

Celebrating Diversity in the Workplace

What does the modern Australian workplace look like? It's likely that your colleagues come from all across the world: some of them will speak languages other than English; some will wear religious dress; and others will bring delicious, if different, treats for lunch or to the company morning tea.

According to the 2016 Census, 75% of the population identified with an ancestry other than Australian, around 26% of the population were born in another country, and 19% of overseas born Australians were born in non-English speaking countries. In all, Australians come from over 200 birthplaces.

Diversity makes for a more interesting and vibrant workplace.

Embracing and celebrating differences among your team mates can lead to new and exciting discoveries:

- A favourite new cuisine
- Varied and engaging approaches to leadership
- Unique styles of music
- Innovative approaches to problem solving

“Diversity is the one true thing that we all have in common. Celebrate it every day.”

Anonymous

WHAT IS DIVERSITY AT WORK?

In the context of the workplace, the Australian Human Rights Commission says:

“A diverse workforce with a range of different backgrounds and perspectives makes good business sense. A workplace that reflects the Australian community will understand its audience better, which leads to improved service delivery and a more inclusive community for all.”

If diversity is about more than culture, language, religion and heritage, what are some of the other factors that reflect diversity at work?

- Age
- Gender
- Ability
- Education
- Family unit
- Sexuality
- Location
- Generation
- Socio-economic status
- Experience
- Health

The characteristics of diversity are really... Diverse! Let's take a closer look at some of the characteristics of diversity at work:

AGE/GENERATION

Think of all the generations represented at your workplace. Your staff will likely cover people from these generations:

- Baby Boomers (born early to mid 1940s through to mid 1960s)
- Generation X (born mid 1960s to early 1980s)
- Millennials (born early 1980s to early 2000s)
- Generation Z (born mid 1990s to mid 2000s, although demographers are yet to agree on the exact birth year range for this generation)

People of different ages/generations may have very different experiences growing up, living life and going to work; these varying experiences will shape their attitudes to a range of



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workplace matters from hierarchies, the ways meetings work, steps to address conflict and more.

The bonus in having members of staff from many generations is that each will have faced unique challenges and have different approaches to overcoming barriers; harnessing this diversity can bring many benefits to your workplace.

A broad range of ages in your workplace creates opportunities for mentoring and learning that go both ways. However, there is also the possibility of conflict at work when younger workers seek to introduce new ideas or older, more senior members of staff become wary of change or adapting to new styles of working. Implementing strategies to manage these tensions is the key to success in an age diverse workplace.

CULTURE/ETHNICITY

Cultural and religious diversity enriches workplaces by introducing people to new ideas, experiences, perspectives, types of music and even different foods.

While Australia is a harmonious multicultural society, there are still possibilities of differences and these may arise across issues relating to hierarchies, gender, religious reflection at work, diet and alcohol, clothing choices and more. Encouraging dialogue around these issues, and focusing on what unites us, can help to manage conflicts.

GENDER

Gender equality is about more than having a 50%/50% split between females and males in your staff. Today's discussions around gender involve looking at how women are represented in leadership roles, the ways your organisation addresses work/family or work/life balance for all employees, steps taken to support new parents at work and even extend to supporting staff members who are transgender.

It may be beneficial for your workplace to raise awareness around gender issues and respectful relationships at work. While it may be difficult to do so, it may also be useful to discuss the ways your workplace can address gender inequalities.

Diversity can be the foundation of a great workplace:

Increased creativity: Bringing together people with different backgrounds, qualifications and experiences means a significant boost to creativity and innovative approaches to problem solving.

Higher employee engagement: When your employees come from different backgrounds, they are likely to share personal stories and develop a culture of learning from each other.

Lower levels of staff turnover: Recruiting from a more diverse background of candidates means a wider variety of education and employment experiences among your staff. As a result, staff may be more resilient and flexible, leading to lower levels of employee turnover.

Boosting your workplace profile: Organisations that are seen to promote diversity develop a positive reputation in the market, attract more staff and have happier customers.

HOW CAN WE CELEBRATE DIVERSITY?

Your workplace is probably already diverse. But you can celebrate diversity all year by hosting events with some of these activities:

- Wearing national costumes: ask staff members to come to work dressed in clothing/ costumes that reflect their backgrounds. Or, during a soccer World Cup, ask people to wear their nation's soccer shirt for a day
- Food and drink: everybody loves trying something new and tasty! Host a lunch at work where people bring foods that represent their culture
- Games and recreations: play popular games from around the world such as chess, card games and dice games
- Decorate your workspace with photos, arts and crafts and flags from around the world
- Teach your colleagues 'basic' words in a language other



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than English. The most commonly spoken languages in Australia include Mandarin, Italian, Arabic Cantonese and Greek

- Music, songs and dancing bring people together, plus you can all share a laugh at everyone's dance moves
- People love telling and hearing stories. Many cultures have unique stories, morals, fables and myths. Sharing these tales can help bring new insights and ideas to your workplace

REMEMBER, IT'S ABOUT CELEBRATION

Embracing diversity at work is about more than large volumes of human resources policies and guidelines stuck on the wall of the lunchroom. Celebrating diversity should always be about bringing people together and giving people an opportunity to express their unique background and traditions in a way that's good fun and inclusive. Everybody loves a celebration, and when recognising and championing diversity at work is enjoyable and engaging, it's something that all of your staff will enjoy participating in.

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