

# The Advertiser

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HD **The celebration of our differences**

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Diverse workplaces are good for individuals and good for business, writes Debra Bela CULTURALLY diverse jobseekers must overcome an unconscious bias and celebrate their differences if they are to gain traction in a competitive jobs market.

There are **billions** of dollars to be made in making Australia's workforce more culturally diverse.

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Reconciliation Australia and Deloitte Access Economics estimate \$24 **billion** could be added to the economy if 80,000 indigenous jobs were created by 2031.

Increased retention rates, sales revenue, innovation and lower labour management costs are also cited by a Diversity Council of Australia report as benefits of cultural diversity at work.

Multinational companies are leading diversity engagement through the appointment of diversity managers and the creation of diversity targets, such as PricewaterhouseCooper's pledge to ensure 5 per cent of partners have an Asian cultural background by 2016.

Multinational tech giant Google also actively recruits for difference. The Federal Government has commissioned an Indigenous Jobs and Training Review to better understand the cultural and practical steps needed to encourage business to support more marginalised workers. But Diversity Council of Australia program and development director Lisa Annese says individual workplaces must implement their own inclusive practices to promote cultural diversity.

"Most of the work has to be done with the employer," Annese says. "Individuals can only do so much – they are up against a system and if it is not encouraging diversity there is a problem.

"In manufacturing there's a lot of blue collar workers who are culturally diverse but the more senior a position gets, it becomes more pale and male – the blueprint for leadership." Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show 46 per cent of Australians are either born overseas or have at least one overseas-born parent. Almost 10 per cent of Australians have Asian cultural origins.

However, the 2013 Capitalising on Culture report reveals only 1.9 per cent of executive managers and 4.15 per cent of directors have Asian cultural origins.

Supporting minority groups at work through ad hoc or tokenistic recruitment will not enrich the work environment and may lower retention rates.

"Critical mass creates safety, especially for people who aren't used to having a voice," Annese says. "It is fundamental to success in the recruitment space if you are going to target groups who are low in numbers, that you don't target them as individuals." She says jobseekers need to celebrate their differences both in their CV and during a work contract.

"If you are a highly skilled individual who is coming to Australia, the important thing is to build the business case around why your skills make you valuable to an organisation," she says.

"You bring a unique perspective. Or you may come from a country where the organisation is trying to target that market." Despite best efforts, research points to an unconscious bias against diversity in both entry-level recruitment and promotion to the top jobs.

A 2009 Australian National University study found that anglicising a name on a CV improved the chances of securing a job interview.

A US study of top chief executives found a link between height and the top jobs, with a disproportionate number of executives over 182cm compared to the general population. The study points to a potential bias against shorter people or racial groups that are not commonly tall.

Educating employers to create better job opportunities for indigenous workers is the focus of the Federal Government's Indigenous Jobs and Training Review.

In its submission to the review, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry stressed the value of engaging a vocationally skilled and work-ready indigenous workforce at a time when Australia's current workforce was rapidly ageing.

"The employment of indigenous people should not be seen or regarded as an act of charity but rather an economic imperative," the submission states. It says indigenous employment would improve long-term labour supply and provide sustainable employment opportunities for those currently outside the workforce.

Reconciliation Australia co-chair Tom Calma urges workplaces to engage in cross-cultural awareness or competency programs to educate staff and remove undesirable behaviour around racism and discrimination at work.

With 58 per cent of Australian marriages being between people of differing cultures, combined with an uptick in international student numbers and a perception change toward indigenous people since National Apology Day in 2008, Calma says he is optimistic that people's attitudes and understanding of multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will change. "In four decades, 25,000 Aboriginal people have gone through the higher education system," says the former national race discrimination commissioner.

"There are 160 Torres Strait Islander medical doctors and another 280 in the system." The Diversity Council of Australia's Lisa Annese says the targeting and support of minority groups within an organisation will be vital to ensuring the business population reflects the cultural diversity in the greater community.

"We went through a stage where we were too scared to target special groups," she says.

"We need to do it that way.

"It will take 177 years to reach gender **equity** if we do nothing. Active targeting and promotion helps create the level playing field." Tamika Blackman (pictured left) is one of 300 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders to graduate from a program for indigenous people in **mining**.

The program's 12 month Camp **Operations** stream prepares participants for hospitality, maintenance and groundwork. After years of unemployment Blackman is now a site administrator, providing hospitality and housekeeping services for a Queensland **oil** and gas operation. Queensland Workforce Skilling Strategy program co-ordinator Karen Bellert says she works with workplace mentors as well as community partners to help the individuals and their families adapt to change.

"It's a fear of the unknown and it could be shame," Bellert says of the reasons why indigenous unemployment is so high. "Sometimes they are looked down upon in their community (because) they are trying to better themselves.

"They have been brought up where they haven't seen their parents work. They have not seen how this works in a family." 10% OF RECENT MIGRANTS WHO HAVE HAD A JOB ARRIVED WITH THAT JOB ALREADY ARRANGED THERE ARE ONLY 29 CULTURALLY DIVERSE FEMALE DIRECTORS IN AUSTRALIA COMPARED TO 233 CULTURALLY DIVERSE MALE DIRECTORS WHAT'S IN A NAME? PLENTY . . .

Having an Anglo-Celtic name increases your chances of getting a job interview. When the Australian National University sent out 4000 fake applications for entry-level jobs, the call back rates were as follows: Anglo-Celtic – 35 per cent Italian – 32 per cent Indigenous – 26 per cent Middle Eastern – 22 per cent **Chinese** – 21 per cent FOREIGN WOMEN Of the 17 per cent of ASX 200 directors who are

female: 78 per cent are from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds 14.1 per cent are from the remainder of northwest Europe 7.9 per cent are from other countriesSource: Diversity Council of Australia

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