2016: it’s time for diversity
Concepts, Facts and findings

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Outline

(1) Clarifying the concepts
(2) Why the concern?
(3) A salutary case study
(4) APS gender and disability findings
(5) Suggestions for change
(6) Concluding considerations
(1) Clarifying the concepts: Diversity, Inclusion and Unconscious Bias.
What is ‘diversity’?

• Complex and multidimensional concept
• About visible and invisible differences among people which shapes their perspectives
• How broad?
  - differences in gender, race, ethnicity, disability
  - also age?
• Note also other differences: socio-economic, personality types, religious beliefs, value systems.
What is ‘inclusion’?

• ‘Inclusion is about valuing and accommodating difference’ (May:2014)
  - where people consciously adapt behaviours, responses and practices to respect differences and include others
Diversity versus Inclusion

• Diversity – like putting some different players on your football team
• Inclusiveness – about passing those players the ball
(Makhlouf 2014)
The giraffe and the zebra
Noah’s Ark Analogy

The giraffe looks at the zebra and thinks that kind of animal is funny looking. He doesn’t look like me – foolishly short neck, silly black and white stripes and eats what looks like garbage. Not like me with elegant long neck, beautiful brown and white spots and eats only the finest leaves…..

(Deloitte 2011:17)
Corporate Noah’s Ark

• ‘this is what happens when you create the corporate version of Noah’s Arc and such clashes will happen indefinitely until leaders and companies come up with a plan for integrating these groups, and benefiting from the stripes the spots and the horns rather than waiting for company-wide conformity’ (Deloitte 2011:17)
Unconscious Bias

• Unconscious versus conscious behaviour
• Where perceptions or hidden beliefs influence individual behaviour without the individual’s conscious knowledge
  - happens automatically as our brains make judgements based on experience or culture
  - e.g. cloning in recruitment; assumptions about family responsibilities and job performance
Parkinson on merit

‘There is a tendency to promote people who look like me, whoever the ‘me’ is, and.... that treats the merit principle as sacrosanct; you can hide a lot of things behind merit’

(quoted UN Women: 2015:6)
(2) Why the Concern?
(1) Current state of play: APS

- Much lower proportions of minority groups than general population
  - Under 3.5 per cent reported a disability
  - Under 2.6 per cent reported indigenous
  - Under 14.4 per cent reported NESB

and

- 58 per cent women but 41% SES with much variation

(APSED 2015)
(2) Basic fairness

• In the APS:
  - employees with a disability nearly twice as likely to report they felt they had been bullied or harassed in last 12 months.
  - Indigenous and non-english speaking background employees reported feeling more this way than other APS employees; women also compared to males.

(APSC: 2014)
(3) Not inclusiveness enough

- Evidence of disparity in perceptions of minority groups and others on barriers to their progress and unconscious bias
- Not sufficient value placed on inclusive culture in public service and hence impartiality as well as representativeness not achieved.
(4) Business Imperative

• Lack of diversity and inclusion hinders capability, productivity and performance, especially in leadership teams

• organisations with greater gender and race diversity performed better in revenue, customers and market share

  - Why? Can recruit best talent, get stronger customer orientation, increase employee satisfaction and enhance capability in decision making.

  (Deloitte 2011; McKinsey 2015)
(3) A Salutary Case Study in Diversity Management

: US Environmental Protection Agency
Case study: plan and actions

- Diversity declared an organisational priority
- Diversity management program devised
- Later diversity initiatives included in five year strategic plan
- Then perceptions and attitudes of employees and managers measured to determine receptivity to diversity
  (Soni 2000)
Case study: what went wrong?

- Diversity management programs had minimal effect
  - lack of understanding of what constituted diversity and why initiatives needed
  - Big difference in perceptions in treatment by minorities (especially race) and women versus white males
• diversity practices can lead to backlash and concern about ‘reverse discrimination’ (e.g. by white males)

• problems of ‘fit’ with the informal organisation for women and minorities with responsibility for ‘fitting in’ placed on these groups.
First step: cultural audit

• Importance of awareness and existing attitudes – see how *unconscious bias* manifests itself
  - *measure* baseline ‘diversity climate’

• A ‘cultural audit’ can accelerate understanding and acceptance of individual, organisational and cultural biases:
  - assessment of ‘diversity climate’ can highlight bias embedded in systems, structures and practices
(4) APS Gender and Disability findings
Not yet 50/50: Barriers to the Progress of Senior Women in the Australian Public Service

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Gender and Disability surveys: APS

• **Aim**
  - explore main cultural and systemic factors *perceived* to affect career progress of senior women and PWD in APS

• **How**
  - Literature surveys
    - quantitative and focus group data and analysis
    - 6 departments on gender
    - 8 on disability
    - varied departmental characteristics
Senior men: main barriers

• ‘commitment to family responsibilities’ most important perceived female barrier
• more than half of the men did not identify any other major barrier.
• Over 40% EL men perceive there are *no barriers* to women – at odds with other groups
Senior women: main barriers

- family responsibilities important but lack of self confidence as important for the majority
- Women in SES male dominated departments felt *excluded from networks*
- They also felt progress impacted by *personal style differences* and *male stereo-typing*
  - critical mass matters
Cultures illustrated

• **Exclusive:**
  ‘This place is rife with unconscious bias. Its very homogenous, with few diverse people, few indigenous people. It is a conservative, male-centric Anglo-Saxon dominated workforce (SES man)

• **Inclusive:**
  ‘In my second week here, I went to a senior management group meeting... I was stunned with how friendly and relaxed but efficient the meeting was. It ended in 50 minutes and everyone was listening (SES man)
PWD study: mentioned barriers

- Cultural
  - unconscious bias in language, behaviours and preconceptions of capabilities
  - raised expectations, but
    - inhospitable culture including in HR
      : often due to lack of knowledge and awareness
      : also some lack of committed leadership
Organisational
- disability definition can disempower as can focus on target numbers.
- unclear management roles and responsibilities
- absence of senior role models
- limited HR experience, compliance oriented
- impact of resource constraints
- gap between policies and implementation
PWD: mentioned barriers (cont.)

• Individual
  - lack of empowerment leading to low confidence
  - work not matching capability
  - slow reasonable adjustment practices
  - inability to access flexible work arrangements
  - uninformed performance reviews
(5) Suggestions for change
(based on Department of Defence 2011)
Leadership and support

(1) *Committed, inclusive leadership* with e.g. holding managers to account in performance agreement; setting targets; showcasing successful diversity leaders

(2) *Support and development* with e.g. unconscious bias, diversity awareness, mentoring/sponsorship programs; diversity networks with champions; HR teams with relevant skills.
Managing talent and work flexibility

(3) *Talent management and succession planning* with e.g. challenging roles or empowering in line with capabilities; effective performance feedback; target recruitment.

(4) *Workplace flexibilities* with e.g. better practice guides with peer review across agencies; website on success stories; focus on bridging the policy/practice gap.
Recruiting and governance

(5) *Attraction, recruitment and selection* with e.g. plain-english recruitment guides; eliminate bias in job descriptions; selection panels with external representatives

(6) *Governance and infrastructure* with e.g. APSC dissemination of annual data on progress; overseeing executive committees with external membership; monitor and evaluation with learning embedded in culture.
(6) Concluding considerations
Concluding considerations to gain cultural inclusiveness

• Reframe discussion toward valuing diversity of thought and diversity as a resource/capability

• Anticipate backlash and reverse discrimination – build awareness of performance benefits from inclusive culture first (Soni 2000: 400,403)

• Counter belief that the concept of merit-based assessment already exists.
Concluding considerations (cont.)

• Important role of champions about need to share power and acting to ensure accountability
• Integrate diversity initiatives as components of integrated HRM systems as well as business strategy (e.g. Geoscience)
• With inclusiveness and trust, brings ‘disclosure’
• Get to the heart as well as to the brain!
References

• May, Deborah (2014) ‘Cultural audit as a means of uncovering unconscious bias and other barriers to diversity within organisation’, Government Directions, May.


• UN Women (2015) *Re-thinking merit: why the meritocracy is failing Australian businesses*, UN National Committee, Australia.