

# diversity and inclusion

## Representation, fair treatment, and appreciation of various identity groups within an organisation

An organisation drawing from the diversity of knowledge, experiences, and perspectives all its members have to offer leverages the advantages of innovative thinking and effective problem-solving. Fostering an inclusive environment, in which employees are fully present and free to draw upon an array of personal assets to contribute to organisational goals, optimally capitalises on the gifts and talents of the organisation's workforce.

### suggested actions

- **leadership commitment** Senior executives and management set the tone for the organisation by communicating their commitment to diversity and modelling inclusive norms. With individuals at the top leading the effort to establish fair processes, inclusive behaviours are more likely to become embedded to the organisation's culture and systems. To encourage this, organisations should hold leaders responsible for diversity (e.g., by linking their performance assessment to the progress of diversity initiatives and achievement of diversity targets).
- **align with values and culture** Clearly define, communicate, and demonstrate the diversity values and beliefs that will set the norms within the organisation's culture. For an organisation to adopt a truly inclusive climate, it must maximise the degree to which employees are valued and their unique perspective is taken into account. Members of all groups should be treated fairly, feel and be included, have equal opportunities, and be represented at all organisational levels and functions. The ultimate goal in working with diversity is to weave it into the fabric of the organisation, which makes diversity the work and responsibility of everyone, not just managers and leaders.
- **devise a strategy** Create a values-based diversity strategy, link it to broader strategic goals, and incorporate it into the organisation's processes. Ensure selection, performance management, compensation and benefits, rewards and recognition, career development, succession planning, and other policies are unbiased, fair, and supportive of diversity. An effective diversity plan should include clear goals, accountabilities, and supporting mechanisms. For example, a diversity council with credible people from a cross-section of functions may be tasked to develop the company's diversity strategy and serve as a resource to ensure diversity is promoted by influential figures and strategically integrated with business objectives.
- **set targets and measure success** Regular reporting of diversity indicators is another useful way to embed diversity into organisational values and culture. Determine how and how frequently diversity strategy effectiveness will be measured. Examples of diversity metrics include complaint ratios, retention rates, workforce satisfaction, and company demographics. It is recommended that cultural audits, employee surveys, and focus groups be leveraged to identify strategic imperatives and gather information about aspects of diversity that warrant further development.
- **train management and staff** Once development areas have been identified, training methods should be implemented to address them. Seminars and workshops may increase awareness of what it means to value diversity and help employees understand the need for diversity. Team building efforts that encourage group members to share information about their unique backgrounds, skills, and experiences help employees develop a deeper understanding of one another and the resources available to them. Training aimed at improving behaviour and skills has generally been found to produce positive outcomes such as reduced bias and increased cultural competence.

### case study

Founded in 1989, John Wollaston Anglican Community School is a school of the Anglican Schools Commission. It is a co-educational, Pre-Kindergarten to Year 12 day school situated in the foothills southeast of Perth. John Wollaston employs in excess of 150 staff members who endeavour to provide an affordable, high-quality, and inclusive education for approximately 1000 students.

In their Voice Engagement Survey, John Wollaston demonstrated exceptional results for “Diversity,” with staff commending its “inclusive culture” and “inclusivity of all students.” Anne Ford, Principal of John Wollaston for the last 15 years, explained that the School’s success in managing diversity may be attributed to integrating diversity as a key value and fostering an inclusive culture amongst staff and students.

As a leader, Anne is committed to providing “an inclusive learning environment in which students have the opportunity to explore their talents and creativity, strive for personal excellence, and develop as caring young people who seek to make a difference.” Her approach to fostering diversity in the School is “more about a mindset.” She clarifies, “It’s just something that I believe strongly in and have all my life.” She has adopted a positive education perspective, which “operates on the premise that unless students feel safe and secure in their environment, they will not learn or their learning will be compromised. And that is similar for staff; unless they feel supported and valued within the workplace their performance and productivity will suffer. If teachers are not functioning optimally, children will not learn either.”

To demonstrate the value of diversity, and to create mechanisms to ensure inclusion remains a strategic imperative, Anne appointed a Head of Inclusive Education who leads the largest department in the School. Anne has further embedded an inclusion-focused strategy into the School’s recruitment and induction processes. John Wollaston advertises itself as an equal opportunity employer, ensures the selection panel includes individuals of diverse backgrounds, and crafts inclusive interview questions. Anne remains mindful throughout the recruitment process of candidates’ unique potential to contribute to the diversity of the School. This has led to the proactive employment of staff with disabilities, and provision of staff flexible options to enable older employees to remain in the workforce. She notes, “we have staff inductions and talk about some of the key things that are part of being in this school... about how to treat colleagues, not just the students.” Therefore, “people, right from the beginning, have this sense that they will be accommodated and welcomed for who they are.”

Anne and her staff’s approach to promoting diversity has certainly benefited the students of John Wollaston. The School was recognised by Western Australia’s Disability Services Commission, having received their “Count Me In Award for Education and Training” in 2013. In discussing their special needs students, Anne explains, “we’ve worked very hard to attend to the needs of these children in an inclusive way and also celebrate the fact that, whilst they may have certain challenges, they also have strengths and I think that they have very much enriched our community.” Anne explains that the School’s inclusive approach is not only beneficial for this group but also for other students “to be in an environment where they see another side of the coin: that people who struggle can also succeed. So there are benefits all round.”

When asked what tips she had to offer for other organisations seeking to become more diverse and inclusive, Anne stated, “Follow your vision; get good people around you who share your vision. Work with staff, be very overt about what you believe in, and have a whole organisation approach so that staff are hearing a common message. Repeat that message regularly throughout the year. Our philosophy is very much immersion... it’s so much part and parcel of who we are and what we do, it’s almost moved beyond a strategy - it’s just us - we celebrate our diversity.”

## useful resources

- Australian Human Resources Institute’s Inclusion and Diversity Website: <https://www.ahri.com.au/assist/inclusion-and-diversity>
- Curtis, E. F., & Dreachslin, J. L. (2008). Integrative literature review: diversity management interventions and organizational performance: a synthesis of current literature. *Human Resource Development Review*, 7, 107-134.
- Diversity Council Australia Website: <https://www.dca.org.au/>
- Society for Human Resource Management. (2009). *Global Diversity and Inclusion: Perceptions, Practices and Attitudes*. Retrieved from [http://www.shrm.org/research/surveyfindings/articles/documents/diversity\\_and\\_inclusion\\_report.pdf](http://www.shrm.org/research/surveyfindings/articles/documents/diversity_and_inclusion_report.pdf)
- Stockdale & F. J. Crosby (Eds.). (2004). *The psychology and management of workplace diversity*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2005). *Diversity Management: Expert-Identified Leading Practices and Agency Examples*. Retrieved from <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d0590.pdf>