World Economic Forum's Centre for the New Economy and Society 2023 research highlights that a growing number of management teams have recognised the importance and urgency of leading DEI conversations within their organisations and taking action to drive DEI progress[2]. It found that this rapid increase in attention to DEI was driven, in part, by the combined impact of movements, evolving consumer expectations, social media, investor attention to environmental, social and governance (ESG) metrics and competition for talent that prioritises DEI, as well as the impact of DEI on team and company performance[3].

Within this global context and as a diverse society with a rich and complex history, Australian workplaces are experiencing a rapidly changing, volatile and sometimes fractious DEI context.

This provides both opportunities and challenges for leaders, DEI specialists and HR professionals in driving the DEI agenda forward in a way that delivers sustainable, positive change for employees, workplaces, society and the economy, while providing agency to those with lived experience.

With DEI becoming a more mainstream indicator of cultural strength, employers, employees and their stakeholders are increasingly demanding more effective DEI programs and outcomes. Within this environment, the practice of DEI requires significant expertise and is now a core capability for HR professionals.

AHRI's *The State of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Australian Workplaces 2023* research shows that there is a clear gap between organisational awareness, intent and capability. The vast majority (84 per cent) of HR professionals say that DEI is critical to the future success of their organisation. However, only half (50 per cent) of HR professionals say that their leaders see DEI as a priority for their organisation, while a similar proportion (49 per cent) of HR professionals also say that their organisation is not placing enough focus on DEI.[4]

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[2] World Economic Forum in collaboration with McKinsey and Company, *Global Parity Alliance: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lighthouses 2023 Insight Report, January* 2023

[3] World Economic Forum in collaboration with McKinsey and Company, *Global Parity Alliance: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lighthouses 2023 Insight Report, January* 2023

[4] AHRI's The State of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Australian Workplaces 2023

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to support AHRI members, DEI specialists and HR professionals to effectively navigate Australia's organisational climate from a DEI perspective. The paper also seeks to enrich our practice in developing comprehensive and sustainable DEI approaches and building inclusive workplace cultures across Australian organisations.

Objectives

a) Define the role of DEI in the current context including the impact of social movements on workplaces, DEI awareness, literacy and capability and the emerging needs of organisations aligned to driving business outcomes

b) Identify critical elements that drive DEI impact including the use of the AHRI DEI Maturity Model as a benchmark tool, the development of sustainable approaches and measurement of impact within an organisational context

c) Explore systemic enablers in building DEI skills and inclusive workplaces including inclusive co-design principles in HR practices, key stakeholder responsibilities and managing polarised views and resistance in workplaces.

Outcomes

Provide DEI specialists and HR professionals with:

a) Insights and concepts to consider the broader global and Australian DEI contexts, and consider the impacts on their organisation including their business strategies

b) Frameworks, tools and resources to build comprehensive and sustainable DEI skills and strategies with impactful practices and measurement to evolve their organisational culture

c) Discussion questions to use with key stakeholders to explore aspirations, current state, priorities, governance and accountability, implementation actions and impact assessment.

Given the evolving nature of DEI standards and contexts over time, AHRI's DEI Advisory Panel will review and evolve the content of this paper on a two-yearly basis, to ensure the most up-to-date DEI contexts and developments are reflected.

We would be delighted to hear from you. If you have feedback or comments on this paper, or ideas for future iterations, please email HRSL@ahri.com.au

3. DEI, Identity and Belonging

Australia is a diverse society with a long and rich history. While it offers many strengths and opportunities and has achieved much, its history also includes exclusion and disadvantage that is not universally understood and has not been fully acknowledged or addressed.

By understanding and acknowledging our multiple and diverse identities, DEI specialists and HR professionals are creating a foundation for their own practice of DEI. This section provides considerations for DEI specialists and HR professionals to support their understanding and application in their own organisations.

a) Identity in Australia

Globally, we all share a common identity - human identity. Noel Pearson in his 2022 ABC Boyer Lecture, *We The Australian People*, stated "…identity is important to all of us and distinction is part of that importance"[5]. However, he reinforced that distinction still informs human prejudice and conflict around the world and that our extraordinary diversity "is undermined when we forget the great similarities and commonalities of our humanity"[6].

Our national identity as Australians is a pivotal commonality. Pearson noted that each of us is unique in our communities of identification, and these may bond us to those close to us, and bridge us to people who would otherwise be strangers. "If the nation is the foundation, then bonds and bridges are built upon this foundation. The unity of the nation depends upon the strength of its bonds and the bridges"[7].

In Monash University's 2019 podcast *Australian identity: What does it mean to you?* Australian identity is described as something that means different things to different people and evolves over time and through generations. Australian identity is diverse, complex and fractured, often comprising contradictions. For example, we see our society as egalitarian and yet significant inequalities continue to exist.[8]

The Australian Cohesion Index 2023, found that while still high by comparison with other developed countries, the sense of national pride and belonging in Australia appears to be declining particularly among young adults and people who are struggling financially. The research identified that connections and belonging within people's neighbourhoods remain strong. "A sense of national identity and belonging is a particularly important indicator of social integration for our newest Australians who have migrated here. This integration is impacted

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[5] Noel Pearson, *We The Australian People*, ABC Boyer Lecture, December 2022.

[6] Noel Pearson, *We The Australian People*, ABC Boyer Lecture, December 2022.

[7] Noel Pearson, *Layered Identities and Peace*, Earth Dialogue, Brisbane Festival, July 2006.

[8] Jacinta Elston, *Australian identity: What does it mean to you?* Episode 11, Monash University January 2019.

by a persistent degree of discrimination and prejudice in Australia – though by the same token is likely enabled by growing recognition and support for multiculturalism and diversity."[9]

b) The complexity of identity

One of the key mistakes in defining identity is viewing it as singular. Singular identity sees people as members of only one group or assumes that people who identify with a specific group are 'all the same'.

Nobel Prize winning economist, Amartya Sen, explored this in his book *Identity and Violence*[10]. Sen acknowledges multiple affiliations or identities, where we have both similarities to and differences from others. This results in the plurality of our complex identities, the diverse implications and the need for an approach to unity that is inclusive[11]. Due to the complexity of our identities, not all our affiliations are known by others. It depends on who we share this with.

Psychologist Daniel Levinson described identity as having three elements[12]:
- The self: how a person perceives themselves
- Personality: how a person is perceived by others
- Life structure: the pattern of a person's life that results from the interaction of self, personality and external world.

These elements are constantly changing as individuals interact with the world around them. DEI specialists and HR professional need to have a robust understanding of intersectionality, considering:

- The complex convergence and overlap of multiple identities
- How we perceive the world and how the world perceives us
- How we experience privilege, oppression, power, and marginalisation.

Strengthening the concept of identity is the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*[13] proclaimed by the United Nations in 1948. In his 2022 book *Advancing Human Rights*, Michael Mintorm states a 'common standard' was created to ensure peoples are acknowledged, their human rights are universally protected, and they are free to live a dignified life, by all peoples and by all nations[14].

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9   Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, Australian Cohesion Index, September 2023.

10 Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York, 2006.

11 Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York, 2006.

12 Daniel J Levinson, *A Conception of Adult Development.* American Psychologist, 41(1), 3–13. 1986.

13 United Nations General Assembly. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).* New York: United Nations General Assembly, 1948.

14 Michael Mintorm, *Advancing Human Rights*, Monash University Publishing, Melbourne, 2022.

As DEI specialists and HR professionals, understanding the complexities of identity and the various legislation and declarations which protect the rights of peoples is critical to informing ethical and legal DEI practices.

c) Identity and belonging

There is a growing awareness of the impact inclusion and identity has on the sense of belonging in workplace cultures. This has been driven by the need to balance inclusion and unity with acknowledging distinctness and the unique contributions of all employees.

Deloitte[15] suggests that creating a sense of belonging in the workplace requires three attributes:

- Comfort: individuals feel they are being treated fairly and respected
- Connection: individuals feel that they have meaningful relationships
- Contribution: individuals feel that they contribute to meaningful outcomes.

Research conducted by BetterUp in 2019[16] found that workplace belonging can lead to an estimated 56 percent increase in job performance, a 50 percent reduction in turnover risk, and a 75 percent decrease in employee sick days. The study found that a single incidence of "micro-exclusion" can lead to an immediate 25 percent decline in an individual's performance on a team project.

Australian DEI specialists and HR professionals play an important role in acknowledging the complexities of identity, understanding the link between belonging and organisational performance, identifying the elements required to foster belonging, and influencing leaders to focus on belonging to balance inclusion and unity, while recognising the unique contributions of all employees.

Summary and Reflection

Complex identities and belonging

- We all share a common identity – human identity
- Identity is not singular – we identify with multiple groups in which we share both similarities and differences with others
- Australian identity is diverse and complex – it means different things to different people and has evolved over time and through generations
- Understanding the complexities of identity, intersectionality and the various legislation and declarations which protect the rights of peoples, is critical to informing ethical and legal DEI practices
- Understanding the link between belonging and organisational performance and identifying the efforts required to foster belonging is essential in balancing inclusion and unity, while recognising the unique contributions of all employees.

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[15] Jeff Schwartz, et., al., Belonging - From comfort to connection to contribution, Deloitte Insights, May 2020.

[16] BetterUp, The value of belonging at work: The business case for investing in workplace inclusion, 2020.

Questions for consideration

- How well does your organisation understand the complexity of identities?
- How does your organisation use quantitative and qualitative data to understand the complex intersection of multiple identities and people's workplace experiences?
- How does your organisation balance inclusion and unity, while acknowledging distinctness and the unique contributions of all your employees?
- What is your current approach to belonging in the workplace?
- How do you measure belonging and what is the impact on employee experience and performance?

4. The Role of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Current Context

There has never been a more rich or volatile context in which to further the DEI agenda. Conversations about DEI are occurring in organisations of every size, across all sectors and industries, and within key stakeholder groups, and the expectations of DEI specialists and HR professionals to deliver effective outcomes from DEI programs are high.

As a result, DEI has become a core capability for HR professionals, and it is critical that DEI specialists and HR professionals are able to navigate the changing context of DEI and effectively apply their understanding and knowledge in their organisations.

a. Social movements and collective actions

The AHRI DEI Advisory Panel has explored some of the significant global and local social movements and collective actions of the last few years, which have had an influence on DEI practices across Australian workplaces. These are shown in the table below.

For example, in light of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, the Australian Human Rights Commission was appointed to undertake a national inquiry into sexual harassment in Australian workplaces. As a result, a series of 'positive duty' guidelines were introduced as part of the Respect@Work agenda in order to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment in workplaces.[17]

DEI specialists and HR professionals are expected to be aware of and knowledgeable about current global and local social movements, to understand how these might affect their employees, organisations and stakeholders, and to provide strategic advice to their leaders and organisations.

Social movements may also have a direct impact on DEI specialists and HR professionals in both their personal and professional lives. Such movements may influence their career aims and aspirations, provide motivation and influence their behaviours, values and ethical attitudes.

The following lists include some of the current social and employment issues DEI specialists and HR professionals need to be aware of and take into account in their DEI practices (note that these lists are not exhaustive).

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[17] Respect@Work: Reforming Australia's workplace sexual harassment laws. Australian Human Rights Institute. https://www.humanrights.unsw.edu.au/students/blogs/reforming-australias-workplace-sexual-harassment-laws. Accessed October 24, 2023.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

- [2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart – Voice, Treaty, Truth](#)
- [2023 Referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice](#)
- [2020 National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#)
- [Increase in Reconciliation Action Plans](#)
- [First Nations incarceration and deaths in custody](#)
- [Bringing them Home Report 1997](#)
- [Land Rights including Mabo Case and The Native Title Act](#)
- [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [Survival Day](#)
- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Framework](#)
- [Aboriginal Cultural Capability Toolkit - Aboriginal Self-Determination](#)

Age

- [Employing and Retaining Older Workers (2023)](#)
- [Age discrimination](#)
- [Understanding the five generations at work](#)
- [Social Responsibility - The Economic Impact of Ageism](#)
- [Human Rights Commission Report into Age Discrimination](#)

Disability

- [Living with disability in Australia](#)
- [Employers' attitudes to hiring people with disability](#)
- [IncludeAbility - closing the workforce participation gap](#)
- [Disability Action Plans](#)
- [Inclusive design - benefits of designing for everyone](#)
- [Key mental health issues](#)
- [Supporting a neurodiverse workforce](#)
- [BCA - Improving Employment Outcomes for People with Disability](#)
- [The Case for Improving Work for People with Disabilities Goes Way Beyond Compliance](#)
- [Enabling Change Getting to Equal 2020: Disability Inclusion](#)
- [Getting To Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage Research Report](#)

Gender Equity

- [Respect@Work](#)
- [How #MeToo is changing Australia](#)
- [New workplace sexual harassment laws](#)
- [Power to create inclusive gender equality in the workplace](#)
- [Gender impact assessments](#)
- [The Economics of Gender Pay Gap](#)
- [Increasing Male Engagement in Gender Equality Efforts](#)
- [Domestic and Family Violence](#)

- [Myth Busting Domestic & Family Violence at Work](#)
- [Workplaces can do better to support women following miscarriage](#)

- Paid parental leave for those who have experienced stillbirth
- Workplace Stigma Around Menopause
- Menopause and the workplace
- Women and girls in STEM
- Families and family composition | Australian Institute of Family Studies

LGBTIQ+
- Intersections at Work: Understanding the Experiences of Culturally Diverse LGBTQ Talent at Work
- Health and Wellbeing of LGBTQA+Young People
- Pride Month
- Being transgender at work
- Transgender Equity in the Workplace
- Supporting gender affirmation in the workplace

Racial Equity
- Black Lives Matter
- Black lives matter to real workplace change
- Racism at Work: How Organisations Can Stand Up to and End Workplace Racism
- Unlocking Leadership - Gender and Race
- Culturally and racially marginalised women in leadership
- Truth be told - no cultural diversity on Australian boards
- Why Culturally & Linguistically Diverse (CALD) has had its day
- Would we be better off without the acronym CALD?
- International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination vs Harmony Day
- Cultural safety
- Measuring and reporting workforce cultural diversity 2021
- Cultural diversity gap in leadership sparks call for targets

Socioeconomic background
- Social Class at Work
- Social class - biggest barrier to career progression

Other Themes
- Inclusion@Work Index 2021-2022
- Shifting Expectations: Flexibility for frontline, shift and site-based roles 2022
- Diversity backlash
- Freedom of Religion and freedom of speech
- Trauma informed approaches
- State of Inclusion and Mental Health in the Australian Workforce
- Identity politics
- Everybody matters - inclusion and equity statement
- The urgency of intersectionality
- Intersectionality - race gender discrimination
- Diversity fatigue - what it is and why it matters

- Diversity Wins
- Benchmarking diversity and inclusion practices Australia

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b. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion awareness, literacy and capability

DEI capability is now an essential capability for the HR profession. The practice of DEI is constantly evolving, which requires a solid foundational knowledge of DEI principles and practices, and ongoing upskilling in DEI principles, practices, cultural and psychological safety, data literacy and intersectionality in order to support the development of contemporary and inclusive strategies and actions, across a range of diversity dimensions.

Emerging changes to DEI practice:

DEI practice
- Re-emergence of equity in diversity and inclusion work
- A stronger focus on belonging
- Importance of lived experiences and voices
- Emerging conversations about exclusion, including racism
- Allyship
- Support with creating inclusive customer/client products and experiences.

Areas of focus
- A broader range of groups or population categories to consider such as socio-economic status/social mobility
- Intersectionality
- Inclusion of psychological safety in workplace safety legislation, policies and practices
- Neurodiversity
- More inclusive parental leave policies
- Hybrid working post COVID considering gender and disability impacts
- Family and Domestic Violence
- Gender affirmation
- More transparent pay equity
- Economic empowerment and security.

Analysis and governance
- Increased diversity data literacy and use of data to inform better decision making
- More robust governance, reporting and accounting
- Board accountability for cultural health and diversity within the workplace.

c. Emerging needs of organisations

There is an increased expectation on organisations by their employees, investors, customers/clients, communities they operate in and prospective employees to demonstrate leadership and accountability in DEI practice. Research shows that investing in DEI practices and programs helps to drive and sustain successful business outcomes.

There are many considerations for organisations, which include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Increased expectations of investors, employees, customers, communities and other stakeholders
- Responding to specific workplace issues as they arise
- Prioritising investment in time, funding, people and programs
- Attraction and retention
- Brand reputation
- The critical role of leaders as enablers
- The specific DEI issues and risks facing their sector or industry
- Authenticity, transparency and honesty in DEI commitment and progress
- Changes to the DEI landscape and practice
- Responding to legislative changes.

Summary and Reflection

Social movements and collective actions

- DEI specialists and HR professionals are expected to be across emerging social movements and collective actions and issues impacting workplaces to provide insights, guidance, and direction.

DEI awareness, literacy and capability

- DEI capability to develop contemporary and inclusive strategies and actions across a range of diversity dimensions is now an essential component of HR's role
- Emerging capability areas include equity, belonging, cultural and psychological safety, diversity data literacy and intersectionality.

Emerging needs of organisations

- There is an increased expectation on organisations by their employees, investors, customers/clients, communities they operate in and prospective employees to demonstrate leadership and accountability in DEI practice, to drive and sustain successful business outcomes.

Questions

- How would you assess your knowledge of current DEI related social movements and collective actions?
- How would you describe your DEI awareness, literacy and capability?
- What are the expectations of your employees, investors, customers/clients, communities you operate in and prospective employees in relation to leadership and accountability in DEI practice?
- How would you assess your organisation's DEI awareness, engagement, capability and accountability?

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5. Critical elements that drive Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Impact

Workplace culture and practices provide the underpinning of diverse, equitable and inclusive organisations.

a. The AHRI Diversity & Inclusion Maturity Model

The AHRI Diversity & Inclusion Maturity Model is two-fold in purpose:
- The model is designed to help DEI specialists and HR professionals engage their leadership and executive teams, explain the business case for DEI, and gain stakeholder buy-in.

- The model also provides DEI specialists and HR professionals with a quick reference guide on how to improve diversity management in their organisation, give them resources to drive change and case studies for benchmarking.

Organisations fall into one of three levels within the Maturity Model. Each level represents the focus and effort organisations are placing on DEI in their organisational strategy.

The Maturity Model demonstrates how organisations can move from compliance to changing mindsets and behaviours to engrained DEI in the organisation's culture, led by leaders and guided by the DEI/HR professional's practices and interventions.

The full model can be found at AHRI Diversity & Inclusion Maturity Model | Australian HR Institute.

Figure 1. AHRI Maturity Model
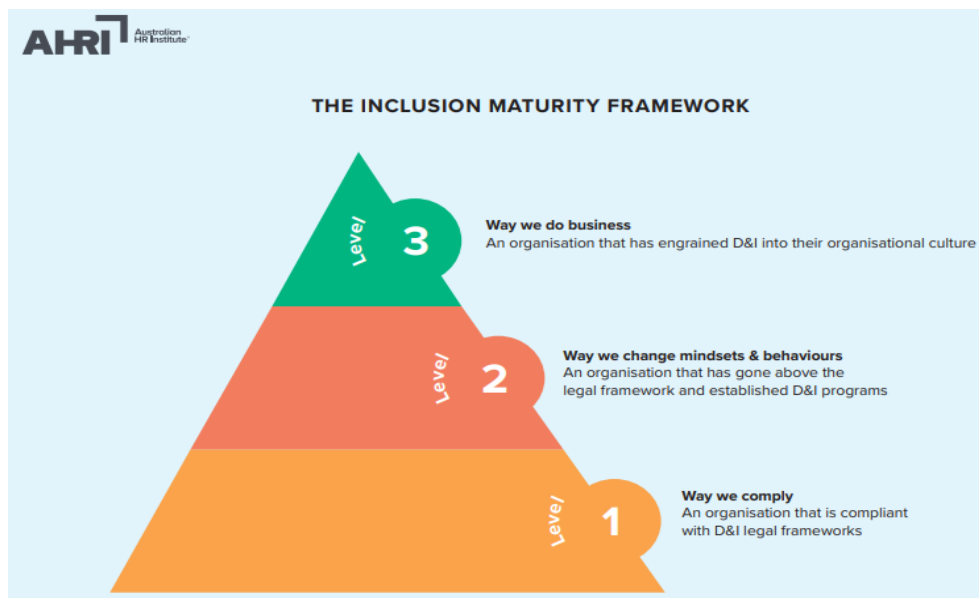
Level One - Way we comply

Level one is the minimum legal requirement for Australian organisations. Level one organisations comply with government-mandated legislation and policy but have yet to implement DEI initiatives beyond the minimum required. However, with commitment, effort and ongoing improvement, legal compliance provides the basis for further development.

Level Two - Way we change mindsets and behaviours

A level two organisation has moved beyond a tick-box approach, gaining leadership commitment and is implementing good governance practices to drive greater DEI. It has established DEI strategies, processes, practices, programs and policies. However, it has yet to unlock the full business benefits that level three organisations enjoy, but is well on its way and, given adequate time and effort, its culture will shift and evolve.

Level Three – Way we do business

A level three organisation has ingrained DEI in the DNA of their organisation and the business impacts are evident. DEI is leader and employee-led, supported by all and is a critical part of its wider operational strategy. Level three organisations become leaders and change-makers, ultimately giving back to the community through advocacy and support for others on the journey.

b. Developing a sustainable Diversity, Equity and Inclusion approach

Achieving sustainable DEI impact requires stepping back to take a data informed, future focused, and systems approach based on a specific context, rather than good intent and rushing to action based on what others are doing.

AHRI's *State of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Australian Workplaces* report states that "…there is an ethical, legal, economic and labour market imperative to creating diverse, equitable and inclusive workplaces in Australia. The pathway to realising this potential lies in leaders, managers and HR professionals working together to transform workplace culture through more deliberate interventions for the good of all Australian employees."[18]

AHRI's Diversity & Inclusion Maturity Model recommends DEI specialists and HR professionals use the following process to develop an approach or to evaluate their current approach:

Define

Using the framework, seek a range of stakeholder input:
- Where are we, where do we want to be and how will we bridge the gap?

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[18] AHRI, The State of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Australian Workplaces, February 2023

- What's our context?
- What are the opportunities or problems we are trying to solve?
- What are the barriers leaders vs stakeholders need to remove to support success?
- What is the current leadership appetite?

Diagnose

Using quantitative/qualitative data and insights, seek a range of stakeholder input:
- What are our strengths?
- What are our weaknesses?
- What are the threats?
- Where are the opportunities?

Design

- Consider your context, challenge the status quo – take a stretch and realistic approach
- Determine your DEI purpose and ensure it is aligned with, and enables the business strategy
- Where relevant, learn from others - explore other organisations' DEI strategies including relevant AHRI DEI award winner case studies
- Identify key overarching goals
- Identify focus areas within each goal
- Identify practical actions
- Determine success measures
- Seek leadership and stakeholder input.

Implementation & Evaluation

- Determine governance approach – roles, accountability, measurement.
- Seek leadership commitment and accountability.
- Develop plan with priorities and practical actions.
- Develop communication approach and leverage storytelling.
- Track progress
- Test and learn, continuous improvement and evaluate.

c. Measuring impact within your organisational context

Diversity Council of Australia's Inclusion@Work 2021-2022 research showed the positive impact that inclusion can have on people and culture, demonstrating that workers in inclusive teams are:
- 4 times less likely to leave their job in the next 12 months
- 10 times more likely to be very satisfied
- 4 times less likely to feel work has a negative or very negative impact on their mental health
- 5 times less likely to experience discrimination and/or harassment
- 11 times more likely to be highly effective than those in non-inclusive teams

- 10 times more likely to be innovative
- 6 times more likely to provide excellent customer service
- 4 times more likely to work extra hard.[19]
-

The key to measuring impact within your organisational context is to ensure the following areas have been considered:

- How will DEI support our business vision and strategy, what would this look like and how do we measure this?
- What are our key people metrics – such as recruitment, representation, retention, progression, engagement, safety, accessibility, leadership, employee network involvement, inclusion, belonging, wellbeing?
- What is the baseline for a range of employee quantitative data and where do we need this to be?
- What other key stakeholder metrics do we need to consider including customers/clients, suppliers, communities we engage with?
- How do we build a robust and transparent governance model with regular internal and external reporting that drives authentic leadership commitment and accountability?
- What review mechanisms do we need to objectively evaluate, evolve or pivot our approach?

Summary and Reflection

The AHRI DEI Maturity Model

- Enables HR leaders, executive teams and stakeholders to better understand their current DEI approach and how they can move from compliance to changing mindsets and behaviours to embed DEI in the organisation's culture.

Developing a sustainable DEI approach

- Take a data informed, future focused, and systems approach based on a specific context
- This process involves defining, diagnosing, designing, implementing and evaluating using targeted discussion questions with key stakeholders.

Measuring impact within your organisational context

- Consider measuring the following using aspirational, current state and forecasting insights:
- How DEI will support your business vision and strategy
- Key people metrics
- Other key stakeholder metrics
- Robust and transparent governance model with accountability
- Review processes to evaluate, evolve or pivot the approach.

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[19] Diversity Council of Australia, *2021-2022 Inclusion@Work Index, Mapping the State of Inclusion in the Australian Workplace,* December 2021

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Questions

- Explore the define, diagnose, design, implementation and evaluation process and questions in this chapter
- Explore the measuring impact questions in this chapter.

6. Systemic enablers to build Diverse Equitable & Inclusive workplaces

a. Inclusive design in HR systems, processes, policies and practices

To achieve better DEI outcomes, it is critical to take a comprehensive, systemic and data informed approach with authentic commitments, tailored strategies, equitable and inclusive practices, regular reporting and transparent accountability.

One consideration is understanding the DEI impact throughout the employee life cycle on the employee experience and organisational outcomes. This encompasses HR systems, processes, policies and practices focused on areas including attraction, recruitment, onboarding, engagement, development, performance/talent management, lateral and vertical career progression, pay equity, leadership, respect at work, intersectionality, employee relations and complaints management.

Ensuring accessible, equitable and inclusive practices starts with inclusive design. Inclusive design is making human centred design decisions that include as many people as possible, considering needs, capabilities and aspirations. This occurs at the beginning of the design process and in many cases solving for one group, results in applicability and benefits for many. Often people think of inclusive design as physical considerations only, but inclusive design applies to the organisational approach to how people work day-to-day including holding meetings, decision making processes, managing risks and policy inclusions.
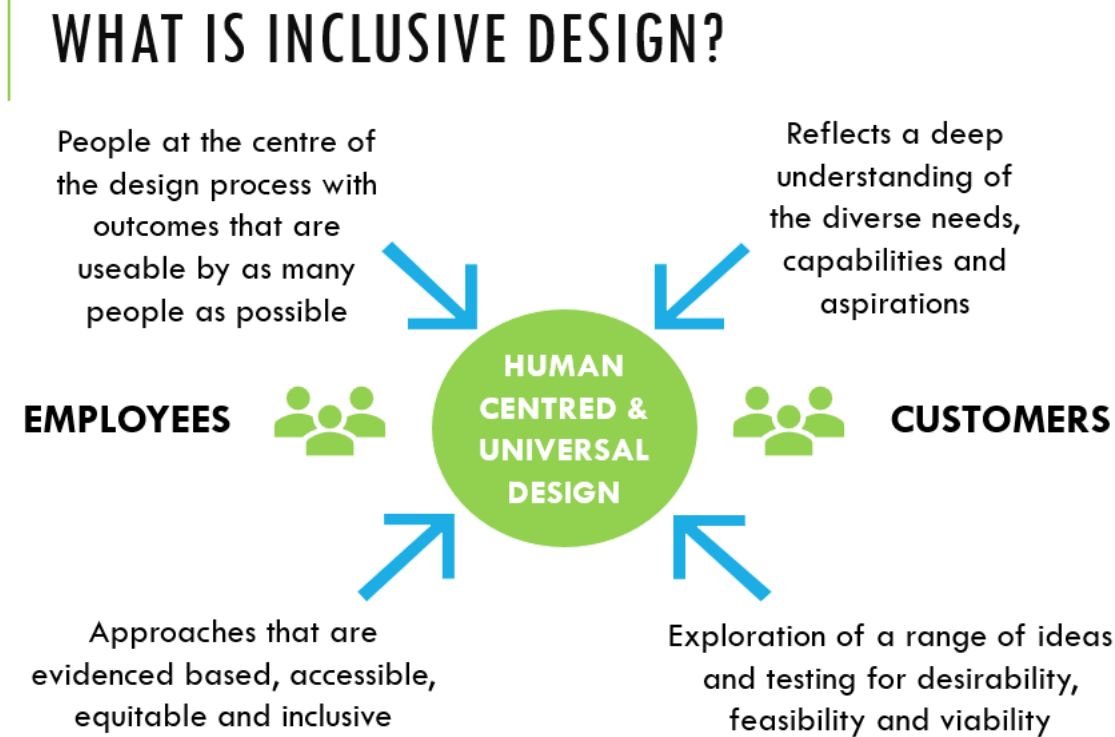
There are several effective approaches that can be taken in driving positive change. Recently, the power of storytelling and sharing lived experience has proven to be an effective way to capture the attention of leaders to help raise awareness of the unique and varied experiences of employees. This emphasises the necessity to build DEI frameworks and capability to ensure systems, processes, policies and practices are inclusively designed.

Inclusive design also applies to the customer/client life cycle and experience, especially in relation to products and services.

Figure 2 provides an example of inclusive design principles that can be applied to the workplace.

Figure 2. What is Inclusive Design?

WHAT IS INCLUSIVE DESIGN?

People at the centre of the design process with outcomes that are useable by as many people as possible

Reflects a deep understanding of the diverse needs, capabilities and aspirations

EMPLOYEES

HUMAN CENTRED & UNIVERSAL DESIGN

CUSTOMERS

Approaches that are evidenced based, accessible, equitable and inclusive

Exploration of a range of ideas and testing for desirability, feasibility and viability

For further information:
The Benefit of Designing for Everyone (centreforinclusivedesign.org.au)
Introduction to human-centred design | vic.gov.au (www.vic.gov.au)

Why is it critical to design inclusively throughout the employee lifecycle?

- Unintentionally, systems, processes and practices could be enabling inequities based on assuming similarities
- This can occur at all touch points of the employee lifecycle - attraction, recruitment, onboarding, engagement, development, performance/talent management, lateral and vertical career progression, pay equity, leadership, employee relations, complaints management
- Exploring trends and patterns in quantitative and qualitative data, is critical to identifying issues
- Deep understanding of lived experience leads to better decision making and design.

What is the impact of designing inclusively?

- Solving for one group, may result in applicability for many
- Identity is not predictive of opportunities or outcomes
- People have equal access to resources, development programs, coaching and feedback, leaders and sponsors
- People have equal opportunity to develop, progress and be rewarded.

b. Key stakeholders and their responsibilities

The success of DEI strategies and initiatives relies on a strategic and whole of organisation effort, where DEI is considered in all key decision-making, policies and practices[20]. This cannot be sustained when it is driven solely by DEI specialists and HR professionals.

The following table provides examples of types of key stakeholders, their responsibilities and role in driving DEI.

People	Suggested focus of responsibility
Senior Leaders	
- Board - CEO - Executives - Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Council, Steering or Advisory Committee, or Working Group - Governing committees, for example, OH&S, Remuneration, Sustainability.	- Leadership accountability - Governance - Leadership capability - Safety, respect and belonging - Transparency - Measurement, reporting, monitoring, and accountability - Alignment with ESG commitments and requirements.
People Leaders	
- Middle managers and front line workers	- Building respect, participation and belonging - Ensuring cultural and psychological safety and inclusive language - Promoting well-being and self-care - Inclusive career opportunities, development and pathways - Adherence to code of conduct and professional behaviours - Inviting people in (informal professional relationships and opportunities) - Understanding the commitment and business case.

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[20] Brown, J. S., Ellsworth, D., Katen-Narvell, A., & Maor, D. (2023, May 10). *It's (past) time to get strategic about DEI*. McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/its-past-time-to-get-strategic-about-dei

People	Suggested focus of responsibility
Human Resources and DEI	
- HR professionals - DEI specialists.	- DEI expertise, communication, education and guidance to support leaders and employees - Custodians of strategies, policies and programs - Coordination of HR and DEI efforts. - Compliance and workplace relations - Employee life cycle inclusive design in systems, processes, policies and practices - Focus on well-being, cultural and psychological safety and respectful behaviours.

People	Suggested focus of responsibility
Community	
- Communities with lived experience - Members of the public.	- Partnerships - Collaboration - Relationships - Community engagement - Pathways and opportunities - Building brand and reputation.
External stakeholders	
- Government agencies (grants and research, compliance reporting) - Sponsors - Investors - Media - Procurement.	- Partnerships - Procurement - Governance - Research and innovation - Marketing and branding.
Facilities and Infrastructure	
- Facilities - Accommodation.	- Accessibility (including digital) - Sensory comfort - thermal, lighting, cultural settings - Prayer room, parents' room, wellbeing room.

c. Polarising views and disagreement in workplaces

One of the opportunities and challenges for leaders, DEI specialists and HR professionals is navigating our unique moment in time.

We are currently experiencing optimism and significant forward movement, while also witnessing increased polarisation, a diverse range of views and backlash. One of the biggest challenges for leaders, DEI specialists and HR professionals is managing these diverse perspectives.

Inclusion does not mean everyone agrees with one another. Inclusive workplaces encourage people to bring their authentic and respectful self to work and share their diverse range of world views and experiences.

The role of an inclusive organisation is to create workplace cultures where it is safe to share, people listen to understand, learning occurs through respectful curiosity, diverse views are valued, and healthy disagreement is well facilitated.

The role of the employee is to demonstrate behaviours that adhere to the organisation's values and code of conduct.

This is easier said than done, especially in relation to strongly held views and personal identity perspectives. We are increasingly seeing fear, assumptions, judgement and backlash. This has resulted in a divided perception of DEI, people enforcing their views on others, fatigue with negative and toxic views, people being stigmatised and personal risks for people and their families who are harassed, bullied or victimised when they share their perspectives and experiences.

When people do not feel safe to share or are not listened to, inclusion is impeded.

A recent Harvard Business Review article stated that "When we encounter disagreement, a common impulse is to assume that we know the facts and the other person doesn't. But in reality, each of us tends to focus on the facts that support our beliefs and dismiss or devalue those that don't. Human minds have a hard time processing contradictory information but easily make connections to familiar ideas. That's not because of insecurity or ego threat; it's simply a limitation of our processing capacity."[21]

Another challenge has been the positioning of the statement *"bring your whole self to work"* which has been used by many organisations globally, with good intent.

The issue is that if this statement is not communicated alongside an expectation of respect and safety, and alignment with an organisation's values and code of conduct, some people assume they can share all their perspectives in the workplace. In some organisations, this has resulted in:

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[21] Julia A. Minson and Francesca Gino, *Managing a Polarized Workforce - How to foster debate and promote trust,* Harvard Business Review, March-April 2022.

- An increase in negative communication
- Employment decisions based on whether people "fit in" or not
- Pressure on those who wish to keep their work and private lives separate to conform.

In some workplaces, DEI specialists and HR professionals are being overwhelmed with requests to mitigate or address issues. Leaders are often cautious about how their organisation responds either internally or externally, especially considering external social and political agendas. So how should we maintain momentum by positively preventing the divide or managing this polarisation?

Dr Tim Soutphommasane is the University of Oxford's first Chief Diversity Officer and was previously Australia's Race Discrimination Commissioner. He believes "supporting freedom of

speech should be accompanied by care and concern for students and staff. Supporting equality, diversity and inclusion, meanwhile, should mean a willingness to engage with views with which one disagrees."[22]

Dr Soutphommasane says "The key is the ability to respect and deeply explore the perspective of others. "We encourage robust civility and all views to be given the chance of a hearing, while being subject to questioning, scrutiny and indeed lawful protest. We take steps to ensure all such exchanges happen peacefully."[23]

d. Key actions to enable respectful and healthy conversations

Enabling respectful and healthy conversations requires skill and effective facilitation. The following provides guidance about some of the actions required by DEI specialists and HR professionals to achieve impactful outcomes.

Organisations

Create inclusive, respectful and safe workplaces

- Examine what your organisation aspires to including values and code of conduct
- Identify the psychosocial hazards and assess the current level of respect, safety, diversity of thinking and collaboration
- Explore statements about people bringing their authentic selves to work, and assess whether these are linked to respect, safety and collaboration

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[22] Dr Tim Soutphommasane, *Freedom of Speech and Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Rights*, University of Oxford, Staff Gateway, July 2023.

[23] Dr Tim Soutphommasane, *Freedom of Speech and Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Rights*, University of Oxford, Staff Gateway, July 2023.

- Empower, elevate and amplify lived experience voices through diverse networks that can co-design with SME's policies, processes and practices focused on inclusion, respect and safety
- Demonstrate leader commitment through role modelling and actions, not just words
- When behaviours are not aligned to the values and code of conduct, address issues by focusing on words and actions, not an evaluation of the person.

Develop an organisation mindset of openness and difference

- Communicate the importance of healthy disagreements
- Encourage teams to seek and explore opposing perspectives when discussing a topic or planning a project
- Focus on learning from different perspectives
- Facilitate respectful disagreements while seeking points of agreement and identifying mutually beneficial solutions.

All employees

Know yourself

- Acknowledge that everyone has a unique perspective based on their life experiences
- Identify how you perceive the world – your experiences, assumptions, triggers
- Explore how your perspectives have differed at different times in your life
- Recognise how your perspective may result in the same message being interpreted differently to others
- Continue to work on your self-awareness.

Listen to understand not to respond

- Demonstrate deep listening by creating the space for others to share
- Digest perspectives and experiences, rather than formulating responses
- Acknowledge this can be challenging when listening to divergent viewpoints that are very different to yours and triggers a negative reaction
- Exhibit empathy and acknowledge other perspectives, remembering this is not about agreement
- Avoid thinking your perspective is the only way of perceiving the situation.

Consider the use of language to present your perspective[24]

- Share your view while not generalising – words like "sometimes" and "often" signal humility and a recognition that there are many perspectives
- Emphasise agreement - highlight areas of agreement which demonstrates that there are many facets to any conversation

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[24] Julia A. Minson and Francesca Gino, *Managing a Polarized Workforce - How to foster debate and promote trust,* Harvard Business Review, March-April 2022.

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- Acknowledge other perspectives - use phrases such as "I understand that you believe…" which shows you actually heard the other person and provides the opportunity for clarification if the point was not understood
- Use positive language – this establishes a constructive approach which is likely to be reciprocated.

Leaders, DEI specialists and HR professionals

Facilitate healthy discussions and disagreements, and manage conflict

- Provide the safe space for all perspectives to be shared
- Encourage curiosity through respectful questioning to challenge personal assumptions and learn
- Observe how people are reacting especially where there are opposing views
- Assess the common and opposed perspectives and ensure people have had the opportunity to fully share their views
- Ensure there is understanding of and respect for differing viewpoints based on the discussion, not personal assumptions
- Collaborate to seek points of agreement and identify mutually beneficial solutions considering the understanding and respect of different perspectives.

Summary and Reflection

Inclusive design in HR systems, processes, policies and practices

- Ensure a comprehensive, systemic and data informed approach with authentic commitments, tailored strategies, equitable and inclusive practices, regular reporting and transparent accountability
- Inclusive design guarantees accessible, equitable and inclusive practices, and should be reflected in the employee life cycle, employee experience and organisational outcomes.

Key stakeholders and responsibilities

- The success of DEI strategy and initiatives, relies on a whole organisation effort, where DEI is contemplated in all key decision-making, policies and practices and led by a range of leaders.

Enabling respectful and healthy conversations

- Inclusion doesn't mean everyone agrees with each other
- The role of an inclusive organisation is to create workplace cultures where it is safe to share, people listen to understand, learning occurs through respectful curiosity, diverse views are valued, and healthy disagreement is well facilitated
- The role of the employee is to adhere to the organisation's values and code of conduct.

Questions

- How comprehensive, systemic and data informed is your current DEI approach?
- How well does your organisation demonstrate comprehensive and regular reporting and transparent accountability?
- How equitable and inclusive are your policies, processes and practices?
- How do you facilitate healthy discussions and disagreements, and manage conflict in the workplace, and what could you do differently?

7. Opportunities for AHRI

a. Research and advocacy

AHRI undertakes primary research and partners with other organisations on issues that will support AHRI members and the broader HR community, including DEI specialists.

Recent AHRI research that supports DEI understanding includes:
- Hybrid and Flexible Working – 2023 and 2022
- The State of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Australian Workplaces – 2023
- Employing and Retaining Older Workers – 2023 and 2021 (with the Australian Human Rights Commission).

The research outcomes provide data that measure and provide benchmarking on the current state of DEI in our workplaces including attitudes, areas of focus, and programs and activities.

AHRI uses the research outcomes to:
- Develop AHRI learning materials including the Australian HR Capability Framework, AHRI professional Certification and short courses / corporate training
- Inform the development of AHRI insights including AHRI Assist materials, HRM news and articles, and webinar and conference topics
- Develop AHRI's annual DEI conference
- Inform the media, business and the wider community about DEI issues in our workplaces, and how they can contribute to more diverse and inclusive organisations
- Advocate to government to support the development of policies that will drive diversity, equity and inclusiveness in our workplaces.

AHRI will continue to undertake research on issues that support DEI understanding, and that provides data and practical information for DEI specialists and HR professionals to use in their organisations.

AHRI is also focused on delivering DEI research that can be repeated over time to build time series for specific DEI areas of interest that include metrics on attitudes and the programs and practices that DEI specialists and HR professionals are putting in place to advance the DEI agenda and build more diverse, equitable and inclusive workplaces.

AHRI will continue to partner with and support other organisations undertaking DEI research.

b. Building, evolving and harnessing DEI capability

Within the current environment, there is a significant opportunity to improve DEI outcomes by harnessing, building and evolving the DEI capability of the HR profession through AHRI.

The Australian HR Capability Framework recognises DEI as an essential knowledge area for HR professionals and the AHRI D&I Maturity Model provides a framework for DEI specialists and HR professionals to benchmark their organisation's DEI maturity.

However, in order for HR professionals to drive and embed sustainable change in their organisations, they need to understand what is required of them, both in terms of capabilities and knowledge. This will allow them to benchmark themselves and develop an understanding of the professional development required to lead and embed contemporary and effective DEI practices in organisations. AHRI's DEI Advisory Panel will work with AHRI's management to identify and communicate these to the HR profession.

As the professional body for HR in Australia, AHRI provides a range of tools, professional development and learning opportunities for HR professionals. This includes DEI. As the capabilities and knowledge for the practice of DEI are explored, the AHRI's DEI Advisory Panel will again work with AHRI's management to identify the professional development gaps that AHRI might address to support and develop DEI practice in Australia.

8. Definitions

Diversity is about what makes each of us unique and includes our backgrounds, personality, life experiences and beliefs, all of the things that make us who we are. It is a combination of our differences that shape our view of the world, our perspective and our approach. Diversity is also about recognising, respecting and valuing differences based on ethnicity, gender, age, race, religion, disability and sexual orientation. It also includes an infinite range of individual unique characteristics and experiences, such as communication style, career path, life experience, educational background, geographic location, income level, marital status, parental status and other variables that influence personal perspectives.[25]

Equity is the principle that people should have the same opportunities to succeed, despite any past injustices or systemic discrimination. This may mean that resources are distributed in a way that addresses the specific needs of underprivileged communities or people.[26]

Inclusion occurs when people feel, and are, valued and respected, and where they:

- Have the opportunity to fulfil their individual and combined potential
- Have access to opportunities and resources
- Can contribute their personal best in every encounter
- Can contribute their perspectives and talents to improve their organisation
- Can bring far more of themselves to their jobs
- Have a sense of belonging.[27]

Belonging moves beyond inclusion, to foster a workplace culture in which every individual feels confident, accountable and able to be themselves, and able to bring this quality out in others.[28]

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[25] Deloitte. (2011). *Only Skin Deep?: Re-examining the business case for diversity* [PDF]. https://www.ced.org/pdf/Deloitte_-_Only_Skin_Deep.pdf

[26] Mollenkamp, D. T. (2022, July 8). *Social justice meaning and main principles explained.* Investopedia. https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/social-justice.asp#citation-22

[27] *DPC Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021.* (2023, March 21). vic.gov.au. https://www.vic.gov.au/dpc-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy-2019-2021

[28] NSW Government Public Service Commission. (2022). *Belonging and Inclusion Strategy: Inclusive for all: A world class public sector where everyone belongs.* https://www.psc.nsw.gov.au/assets/psc/documents/15812_NSW-PSC_Belonging-Strategy-2022_v2_ACCESSIBLE.pdf

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Intersectionality is a theoretical approach that understands the interconnected nature of social categorisations – such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, religion, class, socioeconomic status, gender identity, ability or age – which create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage for either an individual or group.[29]

Cultural Safety is drawn from the work of Māori nurses in New Zealand and can be defined as: An environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening.[30]

Psychological Safety is an environment that encourages, recognises and rewards individuals for their contributions and ideas by making individuals feel safe when taking interpersonal risks. A lack of psychological safety at work can inhibit team learning and lead to in-groups, groupthink and blind spots.[31] [32]

Exclusion is an environment where people do not feel safe, are not heard, are intentionally or unintentionally excluded and in some cases experience discrimination, harassment and bullying.[33] [34]

Person centred. A person-centred approach focuses on the needs, preferences and knowledge of each person. It supports the individual within their unique situation to exercise their rights as experts on their own lives. Services must be flexible and treat each person with dignity and respect in empowering them to make their own informed choices that are free from external judgement. A person-centred approach respects each person's choices and involves listening, coaching, sharing ideas and seeking feedback.[35]

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[29] State Government of Victoria. (2021). *Understanding intersectionality*. Find, connect, shape your Victorian Government. https://www.vic.gov.au/understanding-intersectionality

[30] R Williams, 'Cultural Safety – what does it mean for our work practice?' (1999) 23(2) Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health 213, p213. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1467-842X.1999.tb01240.x

[31] *Definition of Psychological Safety - Gartner Human Resources Glossary*. (n.d.). Gartner. https://www.gartner.com/en/human-resources/glossary/psychological-safety

[32] *Psychosocial hazards contributing to work-related stress | WorkSafe Victoria*. (n.d.). https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/psychosocial-hazards-contributing-work-related-stress

[33] Atcheson, S. (2020, October 23). To tackle inclusion, we must be honest about exclusion. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/shereeatcheson/2020/10/23/to-tackle-inclusion-we-must-be-honest-about-exclusion/?sh=6f7156716bff

[34] Jackson, F. (2023, April 10). Inclusion v.s. exclusion in the workplace | Culture Amp. *Culture Amp*. https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/inclusion-vs-exclusion

[35] Victoria State Government & Family Safety Victoria. (2018). *Everybody Matter: Inclusion and equity statement*. Victorian Government. https://content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-05/Everybody-matters-inclusion-and-equity-statement.pdf

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Social cohesion involves building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and that they are members of the same community.[36]

[36] *What is social cohesion? | Scanlon institute*. (n.d.). Scanlon Institute. https://scanloninstitute.org.au/research/mapping-social-cohesion/what-social-cohesion

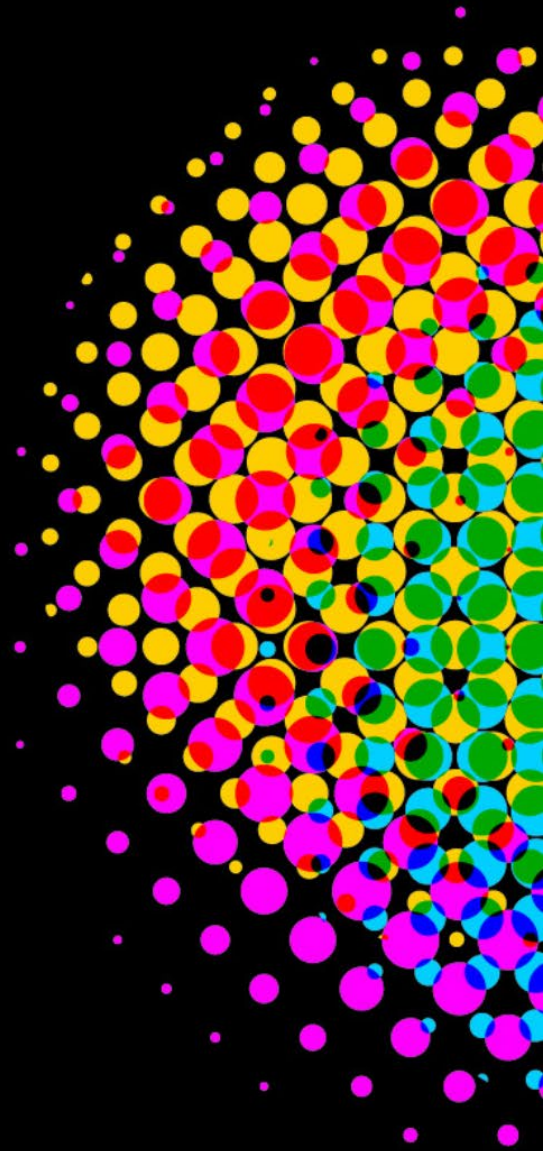**Navigating Australia's DEI Landscape for Impact and Sustainable Change**

9. Endnotes

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