

WORKFORCE DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AND INCLUSION TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

Dr SENANI D. RAJAMANTHRI

Department of Management and Marketing
Faculty of Business and Economics
University of Melbourne

<https://doi.org/10.37602/IJSSMR.2025.8431>

ABSTRACT

Workforce Diversity Management and Inclusion Towards Sustainability. Whether building environmental resilience, addressing climate justice, or building inclusive knowledge platforms, the impact challenge calls for sustainable business transitions that are realigned with societal priorities. Therefore, it is time for researchers to start with actionable insights and share their reflections with colleagues and the industry networks that they contribute to sustainable, realigned business models. With the advent of globalisation, organisations are becoming increasingly global and innovative. HR managers face challenges while building productive, cohesive workforces at the workplace. Gathering a diversified workforce in one place raises questions about inclusive culture, religions, traditions, norms, and values. Consequently, it is essential to address such challenges to sustain one's position in the industry and remain competitive. An effective HR strategy entails screening, training, pay, and other human resource policies and practices using technology and other resources to overcome the challenges of globalisation and its increasing pace toward diversity management, leading to sustainability.

In recent years, diversity management and inclusivity have gained momentum in Australia as a means of achieving sustainability. However, it is apparent that managing diversity prevails early and requires more attention to inclusion in the strategising and management of diversity. Therefore, this study aimed to understand the level of workforce diversity management and inclusion in sustainability in the Australian context. The research question emerged as: 'What is the level of awareness in diversity management and strategies in managing diversity?'

The methodology in this study is an explanatory design utilising the current research available in the literature, which focuses on both positivism and post-positivism based on Objective and Subjective ontology. The epistemological stance of the sample was based on both hypotheses and reality (rich accounts), and the methodology of the selected studies was based on descriptive and explanatory approaches, followed by mixed quantitative and qualitative methods. At the same time, data collection included statistical techniques, in-depth qualitative methods, case studies, and focus groups. The analysis was based on a critical evaluation of the current literature on workplace diversity, which was conducted with a combination of exploratory and descriptive research designs in which qualitative and quantitative research methods were utilised by the respective organisations considered in this explanatory research.

Among the sample, most research studies found that workforce diversity could have been well-understood and appreciated, especially by non-HR managers, as per the research findings.

Organisations generally need to prioritise workforce diversity management and strategising inclusion, and levels of senior manager engagement are tentative. Further, most surveyed subjects in these studies believed they had the skills required to address diversity issues, yet had not received any training or key performance indicators relating to diversity. They acknowledged that their approach to diversity is intuitive. They were receptive to further skill development in diversity management if the value could be demonstrated. However, observing research limitations/implications is essential: as an exploratory study, additional research is encouraged to better understand the cause-and-effect relationships of the findings in this study. The challenge of fostering inclusion and contribution from an increasingly diverse workforce is of increasing relevance. Therefore, the literature reveals that mere training alone is insufficient to develop a manager's ability to manage diversity. Coaching combined with training would be an appropriate approach to raise awareness and create lasting behavioural change towards inclusivity as a strategy leading to sustainability.

There are practical implications for HR managers or those in related roles who might design, implement, and promote workforce diversity management initiatives for sustainability. Further, there are implications for consultants, employees, and senior managers regarding education, awareness, and support for diversity objectives. However, the subjects who had participated in most surveys opined positively towards sustainable diversity management strategies, especially inclusion-based policies, procedures, and organisational designs, yet awaiting more training and mentoring sessions while implementing ongoing monitoring mechanisms.

Keywords: managing diversity, inclusion, sustainability, HRM, Multiculturalism

1.0 INTRODUCTION

To build inclusive knowledge platforms, the impact challenge calls for sustainable business model transitions to be realigned with societal priorities. Therefore, it is time for researchers to start with actionable insights and share their reflections with colleagues and the industry networks they contribute to sustainable, realigned business models.

In recent years, diversity management and inclusivity have gained momentum in Australia as a means of achieving sustainability. Therefore, this study aimed to understand the context of workforce diversity management and the inclusion of sustainability in Australia. Further, 'What is the level of awareness in diversity management and strategies in managing diversity?' was framed as the research question.

The approach in this study is an explanatory design utilising the current research available in the literature, which focuses on both Positivism and Post-Positivism based on objective/subjective ontology. The epistemological stance of the sample is based on both hypotheses and reality (rich accounts). The methodology of the selected studies was descriptive and explanatory, followed by a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. At the same time, data collection included statistical techniques, in-depth qualitative methods, case studies, and focus groups. The analysis was based on a critical evaluation of the current literature on workplace diversity, which was done with a combination of exploratory and descriptive research designs where qualitative and quantitative research methods were utilised by the respective organisations considered in this explanatory research.

Diversity is defined as differences related to gender, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, or any other source of difference that can have a significant impact on employee engagement. It is a set of conscious practices that involve understanding and appreciating the interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment; practising mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own; understanding that diversity includes not only ways of being but also ways of knowing; recognising that personal, cultural, and institutionalised discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others; and building alliances across differences so that we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination (Juntunen et al. 2023).

Workplace diversity refers to the variety of differences between people in an organisation. This sounds simple, but diversity encompasses race, gender, ethnic group, age, personality, cognitive style, tenure, organisational function, education, background, and more. Variety involves not only how people perceive themselves but also how they perceive others. These perceptions affected their interactions. For a wide range of employees to function effectively, human resource professionals must deal with issues such as communication, adaptability, and change (Schermerhorn and Bachrach, 2023).

1.1 Internal diversity

Internal diversity refers to any trait or characteristic of a person. These might include sex, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and physical ability. You may recognise many of these as protected characteristics —attributes specifically covered under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Campbell 2022).

1.2 External diversity

External diversity includes any attribute, experience, or circumstance that helps define a person's identity but is not something they were born with. Examples include socioeconomic status, education, marital status, religion, appearance, or location. Other factors often influence these characteristics and may change over time. They are considered external because they can be consciously changed (Campbell 2022).

1.3 Worldview diversity

What influences how we interpret and view the world is part of worldview diversity (Campbell 2022). Worldview diversity encompasses beliefs, political affiliations, cultures, and travel experiences. Our worldview, or perspective, contributes to an innovative, inclusive, forward-focused work environment.

Diversity Management: Diversity management enhances the performance of a heterogeneous workforce and the inclusive development of people with differences in gender, ethnicity, nationality, and cultural and educational backgrounds (Juntunen et al., 2023). Diversity management is a process intended to create and maintain a positive work environment in which the similarities and differences between individuals are valued so that they can reach their potential and maximise their contributions to an organisation's strategic goals and objectives (Schermerhorn and Bachrach, 2023).

Inclusion: Inclusion is a critical concept that has gained momentum in recent years, particularly in the corporate sector. Inclusion refers to creating a work environment where all employees feel valued, respected, and included, regardless of their background. While inclusion has been recognised as essential to achieving sustainability in the corporate sector, its implementation is only sometimes successful. Therefore, it is necessary to critically evaluate the inclusion and factors contributing to its success or failure.

Leadership is one of the main factors contributing to the success of inclusion. The commitment of senior leaders to inclusion is critical for implementation. Leaders who recognise the value of diversity and inclusivity are more likely to promote an inclusive work environment. Furthermore, leaders who hold themselves accountable for creating an inclusive work environment are more likely to be successful (Juntunen, 2023).

Sustainability: Sustainability consists of fulfilling the needs of current generations without compromising the needs of future generations while ensuring a balance between economic growth, environmental care, and social well-being and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development; this is one of the 17 goals of sustainable development. The pandemic has intensified children's risk of exploitation for child labour, and only 82 countries have independent national human rights institutions that meet international standards (SDG Goals, 2030 Agenda).

Diversity and inclusion are an organisation's efforts, policies, and practices that ensure that different groups or individuals of various backgrounds are culturally and socially accepted and integrated into the workplace. An organisation focusing on diversity and inclusion will employ a diverse team of people that reflects the society in which it operates.

Diversity refers to political beliefs, race, culture, sexual orientation, religion, class, and gender identity differences. Diversity means that the staff consists of individuals bringing new perspectives and backgrounds to the workplace.

Inclusion means everyone in the diverse mix feels involved, valued, respected, treated fairly, and embedded in your culture. Empowering employees and recognising their unique talent is part of creating an inclusive company (Wong, 2023).

URL <https://www.achievers.com/blog/diversity-and-inclusion/>

2.0 DISCUSSION BASED ON THE DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT LITERATURE

According to Skalsky et al. (2009), diversity can be defined by gender, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, or any other source of difference. With globalisation, rising migration, and increasing competition to hire, retain, and motivate the best employees, companies worldwide must manage a diverse workforce.

Diversity management in Australia and its impact on employee engagement (Skalsky and McCarthy 2009).

The findings of this survey indicate that 73% of the respondents either needed a diversity statement or needed to be made aware of whether one existed. This suggests that an informal

approach to diversity management may lead to inconsistent responses by different managers within the same organisation. These findings are consistent with earlier research by the Australian Centre for International Business (ACIB), which revealed that “few Australian firms have established diversity management practices.” Furthermore, this survey found that only one of the fifteen (15) organisations used key performance indicators to measure compliance with diversity issues. Although some Australian organisations have recognised the benefits of diversity management (i.e., AMP, Shell, and NAB), many have not yet identified commercial benefits.

Diversity from a disability perspective is another aspect that should be considered in diversity management.

People with disabilities cross all racial, gender, educational, socioeconomic, and organisational lines. Discussions on diversity have often focused on gender and race. In contrast, limited attention has been paid to people with disabilities as the world's largest minority group (Mackelprang et al., 2021).

Discrimination has been proven due to various disabilities in the world of work, and there is a dire need to fix this. The extent to which disability-inclusive measures have been considered in the current pandemic, which poses an existential risk, requires further examination. Urgent action is needed to ensure the following.

Provision of accessible information; provision of health services via telemedicine and community-based networks, ensuring equitable healthcare access; guidelines prohibiting blanket decisions on medical rationing solely on the grounds of disability; and employment and financial protection delivered through disability-related welfare provision.

Development of support frameworks for people who need to shield from COVID-19 but who are outside of the social welfare or social care context (for example, reasonable adjustments in employment working arrangements); educational interventions and reasonable accommodations through online special education classes, accessible education activities, and distribution of educational materials; social care services, including psychosocial support, personal assistance, and support for independent living; prevention from and response to violence, in the forms of accessible hotlines for gender-based violence, especially for disabled women, and emergency services and shelters prepared to meet the needs of disabled people; measures addressing the intersectional disadvantage disabled people face, including early release for disabled prisoners and provision of accessible health services for homeless people; and inclusion of disabled people in the recovery phase, ensuring that structural changes are implemented making societies more inclusive (Mackelprang, Salsgiver, Parrey, & Parrey 2021).

2.1 Inclusive and accessible HR initiatives lead to improved performance.

Many organisations are looking forward to meeting their social obligations to stakeholders. These organisations are now enlightened to embrace inclusive and exclusive initiatives that influence their performance. These initiatives have shown a significant effect on the organisation's performance; as per Community Business (2014), after implementing inclusive and accessible initiatives, companies have ensured a high level of performance and reduced

attrition rate. It also enhances team spirit and cohesiveness among employees. Community Business (2014) states that disabled people working in billable positions have guaranteed project revenue. These initiatives have also positively affected employee retention and engagement and increased brand visibility. The existing literature shows a positive relationship between inclusion and accessibility initiatives and job performance. This study was based on past analyses related to work done on inclusion and accessibility. Data were collected using secondary sources, including the International Labor Organization, Disability Network, Australian Network on Disability, and National Organization on Disabilities.

Miriam, Baumgartner, Stephan, Bohm, David and Dwertmann (2014) reveal that employees with disabilities differ in the social support they need for higher levels of job performance. The study also indicated a positive relationship between social support and job performance; the job performance of employees with low self-efficacy increased with higher social support.

Shore, Randel, Chung, Dean, Ehrhart, and Singh (2011) defined inclusion using Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT). They then assessed the effect of group inclusion on performance. The outcomes indicated that work-group inclusion leads to job satisfaction, quality relations between supervisors and subordinates, well-being, creativity, career opportunities, and job commitment. Mitchell, Boyle, Parker, Giles, Chiang, and Joyce (2015) observed that the results underlined the critical role of leader inclusiveness in diverse teams. He suggests that social identity and perceived status differences are essential factors that mediate its impact on performance.

According to the findings of the National Organisation on Disability (2016), the NOD's leading disability employer seal is a public, annual recognition designed to apply to organisations that are leading in disability hiring and encouraging other companies to tap into the many benefits of hiring talent with disabilities, including high rates of productivity and dedication and greater employee engagement across the workforce. The NOD-leading disability employer seal is awarded based on the data furnished by companies in response to the disability employment tracker. The companies' performance was examined based on five aspects: 1. Climate and culture 2. Talent sourcing 3. People initiatives 4. Workplace and technology 5. Strategy & metrics. Boehm and Dwertmann (2015) concluded that increased disability diversity in the workplace could lead to beneficial effects, such as creativity, higher commitment, and better performance. According to Bernstein, Crary, & Bilimoria (2015), positive outcomes associated with harnessing and leveraging the social identities and resources of diverse individuals and work groups were identified as the outcome.

Furthermore, according to the prevailing literature, several practices have been highlighted in different government-based sectors. As per Australia Post, 'diversity and inclusion do not just happen in the natural order of organisations; they must be consciously fostered and nurtured as critical influences of organisational performance, and we believe that diverse and inclusive workplaces encourage better workplaces with communities' (2020).

'Building a diverse workforce and an inclusive culture is, first and foremost, the right thing to do. If people feel respected and comfortable bringing their authentic selves to work, they will be best placed to fulfil their potential. Furthermore, leveraging the diversity of our workforce is excellent for our business because it enables us to better reflect on and understand our

customers and drive innovation and better decision-making. I am proud of what we have achieved in building a diverse and respectful workplace and encouraging inclusion within the communities we serve every day. I firmly believe that continuing and strengthening our commitment to diversity and inclusion is critical to the future success of the Australia Post Group (Ahmed Fahour – Managing Director & Group CEO 2015).

‘Large companies like Australia Post realise that the paradigm is changing, the economy is changing, and we need to transform how we approach talent,’ she told HRD (Marketing Manager, Australia Post 2021). Consequently, Australia Post is investing in developing its Employer Value Proposition for nine critical business units across blue-, pink-, and white-collar roles. The employees made a few comments. ‘It gives us a more informed candidate; there is better retention, and employees are happier because they know the culture, the type of work, the people, and even the location of where they will be working’. ‘It also speaks to their unique values, so gone are the days of money being the most important reason somebody joins a company.’ ‘It is very much about the environment they will be working in, the social situation and how they are viewed in the community.’ Responding to ‘employing Women in transport,’ ‘If you ask them, they will use the word ‘mateship’; they feel like the people they work with are their close mates,’ she said. ‘In the transport industry, we know there is deficient female representation. At Australia Post, we wanted to ensure that we think of diversity in every facet of the business given that we want to represent our customer base internally.’

As per Westpac's inclusion plan, a corporate bank of the big four banks, ‘we are committed to diversity and inclusion and have implemented various initiatives to promote inclusivity.’ For example, they have a Gender Equality Action Plan that includes targets for women in leadership and flexible working arrangements for all employees. They also have employee networks like the Westpac Group Pride Network, which supports LGBTQ+ employees and allies. Westpac states, ‘Our holistic and integrated approach seeks to help people with disability by creating a culture of belonging, psychological safety, and respect while designing our products and services with inclusion considerations’ (Westpac Inclusion Plan (2021-2024).

The Commonwealth Bank is committed to creating an inclusive work environment and has implemented various initiatives to promote diversity and inclusivity. For example, they have a Reconciliation Action Plan, which includes indigenous employment and procurement targets. They also have employee networks, such as the CBA Women’s Network, which supports women in the organisation. ‘We are committed to investing in our people, systems, processes and policies to ensure our workplace is inclusive and diverse. We expect our people to work together to achieve a culture that supports this commitment’ (CBA Inclusive Plan 2020).

Deloitte, one of the Big Four audit firms in the world, is committed to diversity and inclusion and has implemented various initiatives to promote inclusivity. For example, they have a Diversity and Inclusion Council that oversees their diversity and inclusion strategy and a ‘Flexibility@Deloitte’ program that provides flexible working arrangements for all employees. They also have employee networks such as the ‘Deloitte Pride Network,’ which supports LGBTQ+ employees and allies.

2.3 As per Global Human Capital trends, based on the Deloitte survey:

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are often treated as a monolithic objective rather than separate but mutually reinforcing sets of actions, with diversity and inclusion being necessary prerequisites to achieve equitable outcomes. DEI actions should achieve equitable results in the workforce—and broader society—while boosting an organisation's innovation, competitiveness, and long-term business success (2023)'. DEI progress has traditionally been measured based on activities and efforts, often with little consideration of the actual outcomes achieved.

Some organisations are making progress in DEI actions. For instance, Generation Z and millennial workers who are satisfied with their employers' societal and environmental impacts and their efforts to create a diverse and inclusive environment are likely to stay with their employers for more than five years. Specific to diversity, there has been a 1% increase in the representation of women in the global workforce since 2017 and a 6% increase in the number of women in C-suite roles (although only 26% of C-suite positions are filled by women).

2.4 Overall, organisations face four common challenges in furthering DEI progress:

- More emphasis on activities and equitable outcomes. According to the Deloitte 2023 Global Human Capital Trends survey, 23% of organisations measure progress regarding diversity commitments through adherence to compliance standards, which may focus on activities instead of their impact. For example, the existence of mentoring programs for specific identity groups versus the outcomes of those programs, such as intent to stay and perceptions of fairness.
- More focus is on solving the individual rather than solving the system. Organisations typically prioritise DEI activities that address professional development, unconscious bias, and inclusive behaviours at the individual level.
- Over aggregated data to report progress or results. Many organisations do not proactively collect and synthesise the data needed to deliver actionable insights into DEI beyond workforce representation (i.e., diversity). Even then, the data may be over-aggregated, making it difficult to face equity challenges facing specific identity groups.
- Disconnect between DEI objectives and other business objectives. Social enterprises prioritise societal value as a component of (not separate from) business outcomes. Deloitte calls this "Purpose Premium," suggesting that organisations with a focused strategy articulating their differentiated role in society realise value and competitive advantage through improved reputation, innovation, market valuation, operational efficiency, risk mitigation, and talent outcomes.
- Similarly, decades of research have revealed correlations between more diverse and inclusive organisations and core business objectives such as innovation and profit. However, according to the Deloitte 2023 Global Human Capital Trends survey respondents, only 15% (diversity) and 30% (inclusion) indicate that their organisations connect diversity and inclusion progress, contributing to equitable outcomes, to business outcomes such as increased profitability or productivity. Equitable outcomes should be considered business outcomes, not separate from 'the business.' In collaboration with DEI leaders, senior executives should consider leading

systemic changes. More than 90% of CEOs have built a DEI into their strategic priorities/goals. Hence, bold action is required to achieve equitable outcomes.

The PWC (another audit firm among the Big Four) Australia is committed to diversity and inclusion and has implemented various initiatives to promote inclusivity. For example, they also have a Diversity and Inclusion Council that oversees their diversity and inclusion strategy and a Flexible Talent Network that provides flexible working arrangements for all employees. They also have employee networks like the 'PWC Pride Network,' which supports LGBTQ+ employees and allies. 'Our people are at the Center of everything we do, and we want to ensure everyone can reach their full potential. Providing an environment where everyone feels that they belong is essential to ensuring that everyone is productive, motivated, and engaged. Tom Seymour, CEO of PWC Australia (2023). PWC's Inclusive Plan includes different policies for balancing work life while focusing on employees' wellness, including various types of leave, family protection, and career policies. 'Everyone involved in our grassroots, volunteer-led networks significantly impact creating an environment where our people feel safe, included and belong. For many of us, being involved in the networks is how we act on our values and fulfil our purpose. Being part of a network is incredibly rewarding and a great way to meet people and develop new skills (Chester, 2023).

Research studies by Allen (2008) and Bergen (2005) have identified multiple benefits for managing diversity, including attracting and retaining good staff, improving problem-solving and creativity, and enhancing overall performance. The managers surveyed here believed that they had the skills required to address diversity issues yet had not received any training, nor did they have any key performance indicators relating to diversity. They acknowledged that their approach to diversity is mainly intuitive. They were receptive to further skill development in diversity management if the value can be demonstrated. Therefore, we maintain that training alone is insufficient to develop a manager's ability to manage diversity. However, coaching and training would be appropriate to raise awareness and create lasting behavioural changes.

In addition, Pollitt (2005) surveyed three (3) million employees and found that creating an inclusive environment was a key driver of employee engagement and commitment. Leveson found that employees who perceived their managers as committed to diversity also perceived the organisation positively and were more committed to their organisations.

Recognising the importance of managing diversity and employee engagement in 2004, the Corporate Leadership Council studied over 50,000 employees in 27 countries to understand the main factors influencing employee engagement. The results show that managers are the key conduit for employee engagement. Furthermore, the critical potential driver of employee engagement was the 'manager's commitment to diversity.' A survey by the American Society of Public Administration in 2006 discovered a clear correlation between satisfaction and overall job satisfaction and engagement. In 2010, the Diversity Council of Australia (DCA) reported that employers who were leaders in managing work-life balance for their staff experienced tangible benefits, including reduced turnover (average 15%), reduced absenteeism (average 16%), and increased employee satisfaction (average 14%). The above research can be benchmarked when analysing the Australian context.

Despite these promising findings, a report by the Committee for Economic Development in Australia claims that ‘top managers do not have a clear understanding of the importance of diversity management or the benefits it brings to the individual employees and employee engagement as a whole.’ Furthermore, the committee argues that Australian businesses are not ‘capturing the diversity dividend.’ In other words, this refers to the benefits of effective diversity management, such as enhanced creativity and innovation, reduced workplace conflict, lower absenteeism and turnover, and superior teamwork skills (DCA, 2010).

The reasons for this may lie in the challenges associated with workforce diversity, including conflict, communication difficulties, and lower employee satisfaction. Therefore, leaders must help managers achieve potential benefits while coping with possible issues. Front-line managers must understand legislative requirements and how to help employees optimise their performance. For example, a white male manager who has never worked outside his own culture may need help in understanding the difficulties that could be experienced by a female manager from the Indian subcontinent in giving negative performance feedback to an older male subordinate (DCA, 2010).

Another study identifying ‘Australian managers’ attitudes and understanding regarding workforce diversity management (WDM) and the practices, inclusion, and incorporation of WDM in organisations was conducted in 2015. The survey was based on a self-administered questionnaire mailed to 100 managers (25 HR managers and 75 other managers) in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane.

As per the findings of this research, workforce diversity needs to be better understood and appreciated, especially by non-HR managers. Statistical analysis highlighted a considerable divergence of opinions across the surveyed group. Organisations generally do not appear to prioritise WDM, and the levels of senior manager engagement with the topic are tentative. However, observing research limitations/implications as such, as an exploratory study, further research is encouraged to understand better the cause-and-effect relationships between the findings in this study.

Practical implications for HR managers or those in related roles who might design, implement, and promote WDM initiatives, as well as implications for consultants, employees, and senior managers regarding education, awareness, and support of diversity objectives. It also addresses a gap in the literature by looking at contemporary attitudes and practices regarding WDM in Australian organisations, providing the first empirical comparison between HR and other managers on the topic.

Shifting responsibility for achieving equality objectives to organisations makes sense in terms of efficiency. However, the practice of managing diversity through being inclusive is diverse. Even with some prescriptions and guidance, such as in the Australian Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) legislation, the outcomes are variable (Burgess et al. 2007). Therefore, this study explored the rationale for managing diversity, examined the legislation supporting equity in the Australian workplace, and discussed the organisations selected as ‘best practice exemplars in terms of their EEO reporting.’ As the findings reveal, in Australia, organisations are primarily left to judge what is equitable for employees and profitable for the business. Unsurprisingly, organisations are only particular about what to do when policies are spelled

out in legislation (Burgess et al., 2007). Australia has a mix of legislated standards and voluntary codes to support EEO in the workplace. The EEO regime is a reporting regime. From the 1980s, the main concern was directly addressing discrimination in the workplace and later promoting EEO for female employees. Over the past decade, the emphasis has shifted towards corporate responsibility and organisations doing the right thing regarding broader equity objectives. This voluntarism has been boosted by the tightening labour market, which pressures organisations to acknowledge and address the diversity of their workforce. In addition, Burgess et al. (2007:535–36),

Organisations can choose the policies and practices they believe are appropriate to their business situations and the extent to which they will implement them. This might include attention to workers' preferences about individual work arrangements and career paths, emphasis on recruiting and training women in non-traditional roles, increasing 'flexibility' in hours worked, length of shifts and other temporal arrangements, or other priorities. Organisations can portray many policies and practices related to EEO without assessing outcomes against specified criteria or undertaking any measurement of change. Ad hoc business and labour force demands determine organisational equity policies and practices, which may colour the organisation's ethics and values.

Neither anti-discrimination, affirmative action, equal opportunity, nor managing diversity offers a cure-all for the inequality many people experience in the workplace. Even within the same industry and labour market, organisations can have different approaches and programs for EEO (Burgess et al., 2010). The various approaches to managing individual and collective 'sameness' and 'difference,' as well as any related disparity at work, result in other structures and policies for implementation.

Based on this study, it is concluded that managing diversity also depends on organisational goals. It is confined to sufficiently large organisations with diverse workforces and an HR division responsible for workforce management and development. Managing diversity is individualised in that each organisation develops its program subject to its own needs and those of its employees to achieve the company's vision, mission, and goals. Indeed, the programs can be individualised to satisfy the diverse needs of each employee. While programs must conform to universal legislative conditions, such as anti-discrimination laws, the authority for inclusivity to manage diversity comes from within the organisation. In this context, managing diversity can be fluid and still developing, subject to change as the organisation evolves regarding its employees, business conditions, and prevailing organisational objectives and goals (Burgess et al. 2010).

Several recent studies have illustrated the benefits of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The identified benefits of diversity in the workplace include increased innovation and creativity due to the different ideas and perspectives it brings. It also provides employees a supportive culture where everyone can bring themselves to work and realise their full potential. If we do it correctly, it should be clear and the same. However, how we work with each other and our stakeholders in the broader Australian Public Service (APS) and the Australian community will be evident. Therefore, further research on diversity and inclusion in all workplaces is encouraged, especially in the research sector, where creativity and innovation should thrive.

While ensuring a diverse workforce within the Australian Research Council (ARC) is a priority, the aim is to set an example and act as a role model for others. According to ARC Diversity and Inclusion, principles within the sphere of influence, encouraging diversity and inclusion within the entire network, including the research workforce, will be significant. In this way, the impact and benefits that may be realised for individuals and the community will be extended beyond ARC (2009).

‘This is the ARC’s vision for our future and our community. I hope that you will join us on this journey. Within an increasingly diverse society, the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures in communities and workplaces is paramount. It significantly affects whether we succeed or fail in an unfamiliar intercultural setting. Hence, communicating and interacting effectively and acquiring this ability via intercultural learning matters’ (ARC, 2009).

Diversity is the one thing we all have in common. Celebrate it every day. Building diverse companies through design means creating great places to make a difference. The organisation could design a few practices: actively listen and learn, list and align senior leaders, audit the culture, document what you are doing now, Establish Benchmarking, Build Action Learning Teams, and Develop an Action Plan (White 2022).

Best ways to promote diversity towards sustainability.

- Educate Managers on the Benefits of Diversity in the Workplace.
- Create More Inclusive Workplace Policies.
- Communicate Clearly and Create Employee-Led Task Forces.
- Offers meaningful opportunities for employee engagement.
- Create Mentorship Programs

2.5 Impact of Diversity Training on Inclusivity

Diversity training is used to increase diversity awareness and educate employees about business cases for diversity. Diversity training programs teach managers behaviours that foster respect and inclusion. Participants in this survey did not have diversity training but considered diversity training legislation-centric. When faced with diverse legislation-related issues, they tended to refer these to the HR department. Managers responded to more subtle, non-legislative matters related to gender, sex, ethnicity, or religion. In addition, they appear to use an intuitive, individual approach to managing diversity rather than a systematic approach. The absence of performance indicators also suggests an informal approach to diversity. Managers felt intuitively equipped to deal with these issues. However, they believed additional skill development might be beneficial, although they needed help defining what might entail. According to the Australian Center for International Business, only 27 % of organisations provide diversity training. Training helps communicate legal and company policies. However, Gillert, Arne, Chuzischvili, and George (2004) found that a traditional classroom environment could have been more conducive to effective learning about diversity. Lai and Kleiner (2001) also found that practical diversity training had to be supplemented with other initiatives, such as mentoring.

Diversity issues can be personal and can challenge one's cultural background. Religious views, tolerances, and biases are often deep-rooted. Coaching is based on a one-on-one confidential partnership, creating an environment that helps build trust and empathy and creates rapport. Bagshaw (2004) noted that we are susceptible to using distorting perceptual filters that lead to inaccurate assumptions about others. A non-judgmental coaching approach involves listening to and asking questions to understand the individual. This leads to heightened self-awareness, which helps managers gain an accurate picture of their performance and impact on others. Schmidt (2004) claims that diversity training is related to awareness. The benefits of training are often lost shortly after completion of a training course. However, when coaching is combined with exercise, sustainable behavioural changes can be achieved via monitoring and auditing.

Zhang and McGuire (2022), exploring the mechanism of diversity training through on-the-job embeddedness in a diverse workplace, explain how diversity training can reduce employee turnover in diverse organisations. Researchers have paid considerable attention to workforce diversity's positive and sometimes harmful effects. Much has been learned, but unanswered questions remain: How does firm behaviour affect employee turnover in diverse workforces? Which individual attributes of employees should be considered to facilitate an inclusive workforce climate? This study uses an integrative model to explain the consequences of workforce diversity training on employee turnover. This study proposes that diversity training can generate an inclusive organisational climate, increase employees' job embeddedness and decrease turnover. However, as a caveat, they suggest that mindset, a psychological construct, moderates the effectiveness of diversity training on the organisational climate and the relationship between an inclusive environment and on-the-job embeddedness.

Contemporary corporate culture in Australia presents managers with many different demands. The challenge of ensuring we foster inclusion and contribution from an increasingly diverse workforce is becoming increasingly relevant. Therefore, the literature reveals that mere training alone is insufficient to develop a manager's ability to manage diversity. Coaching combined with training would be an appropriate approach to raising awareness and creating lasting behavioural change towards inclusivity as a strategy leading to sustainability.

Team Management Systems recognise that organisations must identify a discernible performance improvement from collaborative teams comprising diverse individuals towards the suitability of the sector/organisation. Regarding how successful organisations tackle this challenge and what managers and leaders do to make a difference, Australian corporate learning and development specialists and Team Management Systems (TMS) have recently hosted a series of forums, assembling leading practitioners in diversity and inclusion (D&I). Revealing the outcomes and content from discussions on diversity and inclusion, TMS identified seven key issues and recurring themes that emerged.

- **Organizations must understand and work with differences.**

Diverse thinking and perspectives are needed if organisations are to solve some of today's most challenging and complex problems in the future. Establishing common ground is crucial in this process; upon achieving this, we can improve connections exponentially to build our understanding of diverse perspectives using different lenses and feedback tools.

- **Focus on an individual is a dire need.**

Everyone needs to feel included and valued, which requires acknowledging the whole person and all they bring to their workplace.

- **A top-down approach is required if these initiatives are to succeed.**

Senior leaders must personify diversity, which means doing more than just endorsing a policy. All levels of the organisation need to be involved, with passionate advocates developing and implementing plans across the broader organisation.

- **Increased self-awareness is central to addressing unconscious bias.**

Organisations have many initiatives to improve performance, all requiring dedication and resources. Nevertheless, self-awareness and emotional intelligence training are critical for helping people understand each other and communicate more effectively. A crucial insight is that leaders must develop competencies to create greater self-awareness and constructively address conflict.

- **Notions such as intersectionality also need to be considered.**

When examining multiple elements of diversity, such as ethnicity, gender, and age, one must be mindful of the compounding impact on an individual's experience and identity. Training programs work best when considering how complex attitudes towards diversity can impact all areas of an employee's life.

- **D&I programmers need to foster compassion in corporate life**

Personal impacts beyond policy and initiative must be considered by encouraging a culture of kindness within organisations. There is no place in corporate culture for ignorance or discrimination. At the same time, it is essential to be sensitive to lifestyle factors and how they can impact some of the significant initiatives of organisations.

- **D&I initiatives cannot be tokenistic or deliver performance gains.**

Inclusion programs should work at the grassroots level and be designed to empower people genuinely. Skill training in areas such as hosting effective meetings can encourage people to call out noninclusive language and behaviour, which helps to create safe and supportive workspaces. There is plenty of evidence that organisations with diverse leadership have recorded impressive returns and, without assuming causality, questioning, 'Why wouldn't you foster diversity?' It is possible to see a change in the bottom line when hiring people who look, think, and make decisions like your customer base.

2.6 Diversity and inclusion in sustainability: moving forward.

The Australian Human Rights Commission, Diversity Council in Australia, workplace gender equality agency, Australian Multicultural Foundation, and Australian Network on Disability provide necessary advice, facilities, training, and guidance.

As the Australian workforce recognises the importance of creating inclusive teams, this topic becomes more relevant for managers and leaders. The Institute of Managers and Leaders in Australia and New Zealand have diagnostic and development tools designed to improve leaders' ability to communicate better with a wide range of unique individuals. Thus, unconscious bias can be addressed by improving self-awareness (Schermerhorn and Bachrach, 2023). Diversity management and inclusivity are critical concepts in the Australian corporate sector for achieving sustainable practices. A literature review highlights the importance of diversity management and inclusivity in promoting creativity, innovation, and sustainability.

3.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, focusing on the Australian corporate sector and providing relevant examples is crucial when discussing diversity management and inclusivity towards sustainability. These examples demonstrate that many Australian companies have recognised the importance of creating an inclusive work environment and have implemented various initiatives to promote diversity and inclusivity. However, ongoing efforts are required to ensure these initiatives succeed and that all employees feel valued and included.

Most studies conclude that successfully managing diversity can lead to more committed, satisfied, and better-performing employees and potentially better financial performance for an organisation, leading to sustainability. In addition, many organisations surveyed need to derive the potential commercial dividend from diversity management via inclusion towards sustainability identified in previous research. This shows us that diversity training may produce a return on investment of more than 150% on the decreased turnover costs of staff through increased retention.

Further, most surveyed subjects in these studies believed they had the skills required to address diversity issues yet had to receive any training or key performance indicators relating to diversity. They acknowledged that their approach to diversity is mainly intuitive. They were receptive to further skill development in diversity management if the value can be demonstrated. Therefore, it was concluded that mere training alone would be insufficient to develop a manager's ability to manage diversity. However, coaching combined with training would be an appropriate approach to raise awareness and create lasting behavioural change towards inclusivity as a strategy leading to sustainability.

However, achieving 100% success in managing diversity requires considerable effort. It involves a new approach, from recruiting to assigning projects, to ensure someone is culturally fit. It generally takes years for intentional changes to occur. This means applying analytics as rigorously as any other aspect of business. Further, it required fully committed leaders with empathy and an inclusive orientation while creating an anti-racist culture at every level of the organisation. As companies rebound from pandemic-related disruptions, leaders have a brief window to reimagine how they approach the workforce. Finally, building diverse organisations by design, embedded in their vision, mission, goals, and overall strategy/development objectives towards sustainability, while identifying it as a priority, means creating great workplaces and becoming 'employers of choice.'

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