

# Tip SHEET

## MARCH 2018 CELEBRATING DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

As the world of work becomes more complex, it's important to look beyond traditional concepts of diversity as part of our efforts to create happy, healthy, productive and successful workplaces.

*"Strength lies in differences, not in similarities."*

- Stephen R Covey, author

In its recent report "Delivering through diversity", management consulting firm McKinsey found a demonstrable link between diversity, which it defined as a larger proportion of women and a more mixed ethnic and cultural composition in the leadership roles of large companies, and a business' financial performance:

- Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity in their executive teams were 21 percent more likely to experience above average profitability
- Companies in the top quartile for ethnic and cultural diversity were 35 percent more likely to outperform on profitability

### WHAT IS DIVERSITY AT WORK?

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

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

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

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

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

### AGE/ GENERATION

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

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

People of different ages/ generations may have very different experiences growing up, living life and going to work; these varying experiences will shape their attitudes to a range of workplace matters from hierarchies, the ways meetings work, steps to address conflict and more.

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

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

### CULTURE/ ETHNICITY

Cultural and religious diversity enriches workplaces by introducing people to new ideas, experiences, perspectives, types of music and even different foods. While Australia is a harmonious multicultural society, there are still possibilities of differences and these may arise across issues relating to hierarchies, gender, religious reflection at work, diet and alcohol, clothing choices and more. Encouraging dialogue around these issues, and focusing on what unites us, can help to manage conflicts.

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### GENDER

In 2018, gender equality is about more than having a 50%/50% split between females and males in your staff. Today's discussions around gender involve looking at how women are represented in leadership roles, the ways your organisation addresses work/ family or work/ life balance for all employees, steps taken to support new parents at work and even extend to supporting staff members who are transgender.

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

### SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

This is a very personal issue, however sexuality has been a topical issue in Australia. Data from overseas shows that gay men and lesbian women who are open about their sexuality are more likely to advance in their careers as compared to those who remain 'closeted'. Our workplaces can support people with diverse sexuality to feel welcome and included and supported in their relationships.

### ABILITY

Supporting people of all abilities to participate in the workforce is an important expression of celebrating diversity. When looking at creating a workplace that is support of, and accommodating to, people of all abilities, consider:

- Enabling access to your worksite for people who use wheelchairs or other mobility supports
- Providing access to technologies including headsets, screen readers and specialised computer software
- Addressing attitudes around the inclusion of people of all abilities in your workplace

### DIVERSITY CAN BE THE FOUNDATION OF A GREAT WORKPLACE

How can diversity contribute to building a great workplace? Above we looked at McKinsey's findings about how diversity drives business success, but what are some of the other benefits?:

- **Increased creativity:** Bringing together people with different backgrounds, qualifications and experiences means a significant boost to creativity and innovative approaches to problem solving
- **Higher employee engagement:** When your employees come from different backgrounds, they are likely to share personal stories and develop a culture of learning from each other
- **Lower levels of staff turnover:** Recruiting from a more diverse background of candidates means a wider variety of education and employment experiences among your staff. As a result, staff may be more resilient and flexible, leading to lower levels of employee turnover
- **Boosting your workplace profile:** Organisations that are seen to promote diversity develop a positive reputation in the market, attract more staff and have happier customers

### LEARN HOW DIVERSITY CAN BENEFIT YOUR WORKPLACE

Need support around managing diversity at work? Converge International has a range of expertise around team building, conflict resolution, change management and more. You can learn more by visiting [www.convergeinternational.com.au](http://www.convergeinternational.com.au) or calling **1300 OUR EAP (1300 687 327)**.

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