Panel T13 P05

Gender, Diversity and Public Policy

Title of the paper

PUBLIC SECTOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVENESS: CONCEPTS, FINDINGS AND SUGGESTED POLICY ACTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the issues of diversity and inclusiveness in the public sector, with a particular focus on the barriers to employment and career progression of two minority groups: people with disability and senior women. After examining relevant concepts and literature findings, the paper provides findings from two recent 'cultural audits' from the Australian Public Service: one examining the perceptions of senior men and senior women about the barriers to career progression that senior women face; the other examining the perceptions of people with as well as without disability of the barriers faced by employees with disability. It also provides plausible and practical measures that public administrators can undertake if the benefits of a more diverse and inclusive workforce are to be gained.

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The focus of this paper is as follows. After clarifying relevant concepts, the paper summarises the main reasons why we need to pay attention to a more diverse and inclusive workforce. A brief case study is then presented on diversity management to provide a salutary lesson in what can happen, despite the best intentions, if attempts are made by management to encourage more diversity in its workforce but without dealing also with underlying issues. The main section of the paper provides a summary of findings from two recent surveys or 'cultural audits' of Australia's public service perceptions and practices; one survey examined the perceptions of senior public servants about the barriers to the progression of senior women and the other survey was about the perceptions of public servants to the barriers faced by employees with disability. The paper concludes with evidence-based recommendations to improve policy and practice

1. *Clarifying Concepts*

Diversity is a complex concept, more so when it is distinguished from the concept of inclusiveness. In essence, *diversity* includes both visible and invisible differences among people that shape their perspectives; inclusion is more about valuing and accommodating differences. An *inclusive culture* is where people consciously adapt their behaviours, responses and practices to include others, rather than expecting others to fit into the prevailing culture. Diversity has been likened to putting a range of different players on a sports team whereas inclusiveness is more about passing those players the ball (Makhlouf 2014). Whether differences are in terms of nationality, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability or educational background, an inclusive culture and its practices recognizes value and harnesses 'what makes every individual unique in the broader sense of acknowledging and respecting differences.' (World Bank 2006: 2015).

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)

A related concept is relevant and important to clarify: that of *unconscious bias*. Conscious biases in behavior are easy to identify; much harder is unconscious behavior. Unconscious bias refers to the perceptions or hidden beliefs that influence an individual's behaviour but without the individual's conscious knowledge. We all have unconscious biases as our brains automatically make judgements based on our experience or culture. For example, unconscious bias assumptions are often made about the impact family responsibilities may have on the work performance of women (but not of men).

In the workplace, this means that it is not easy to detect cultural bias that can be embedded in organizational structures and practices (Edwards et al 2013:11). Therefore, there is a danger that unconscious bias in relation to others' behaviours can lead to unconscious discrimination and exclusion. It follows that if the playing field is not level then the merit principle is hard to apply (see UN Women 2015)

HOW MANY LEGS DOES THIS ELEPHANT HAVE?
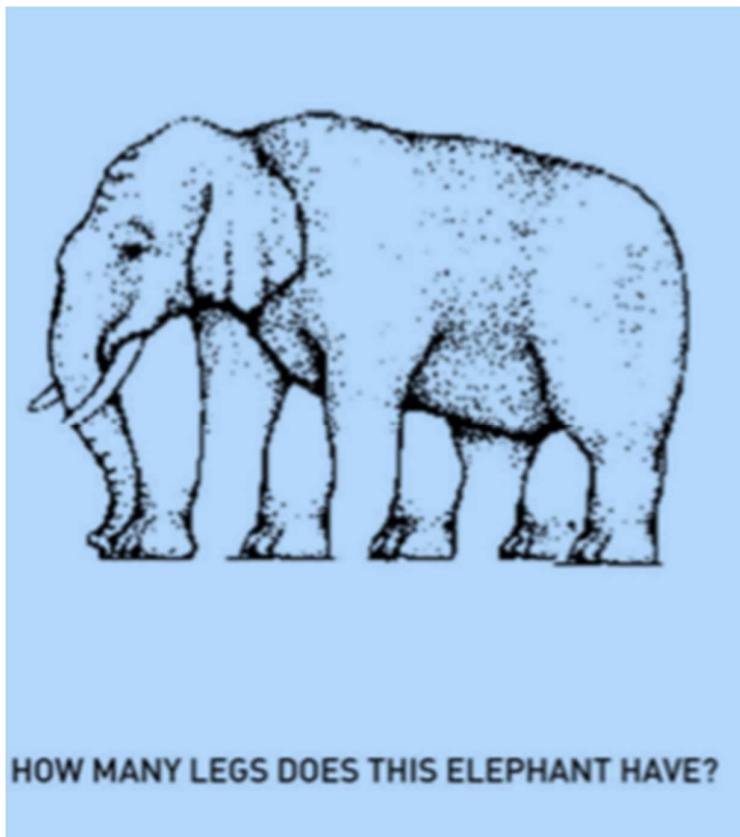
Many studies have shown clear biases in recruitment based on differences, for example, gender (Wittenberg-Cox 2014). When equally qualified male and female candidates apply for a job, managers are much more likely to hire the man for the job. Male candidates tend to boast of their abilities while women tend to downplay their talents. However, managers do not tend to compensate for these differences when making hiring decisions. So, until hiring and promotion practices change, women can 'lean in' all they like but are still much less likely to make it to the top. Wittenberg-Cox writes: 'The corporate world is led by men confident that they are identifying talent objectively and effectively. The reality, underlined by this and many other reports, is that decision making about talent is rife with unconscious assumptions and personal biases' (2014). While much is claimed for the benefits of the 'merit principle' in recruitment, whether merit in fact operates in practice needs to be carefully scrutinised (UN Women 2015).

In our work on perceptions around disability the question often raised was what is actually meant by the term '*disability"?* Disability, unlike age or gender, is abstract, relative and a socially constructed concept. It is also a condition that can change over time (ARTD 2013:35-36). Hence attempting to define it can be complex and more than one definition may be needed depending on the purpose.

Narrowly defined, disability occurs if there is 'a limitation, restriction or impairment' which lasts for a considerable period of time and restricts daily activities (based on ABS: 2012). More broadly it would include current and previous disabilities that that may exist in the future (based on APSC 2012:35-36). The *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability* considers disability 'an evolving concept and occurring as a result of the interaction between people with impairments and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'. (Preamble CRPD, Section (e)).

There is an important distinction here between impairment and disability: a person may have an impairment, such as deafness or autism, but the extent of disability in the workplace will depend on the extent to which their capabilities to do the job are hindered. This in turn depends on the interaction of personal characteristics, supports available (such as hearing aids and loops) and environmental factors (Mitra 2006: 237).

In the workplace, the term 'disability' can lead to a focus on what is lacking in a person, rather than what is lacking in the workplace environment. This supports a culture of reactive adjustments for individuals that disclose their disability, rather than proactive attempts at increasing the attractiveness of an organization to support the recruitment, retention and career progression of people with different disabilities (ARTD 2013:viii).

2. *Why Does Diversity Matter?*

Why should there be concern at a lack of diversity in any organization? In most, if not all countries, there is an under-representation of people with disability and senior women in employment. This is particularly the case in the public sector for people with disability. In Australia for example, although PWD make up almost 9 per cent of the workforce, in the Australian Public Service (APS) that figure is around 7 percent (with only 3 per cent disclosing their disability to their agency) (AHRC 2016:216). For senior women, the proportion in more senior roles, compared with men, is generally much lower than the proportion employed at lower levels or the proportion of senior men. Low representation and few role models can lead to hostile work places. In Australia, for example, public sector employees with disability have been found to be almost twice as likely to report feeling bullied or harassed in the last 12 months than other groups (APSC 2014). Minority groups perceive many more barriers to their employment progress than more mainstream employees. This is a matter of fairness and basic human rights enshrined in so many UN instruments and decisions as well as domestic legislation. It is a moral imperative to place value on an inclusive culture and to empower rather than exclude such groups. Further, without impartiality in employment decisions in the public service then there will be less representativeness of the population whom public servants serve.

In addition to the above observations is the business imperative for a diverse workforce accompanied by an inclusive culture; what the World Bank refers to as 'smart economics' (2006). There is much evidence to suggest that where there is

a lack of diversity and inclusion, then, capability, productivity and performance are hindered, especially in leadership teams (e.g. see Deloitte 2011; McKinsey 2015). The evidence shows that organisations with greater gender and race diversity, for example, perform better in revenue, customer and market share and hence organizational performance. There is also evidence that organizations that provide more flexible work practices significantly improve their productivity (see, for example, Ernst and Young 2013; Canada 2011; Deloitte 2012; AHRC 2016)

What accounts for these findings? A broader base of recruitment leads to a greater capacity to recruit the best talent, to get stronger customer orientation, to increase employee satisfaction and enhance capability in decision-making.

3. *A Salutary Case Study in Diversity Management*

Soni (2000) provides an instructive case study that is based on a diversity management strategy in the United Sates Environmental Protection Agency; it is which is likely to resonate with many organizations today. The agency declared diversity as an organizational priority.   It therefore devised a diversity management program and went on to include diversity initiatives in its five-year strategic plan. As part of its monitoring of this program the agency measured the perceptions and attitudes of its employees and managers to determine the extent of receptivity to diversity.

What were the findings? It found that its diversity management program had minimal effect.   There was a lack of 'cultural competence' or understanding by staff of what constituted diversity and why the diversity initiatives were needed. It also found a big difference in perceptions in treatment by minorities (especially race) and women when compared with the perceptions of white males. In fact it found that their diversity practices had led to a backlash and concern about 'reverse discrimination' especially by white males. This group experienced a form of 'cultural shock' arising from the changes that had not been anticipated up front. As for the minority groups; they found that they were expected to 'fit in' with the existing culture rather than the culture adapting to their needs.

What this experience taught the organization was the importance of undertaking early a 'cultural audit' of the existing state of awareness and attitudes and how unconscious biases might be manifesting themselves. In other words, instituting up front a baseline measure of the organization's 'diversity climate'. Had the agency done this, it could have gauged the extent of 'organizational readiness 'and the extent to which employees acknowledged that there was a problem and whether there was a need to experiment with solutions.
 Soni discovered that '…whether the goal of effectively managing workforce diversity is achieved depends largely on an organization's diversity climate which, in turn, influences an employee's receptivity to diversity and to diversity-management initiatives' (2000:396).
Soni's salutary conclusions are reflected in more recent assessments of why, despite best intentions, public sector organizations across several countries have failed to achieve their diversity management objectives (see, for example, Canada 2011; NAO 2015; Ospina 2001; United Kingdom 2015). The National Audit Office

in the United Kingdom, for example, notes that 'a series of previous strategies have not led to sustainable change to the approach in the civil service, and momentum was lost' (2015:7). Previous attempts had 'limited success because they did not address the core issues' (ibid).

4. *Diversity and Inclusiveness in the Australian Public Service: two cultural audits*

(a) Purpose

The Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis at the University of Canberra has recently undertaken two studies or 'cultural audits' of the Australian Public Service (Edwards et al 2013; Evans et al 2016). The prime aim was to explore the main cultural and systemic factors perceived to affect employment participation and career progress. The studies specifically focused on the perceptions of senior men and women about the barriers to the career progression that senior women face; and the perceptions of people with and without disability of the employment barriers people with disability face. The ultimate aim was to inform decision makers about those barriers and to provide evidence-based recommendations to enable effective policy action.

One of the motivating factors for undertaking these studies was because as yet so little is known in Australia as well as elsewhere about employee perceptions on the barriers to employment progress of minority groups in the public sector.

(b) Methodology

Both studies addressed five core questions:
1. What are the barriers public servants experience and why?
2. How can these barriers be mitigated?
3. In terms of workplace policies and processes – what works and what does not?
4. What does international and domestic best practice suggest to meet those challenges?
5. How can existing practices be made more robust and become embedded in the culture of the organisation?

A mixed methods approach to data collection was used as follows:
- qualitative analysis via the delivery of focus groups. In the case of our study of the barriers that senior women face, focus groups were held with senior women and men separately as well as some one to one interviews with more senior people. In the case of the disability study, three focus groups were held in each department: one with middle managers; one with a mixture of staff across departmental functions; and a mixed group of public servants who had declared different types of disability at various levels of the organization;
- a quantitative on-line survey was undertaken for all Department members in the disability study, in order to validate findings emerging from the

qualitative work and to identify any inconsistent knowledge claims. Similar quantitative validation was undertaken to validate focus groups perceptions of the barriers senior women face.

- A quantitative analysis of relevant data across all Australian Government departments (based on APSC State of the Service Reports).

In both cases, quantitative and qualitative focus group data were collected and analysed, involving around 250 contributors to focus groups in each case, with the data underpinned by an extensive literature survey (for more detail, see Edwards et al 2013; and Evans et al 2016). Six departments were involved in the gender study and seven in the case of disability with departments selected displaying a variety of characteristics, including size and portfolio (ibid).

A comparison was undertaken of workplace participation and career progression to gauge the extent of workplace inclusion for the two minority groups: perceptions of the dominant as well as minority groups were investigated and compared to assess whether a progressive culture for the advancement of a diversity agenda exists. In sum these methods allowed us to assess:

(1) how successful the Department is in expanding the capabilities of its employees by gender or who are experiencing a disability ; and
(2) what dimensions of the implementation process for empowering people and enhancing workplace participation and progression are effective or not.

(c) Main Findings

What did we find? In essence, in both studies we found much unconscious (if not conscious) bias related to employment and career progression. The main perceived barriers for our two studies follow (For more detail see Edwards et al 2013; Edwards 2016; Evans et al 2016).

Barriers faced by Senior Women

Senior men overwhelmingly considered that the lack of progress of senior women was caused by their 'commitment to family responsibilities'. In fact more than half of the men did not identify any other major barrier. Interview narratives betray a range of negative perceptions such as: having a family is a sign of lack of commitment; or a tension between being at work and being visible; or wanting to be a parent and, if not actually in the office, assumed to be not working:

> *'It's obvious. Can I depend on a woman for three years when she's likely to have a child?'*

or

> '*We have on paper all that stuff about flexibility… but there is little evidence that we support it. I promoted someone when she was pregnant and they thought she shouldn't apply and to put her in a job that's below her skills'*

On the other hand, women saw the barriers somewhat differently and in a more nuanced way. While family responsibilities were perceived as important to

women, interestingly lack of self-confidence was an even more important factor for the majority of women, especially for women in male dominated departments. For example:

> *'By the time (women) are aiming for promotion (to the executive level), they have often been overlooked, excluded, spoken over, or discouraged by overly aggressive/competitive environments. Without unpacking the 'lack of self-confidence' argument, it is too easy to see this as a problem of the women, that we should fix the woman rather than fix the workforce.'*

Senior women in these departments commonly felt *excluded from networks* and suffered from *male stereotyping*. They also felt that their employment progress was impacted because their *personal style* differed from the senior men around them. One senior male from a department with mostly men in its senior ranks had this to say about the exclusive culture of his organization:

> *'This place is rife with unconscious bias. It's very homogenous, with few diverse people, few indigenous people. It is a conservative, male-centric Anglo-Saxon dominated workforce.'*

And a senior woman reflected:

> *Since I've been here my confidence has gone down quite a bit because it's a hierarchical environment. I'm, always trying to find out what is going on and feel very disempowered. This is impacting my ambition and creates a lot more uncertainty.*

We found cultural biases that women take on primary care responsibilities for families; organizational biases that favour those without family responsibilities; and gender biases, which result in men and women assuming that women with children must choose between families and a demanding career (May 2013).

Questions were asked about critical success factors in career progression. Important here was the extent of 'cultural fit' felt by staff. There was a distinct difference between departments where men dominated senior positions with departments where senior women were more prevalent. In the former there was more mention of 'boys' clubs', exclusion from networks by senior women and a lack of tolerance for flexible work practices. For example a senior woman where senior men dominated had this to say:

> *' The boy girl thing is very evident. I keep probing, asking questions respectively. I don't want to challenge them so they feel threatened, but if you don't realize this is the situation, you will be behind the eight all. You have to tailor your style'*

By contrast, in departments with a prevalence of senior women, overall there was a greater acceptance of a range of leadership styles and the culture was described more in terms of communication with organizational and cultural values of

collaboration and collegiality, as well as more support for family friendly workplaces.

As the next section shows, perceptions around the lack of an inclusive culture were also prevalent amongst people with disability and, while the very different barriers to participation and career progression faced by people with disability should not be minimized, the similarities are also striking.

Barriers faced by people with disability

In its focus on people with disability and perceptions on their employment barriers, a distinct difference was found between people with disability and those without disclosed disability about the barriers faced. On the whole people with disability perceived more and stronger barriers, especially in implementation than did people without a disability. Basically, both groups have identified cultural, organizational and individual barriers. Some of the (overlapping) barriers identified include the following:

(a) Cultural
- unconscious bias in language, behaviours and preconceptions of capabilities;
    - leading to stigma and discrimination
    "I do not believe this is malicious, just that people are ignorant."

- raised expectations, given departmental policy statements
    - but lack of incentives to follow through e.g. on flexible working arrangements
    "They're encouraging more people with mental health issues to come back to work but we're not providing a packet of education around, what to do if you do have somebody in your area that has a mental health issue or whatever. You may be putting that person there, but we're not showing people how they should be interacting with that person: not treating them differently, but making adjustments for people."

- at times an inhospitable culture, including in human resource areas
    - this was frequently due to lack of knowledge and awareness and fear about how to act (especially on mental health issues) but
    "If you don't know much about people with disabilities, it's really hard to throw any type of interaction or judgment on them without feeling like you could upset the person or be positive to the situation. In the public service with such a stigma of having "don't offend people" that can be one of the issues that causes people to just not interact and not connect. That is a barrier."

- also at times an absence of committed leadership;
    - the ultimate result was too often a feeling of lack of trust and a failure to disclose any invisible impairment.

"During the selection process I would not disclose my disability until such time as I knew I was down to, I don't know the last two or three. Then I would say in that situation where I had an expectation that I may be offered the position then I would fess up if you like and tell them what the impacts of that disability were."

(b) *Organizational*
- the definition of disability used can disempower employees;
  - especially if it focuses on achieving target numbers alone and there are no measures taken to empower employees in line with capabilities;
    "It's not just getting people in the door and satisfying a quota or whatever it might be, it's actually providing career. I think we're more at the latest part of that, focused on getting people in the door."

- lack of accessible and equitable recruitment, promotion and performance management processes;
  "If something needs to be addressed across the whole public service, it really is serious career progression for people with disabilities."

- lack of reasonable and prompt workplace adjustment processes;
  "It's not hard, it's just an adjustable desk. Since starting I had to wait about three and a half months to four months."

- unclear management roles and responsibilities;
  "I don't feel that I have the tools and maybe I should be reaching out more between determining is that a behaviour that needs to be addressed and trying to provide some support and sort of bring awareness to that."

- an absence of senior role models;
  "There are several well promoted case studies of work that the department is doing in this area however, these largely apply to more junior staff. There are few if any examples of the work done in this area at the senior executive level."

- limited human resource experience which tended to be compliance oriented;
  "They are wrapped up in the rules and the regulations to the point where they can't see you as a person."

- insufficient provision for targeted learning and development opportunities;
  "There is no training (that I am aware of) that helps managers best approach staff that may have a disability or limited ability."

- the impact of resource constraints;
  "In my Department there is still a disconnect between the Department's supportive position and the Property sections who should be ensuring our environment can support people with a disability. It has been clear

over the years that Property is pressured to save money, not consider staff needs."

- a gap (sometimes quite large) between policies and implementation
  "I don't see active discrimination against people with disabilities, but I do see an inflexibility, or a system that isn't easy to make changes to."

(c) Individual
- a lack of empowerment, leading to insufficient autonomy and low confidence;
  "I've always been of the assumption you've got to be twice as good to be considered half as good. "

- assigned work under-estimating capability;
  "Recently I heard someone saying, "My personal opinion is you shouldn't be working." I've had three professors and numerous doctors all say that I'm perfectly fine to work. There's nothing wrong ... There is something wrong with me but nothing wrong with my capacity and I can work full time."

- inability to access support networks;
  "I don't know if we have a disability network - certainly our other networks are much more high profile."

- unreasonably slow adjustment practices;
  "It can take too long to make adjustments such as obtain different IT equipment. I waited months for a piece of equipment that should have been readily available."

- inability to access flexible work arrangements;
  "Colleagues often do not understand the need for flexible working hours and complain when people work at different times."

- uninformed performance review processes;
  "I think there are some managers who, particularly with the invisible disabilities have preconceived ideas about ability. I know of people who've got mental health conditions who have ended up being performance managed. Unfairly. I think that is quite a big issue."

- financial costs of participation.

  "If you do choose to disclose, you shouldn't have to fight for what you need and I think, you still have to fight with the APS, for what you need. This is a money issue and no manager has, - I don't have - a line item in budget that says reasonable adjustment.

5.   *Directions for Change[1]*

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[1] For more specific proposals, see Edwards et al 2013 and Evans et al 2016.

The above is a summary of our findings on workplace barriers - whether faced by senior women or those with people with disability - that adversely affect inclusivity and organisational productivity. The findings indicate some critical dilemmas that are faced by the public sector agencies we surveyed, and by implication, others more generally; dilemmas which lead onto areas for policy action. Again, while specific measures for effective action will obviously be different for different minority groups (as well as individuals within those groups), three key dilemma areas for action can be identified as follows:

- A exclusive culture which leads onto unconscious biases;
- Organizational myopia and a lack of managerial capabilities; and
- Ineffective implementation, including lack of appropriate learning and performance regimes.

In practice these areas interact with one another and impact directly and indirectly on the well being of minority groups – such as those in our study – as well as the overall health of agencies.

(a) Building an inclusive culture

Unconscious bias is too often reflected in staff behaviour and in preconceptions about capabilities, commitment and reliability of both PWD and senior women. As we have seen, a major 'culprit' is a dominant value system which leads to an inhospitable culture (e.g. UK Disability Rights 2014: 18; Ospina 2001:13; Soni 2000:403). In this context it is relevant and important to note that building an organizational culture around a concept of high performance, or, inflexible work practices, can be perceived as exclusionary by minority groups. In turn, lack of empowerment and lack of self-confidence can follow for affected minority groups. People with disability may need to work differently from others and this requires respect and support. And many women may have a different style of management from the dominant culture that also needs to be recognized. Otherwise organizational trust is adversely affected and with it levels of organizational performance.

Soni (2000) noted earlier in this paper, refers to *organizational readiness* or receptivity as an 'important and necessary condition for diversity-management initiatives to be undertaken' and one way to do that is through 'prior attitudinal work' (Soni 2000:405). The recent UK Civil Service *Refreshed Talent Action Plan* (2015, para 20) notes that there is a need for data on perceptions of inclusivity in the organization as a driver of reform. It is because organisations commonly find it difficult to achieve results, despite good intentions, that our project has placed emphasis on an initial upfront emphasis on those attitudes or perceptions; on undertaking cultural audits. This would be a baseline measure of 'organisational readiness' or change (Soni 2000).

Ospina (2001) argues that an effective diversity management strategy would start with the objective of *considering* and *pursuing* diversity (or disability) so that those within the organisation are involved in tasks 'that help them become

aware of the benefits of increased diversity'. Only once there is some motivation and awareness of why diversity is being pursued can managers then look to create a more diverse workforce by developing a strategy for *managing* diversity. Managers can then use the workforce strategically to add value to the organization's strategic goals by supporting the unique contributions each organizational member brings, thus *maximizing* diversity (Ospina 2001:16)*.*

It follows that *strong, committed, consistent and inclusive leadership* is a necessary (but by no means sufficient) area for action. Culture reflects the underlying values and assumptions of the organization that translate into behaviours which leaders need to drive. More specifically this would involve leaders determining when to act with what measures, including:
- driving cultural change - for example challenging negative language and attitudes and ensuring people are held to account for inappropriate behaviour.
- clearly communicating why a more inclusive culture is needed and its business and other benefits; and more generally
- showcasing successful diversity leaders and encouraging role models;
- setting relevant targets (with teeth);
- holding managers to   account in performance agreements for clear diversity objectives (e.g. through 360 degrees assessments) ;

(b) Improving organizational and managerial capabilities

 Gaining the capabilities to move from an exclusive to a more inclusive culture in any organisation is a tough task. This is particularly so for organizations which have a cohesive dominant culture with embedded norms and values.

In line with an emphasis on the acceptance of a range of differences in ways in which people work - whether male or female, with or without disability or with other characteristics - goes the value of mainstreaming as many policies as possible that can benefit people, not only minority groups, but the whole workforce in so far as capabilities are enhanced. This would include accessible workplaces, flexible workplace practices, fair complaint systems, improved and fairer performance management processes, and more generally supportive supervisor-staff relationships (AND 2016:06). This is one useful starting point for any diversity strategy. In relation to disability, this is also a way to change the focus from the narrower medical approach to disability, that places the onus on the individual's 'problem', towards the broader social approach to disability so that talent is not wasted and in which inclusion of all workers in the workplace is valued.

Obviously important in making progress with a diversity strategy is the effective provision of relevant information and a range of education tools - including clear communication of the business arguments for inclusion- so that staff genuinely understand why diversity matters. Valuable at this stage of building awareness, can be regular face-to-face staff meetings to talk about diversity issues.   More specific areas for action designed to enhance organizational capability include:

- *Attraction, recruitment and selection processes* which are more friendly to minority groups, such as:
  - easy to understand recruitment guides; eliminating bias in job descriptions; and selecting recruitment panels with external representatives
- *Talent management and succession planning,* such as:
  - challenging roles or empowering role allocation in line with capabilities; fast track mechanisms for those in a minority position with identified talent; setting up emerging leaders programs; effective performance feedback; targeted recruitment;
- *Workplace flexibilities*, achieved by:
  - better practice guides with peer review across agencies; websites on success stories; focus on bridging the policy/practice gap;
- Providing *easy access to support networks* such as mentoring, reverse mentoring (to gain exposure) and sponsorship
- More appropriate and responsive *centralized workplace adjustments,* for all employees but including providing people with disability with 'passports' (to minimize on how many times they need to inform managers of their needs)

(c) Bringing policy into action in a learning and performance regime

We found a big gap between policy intentions to assist our two minority groups with their employment and career progression and what actually was occurring in practice. However good the structures and policies, unless they and the culture are consistent, those well intentioned policies will fail.

One factor commonly identified in both our surveys and which appears to be a systemic problem in the APS was ineffective feedback to staff, if not bias, about their performance and, more generally, inadequate performance management systems. Better realizing the talents and potential strengths of all staff, providing more career progression opportunities and developing more effective performance management systems are areas ripe for attention.

We asked our survey participants for suggestions about what their departments and the public service more broadly could do to reduce the barriers to employment they had identified. Interestingly, despite differences in departmental cultures and individual backgrounds, the responses were surprisingly uniform across the departments surveyed with a common call for action for more diversity awareness and unconscious bias training and support as well as programs to build self confidence. Our studies suggest particular attention needs to be paid to building human resource teams with relevant skills and to ensure that human resource areas are not marginalized and have representation on the departmental executive team. And all managers need support to build their competence in managing diversity and training in inclusive behaviour (UK 2015). However, it needs to be noted, diversity training programs are unlikely to be effective without diversity goals being reflected in organizational culture and day-to-day practice (Soni 2000:404).

Finally, much more attention needs to be given to developing a culture that values learning: where regular monitoring of progress toward desired outcomes for minority groups with feedback loops is embraced; where best practice is actively shared; where managers are held accountable for diversity outcomes; and where data is valued. Strategically used, data on diversity, performance, progression and more broadly attitudes to progress on inclusion can and should drive change and lead to a better alignment of policy and practice (e.g. Disability Rights UK 2015:13).

Endnote

The evidence presented above would suggest that public sector agencies need to reframe organizational statements and discussions towards valuing difference in the workplace, diversity of thought and viewing diversity as a resource or capability rather than as a liability. Our studies would suggest it is more effective to consider how the workplace can be adapted to work for minority groups rather than focusingt on how they can be supported to fit into the existing workplace.

The case study cited above also highlighted the real possibility of backlash from affected groups and that needs to be anticipated up front by building an awareness of the performance benefits from the creation of an inclusive culture (e.g. Soni 2000: 400,403)[2]. There is also a need to counter the belief that the concept of a merit-based assessment already exists. There is an important role for organizational champions to provide leadership about the need to share power and ensure people are accountable for their actions. In an effective system, diversity initiatives would be integrated into both human resource and business strategies. Only when an organization has taken seriously the importance of diversity and combined it with an inclusive culture and a comprehensive set of safeguards, will trust grow and all employees have the chance to realize their full potential.

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[2] There is a rich literature on how to handle the possible impact of diversity initiatives on non-minority groups, most frequently heterosexual white males (e.g. Stevens et al 2008; Miller and Katz 2009; Sabharwal 2014; Galinsky et al 2015; Sabharwal et al 2016).

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