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DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND BELONGING GUIDE

Developing inclusive and equitable workplaces
in Queensland's community services sector

CONTENTS

OVERVIEW

This guide provides a comprehensive overview of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) concepts and strategies for creating inclusive and equitable workplaces across the Queensland community services sector. You will learn about the importance of DEIB in organisational success, the impact of biases and stereotypes, and practical techniques for fostering a sense of belonging for all employees.

DEIB in the Community services sector

In the community services sector, there are distinctive opportunities for enhancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) for employees. The composition of our workforce is a rich blend of professionals, individuals with lived experiences, and those with diverse educational backgrounds. One of our strengths lies in the dynamic nature of our organisations, which collectively contribute to a unique and inclusive organisational culture.

Some organisations do find it challenging to ensure diversity reaches all levels of organisational leadership and decision-making. In essence, our commitment to DEIB is evident in the dynamic composition of our workforce and our dedication to incorporating diverse perspectives in our decision making processes, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and effective community service sector.

UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Why is diversity and inclusion important?

The appreciation of diversity and inclusion has always been a cornerstone of the community services sector. The sector has been established to champion and serve people who may be marginalised and experiencing vulnerability.

Service users encompass a variety of individual difference in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, and other characteristics that contribute to unique perspectives and experiences. While organisations within the sector appreciate the value that diversity brings to their work, many encounter challenges in translating these values into a diverse workforce across all levels. Achieving alignment between the diversity represented in service users and the workforce remains an ongoing objective for many organisations we speak to.

Diversity Australia highlights that organisations that value diversity and promote inclusive practices are better positioned to attract and retain top talent, enhance creativity and innovation, improve decision-making processes, and gain a competitive edge. Moreover, diversity and inclusion promote a culture of fairness and equity, enabling individuals from various backgrounds to thrive and contribute their unique skills and knowledge.

Embracing diversity and fostering inclusion is an ethical imperative aligned with the foundational values of the community services sector. It also provides strategic advantage. Diversity within decision-makers enhance perspectives, fosters innovation, and ensures decisions align with stakeholder needs, contributing to organisational reputation, employee engagement, and adaptability.

Understanding Diversity

Diversity encompasses the full range of human attributes, characteristics, and dimensions that make individuals unique. These include but are not limited to:

1. Primary Dimensions

Primary dimensions refer to inherent, unchangeable characteristics that shape an individual's identity and experiences. These dimensions are typically the most evident and impactful in society and include:

- **Race and ethnicity**: Diversity in racial and ethnic backgrounds enriches perspectives and brings a broader range of ideas and insights to the table.
- **Gender**: Understanding gender diversity supports fair and inclusive practices and challenge gender stereotypes.
- **Age**: Generational diversity contributes to knowledge sharing, skills transfer, and different perspectives.
- **Sexual orientation**: Valuing different sexual orientation helps create a safe and inclusive environment for all employees.

2. Secondary Dimensions

Secondary dimensions may be more fluid and can change over time. These dimensions include:

- **Education**: Different educational backgrounds offer varied approaches to problem-solving and critical thinking.
- **Socio-economic status**: Understanding the socio-economic disparities that individuals face helps create a more equitable environment.
- **Religion**: Encouraging religious diversity ensures individuals can practice their faith while feeling respected and included.
- **Language**: Embracing linguistic diversity promotes effective communication and the exchange of ideas.

Recognising and respecting the full spectrum of diversity is an opportunity to provide an inclusive workplace.

Embracing Inclusion

Inclusion involves creating a workplace culture that values and appreciates individual differences. It is a call to action that goes beyond simply acknowledging diversity. Inclusion is about ensuring that all individuals feel valued, respected, and have equal opportunities to participate and contribute fully.

Here are some of the key elements to consider when fostering inclusion:

1. Psychological Safety

Psychological safety means individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves, taking risks, and being their authentic selves without fear of negative consequences. An inclusive workplace encourages open dialogue, active listening, and shared decision-making, reinforcing trust and respect among team members.

Example:

Lotus Mental Health incorporate psychological safety training into their induction process for new employees, which outlines how employees should treat each other and work together. Employees have fortnightly check-ins with their manager where they talk about their progress and work together on areas where support is needed. Lotus Mental Health also host monthly small group supervision sessions using an external facilitator, as they recognise that professional supervision outside of regular employee and line manager check-ins is also important for ensuring psychological safety. Professional supervision provides a safe space for employees to debrief, reflect and learn, advance their professional skills and abilities, and receive additional support to navigate identified issues. All employees also have access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for mental health support, and there is diversity in counsellors available through this service.

2. Equality and Equity

Promoting equality means treating everyone fairly and impartially, regardless of their diversity dimensions. However, equality alone does not account for differences in needs and experiences. Equity goes a step further by recognising and addressing existing disparities to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.

Example:

Eucalypt Youth Incorporation has a leadership program to progress frontline staff into leadership and management positions with the organisation. The program recognises that some staff come into the organisation with varying levels of education and proficiency in literacy. The leadership program offers additional study support to staff who would like to complete the program and require literacy support.
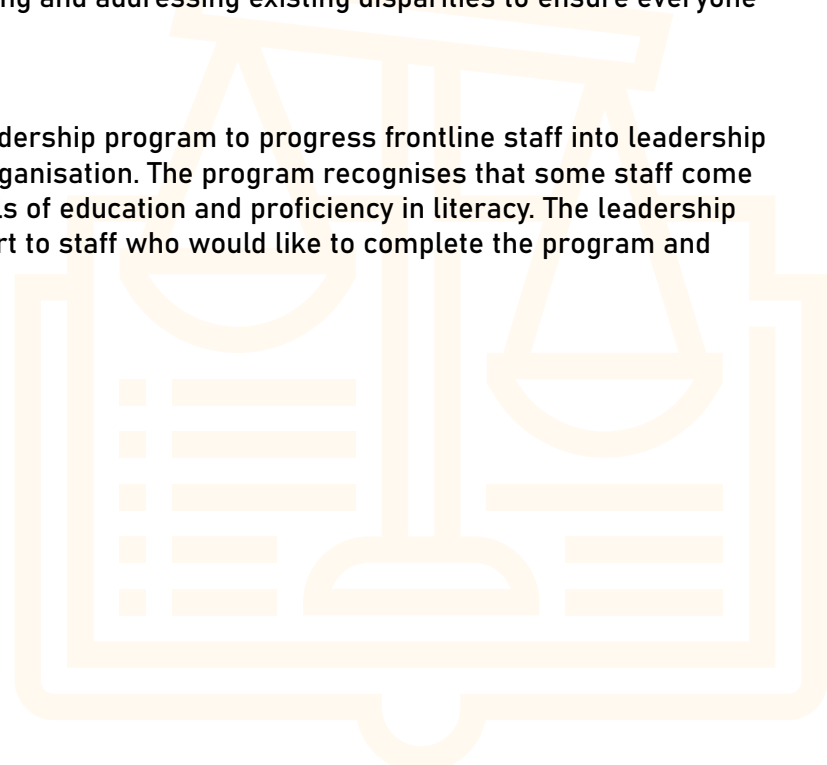
3. Communication

Effective communication plays a crucial role in inclusion. Inclusive communication involves using clear and respectful language, actively listening, being open to different perspectives, and providing opportunities for all voices to be heard. Inclusive communication ensures that all individuals feel valued and understood and can receive messaging in an accessible way.

Example:

Grevillea Community Services facilitates open communication among staff by offering various avenues for discussions on organisational policy and practice. Small team meetings provide a comfortable space for employees to ask questions and share ideas, minimising the risk of miscommunication. Distributing meeting agendas in advance allows individuals ample time to consider discussion points and contribute thoughtful feedback or questions. Leadership and management undergo regular professional development to enhance their supervision and interpersonal skills, ensuring they can lead respectful team discussions and provide effective one on one supervision. Employee expressions are met with consideration, and disrespectful interactions are promptly addressed by leadership.

4. Belonging

Creating a sense of belonging is a critical component of inclusion. It means fostering an environment where employees feel accepted, appreciated, and as part of the team and broader community. Building social connections, promoting collaboration, and recognising and celebrating different contributions all contribute to fostering a strong sense of belonging.

Example:

Banksia Family Support has a staff morning tea once a month scheduled in the staff calendar. The roster for hosting morning tea is shared across teams and is an opportunity for staff to share culinary skills, cultural dishes or days of celebration. The morning tea format has been refined over the years through staff feedback, and has become a low-pressure way of staff enjoying half an hour of each other's company and getting to know one another. New staff have reported that this monthly morning tea has been valuable in getting to know their colleagues, and is something they look forward to every month.

Conclusion – Understanding Diversity and Inclusion

Understanding diversity and inclusion is crucial for fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace. By providing tools and strategies to promote inclusivity, organisations can create an environment where every employee feels valued and respected, and can fully contribute to the organisation's success.

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

In today's diverse global society, creating an inclusive culture is vital for organisations to thrive. An inclusive organisational culture values and respects the unique differences and perspectives of all individuals, ensuring that everyone feels a sense of belonging and can fully contribute to the organisation's success. This section dives into the various strategies and actions organisations can take to establish and nurture an inclusive culture. Honesty is important, and the ability to reflect honestly about how an employee will feel and perceive the organisational culture will go a long way to addressing inequalities within the organisation.

Importance of Inclusivity

Inclusivity is a fundamental aspect to fostering creativity, innovation, and productivity within an organisation. By cultivating an inclusive culture, organisations can:

1. Enhance Employee Engagement

- Inclusive cultures promote a sense of belonging and encourage employees to be their authentic selves.

  Reflection questions:
  - *How does your organisation create a sense of belonging?*
  - *Do we have effective feedback mechanisms to understand the experiences of employees from different demographic groups?*
  - *How can we improve communication channels to address concerns related to diversity and inclusion?*

- Employees are more likely to show commitment, motivation, and dedication when they feel supported and valued.

  Reflection questions:
  - *How does your organisation support and value its staff?*
  - *What assessments are in place to support management's understanding of the experiences and perspectives of minority groups?*

2. Foster Collaboration and Teamwork

- Inclusive cultures break down barriers, allowing diverse teams to collaborate effectively.

  Reflection question:
  - *What are some of the barriers within your organisation that need to be worked through for employees to feel more supported?*

- Different perspectives can lead to higher quality decisions and innovative solutions.

  Reflection questions:
  - *Is your organisation equipped to recognise and value the perspectives of those who may not be the most outspoken in the room or whose voices may not align with the current decision-makers?*
  - *Are our employees, especially those in leadership roles, equipped with the knowledge and skills needed for managing diverse teams?*
  - *How can we enhance diversity and inclusion training throughout the organisation?*

3. Attract and Retain Top Talent

- Organisations that prioritise inclusivity are more likely to attract a diverse pool of talented individuals.

- When employees see that their organisation values diversity and inclusion, they are more likely to stay and contribute long-term.

  Reflection questions:

  - *Do our recruitment processes actively seek out and attract diverse candidates?*

  - *Are there any unintentional bias in our hiring practices that might hinder diversity?*

  - *Are there equal opportunities for professional development for all employees?*

  - *How can we ensure that career advancement is accessible to individuals from diverse backgrounds?*

  - *Are our leadership and management teams representative of the diversity within our organisation and community?*

  - *How can we enhance diversity at various organisational levels?*

Strategies for Creating an Inclusive Culture

Creating an inclusive culture involves deliberate actions that promote inclusion at all levels of an organisation. Here are some effective strategies to consider:

1. Establish leadership commitment

- Leaders play a crucial role in setting the tone for inclusivity.

  Reflection question:
  - What is the leadership team doing to proactively reflect on the tone of inclusivity within the organisation?

- Leaders should publicly and consistently express their commitment to foster an inclusive culture.

  - *An inclusive culture is something that is fostered and developed and takes time. Organisations need to be intentional about this commitment.*

2. Develop inclusive policies and practices

- Review existing policies and practices to identify any potential biases and barriers.

- Ensure policies and practices are designed to be fair and inclusive for everyone.

3. Promote inclusive policies and practices

- Actively strive for diversity in all aspects, including ethnicity, gender, age, and more.

- Ensure diverse representation in leadership positions and decision-making roles.

4. Provide diversity and inclusion training

    - Equip employees and leaders with the knowledge and skills needed to appreciate and embrace diversity.

    - Offer training sessions on unconscious bias, cultural competence, and inclusive communication.

5. Encourage Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) or Affinity Groups

    - Where appropriate and at the direction of the staff in consideration, organisations can consider introducing Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) that can advocate for minority groups. ERGs are voluntary, employee-led groups whose aim is to foster a diverse and inclusive workplace. Many of these groups are set up to support and advocate for minority groups so the power base needs to remain with the groups. This should not be seen as a tool used by management to tick a box or manage Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

    - ERGs when used appropriately can provide a platform for employees to connect, share experiences, and support one another.

    - Encouraging ERGs, when employee driven, can help demonstrate management's commitment to diversity and also facilitates networking and inclusion.

    - The community services sector is very good at advocating for its service users. ERGs within an organisation can provide a great opportunity for employee advocacy skills to be cultivated, and directed / targeted towards workforce diversity.

6. Foster inclusive communication

    - Create an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas and perspectives.

    - Encourage active listening, open dialogue, and respectful for different viewpoints.

7. Recognise and celebrate diversity

    - Celebrate different cultural holidays, observances, and achievements.

    - Acknowledge and appreciate the unique contributions that diverse individuals bring to the organisation.

8. Regularly assess and adjust inclusion efforts

    - Conduct regular assessments to measure the effectiveness of inclusion efforts.

    - Use feedback to identify areas needing improvement and implement necessary adjustments.

Conclusion – Creating an inclusive organisational culture

Creating an inclusive culture is a fundamental step towards building a diverse and equitable organisation. Inclusive leadership, policies, and practices are the foundations for this. By fostering a culture that promotes collaboration, open communication, and diverse perspectives, organisations can harness the power of diversity to drive innovation and foster a sense of belonging for all employees.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AND STEREOTYPES

Understanding Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias refers to the biases or prejudices that we hold unconsciously, without being aware of them. It is important to understand that everyone has unconscious biases, as they are a nature part of human cognition. These biases are formed by our experiences, upbringing, socialisation, and the environments in which we live and work. They can influence our perceptions, attitudes, and decisions without our conscious awareness.

Types of Unconscious Bias

There are various types of unconscious biases that can impact our intentions, decision-making, and perceptions of others. Some common types of biases include:

Affinity bias: This bias occurs when we prefer people who are similar to us in terms of characters such as gender, race, ethnicity, or background.

Halo effect: This bias happens when we perceive one positive trait or characteristic of a person and assume that they possess other positive traits as well, without any evidence.

Confirmation bias: This bias involves seeking and interpreting information in a way their inherent characteristics or disposition, rather than considering external factors.

Attribution bias: This bias occurs when we attribute the actions of other to their inherent characteristics or disposition, rather than considering external factors.

Stereotyping: Stereotyping involves making assumptions o generalisations about individuals based on their membership in a particular group.

Impact of Unconscious Bias

Unconscious biases can lead to unintended discriminatory practices and perpetuate inequalities in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and social interactions. They can affect decision-making processes, such as hiring, promotion, and the allocation of resources, leading to biased outcomes and hindering diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.
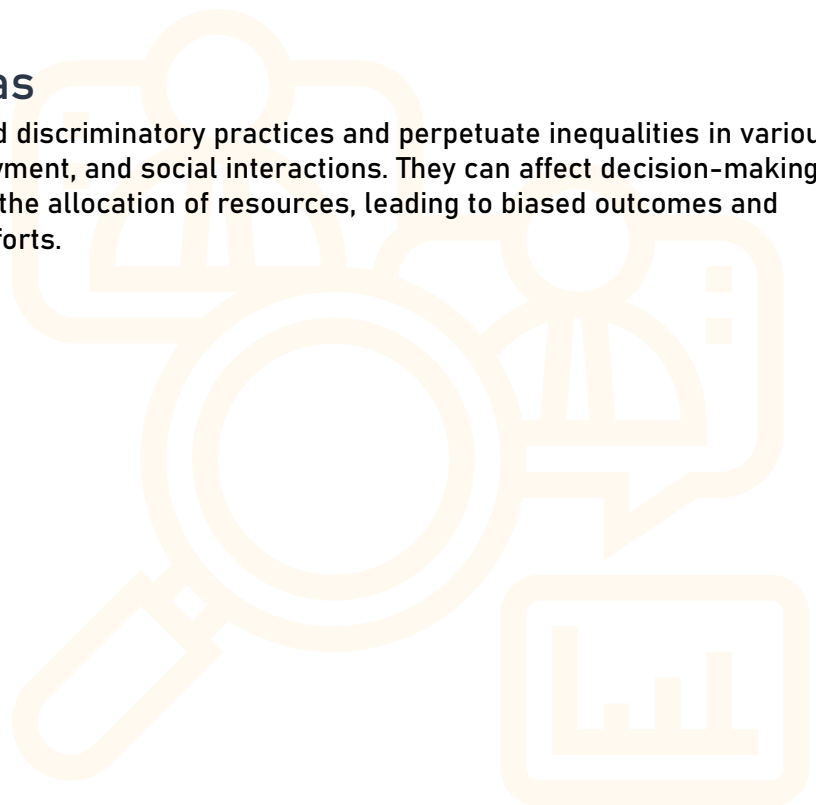
Mitigating Unconscious Bias

The first step in mitigating unconscious bias is to become aware of its existence and recognise that it affects everyone. By acknowledging our biases, we can work towards addressing and minimising their impact. Here are some strategies to mitigate unconscious bias:

Education and training: By learning about unconscious bias and its various forms, individuals can develop a better understanding of their own biases and learn strategies to challenge and mitigate them.

Promote diversity and inclusion: Creating diverse and inclusive environments can help reduce biases by exposing individuals to different perspectives and experiences. Encouraging open dialogue and inclusivity can foster greater awareness and empathy.

Blind processes: Implementing blind processes and procedures, such as blind recruitment or evaluation, can help eliminate bias by removing identifying information that could trigger unconscious judgements.

Self-reflection and feedback: Regularly reflecting on our thoughts, beliefs, and actions can enable us to identify and confront our biases. Seeking and providing feedback can also contribute to personal growth and awareness.

Creating a supporting culture: Organisations and institutions should create a supportive culture that embraces diversity and encourages individuals to challenge their biases openly. Providing resources and support for addressing unconscious bias can promote a more inclusive and equitable environment.

Stereotypes and their Impact

Stereotypes are widely held beliefs or generalisations about a particular group of people. These beliefs may or may not reflect reality and are often oversimplified and based on assumptions or incomplete information. Stereotypes can have harmful effects on individuals and communities, perpetuating biases and reinforcing inequalities.

Negative Consequences of Stereotyping

Stereotyping can have a significant impact on individuals and communities by:

Promoting bias and discrimination: Stereotyping can lead to prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behaviours based on perceived group characteristics.

Reducing opportunities: Stereotypes can limit opportunities for individuals and marginalise certain groups by creating barriers to employment, education, and social participation.

Impact of self-perception: When individuals are repeatedly exposed to stereotypes about their group, they may internalise these beliefs, leading to negative self-perception and lower self-esteem.

Influencing social interactions: Stereotyping can shape how individuals interact with each other, leading to misunderstandings, tension, and exclusion.

Challenging Stereotypes

Challenging stereotypes requires a collective effort from individuals, institutions, and society as a whole. Here are some strategies to challenge stereotypes:

Increased awareness: Educating ourselves and others about the harmful effects of stereotypes can promote greater awareness and consciousness of their impact.

Individual responsibility: It is important for individuals to identify and challenge their own stereotypes by questioning assumptions and examining evidence before making judgment.

Promoting media literacy: Encouraging media literacy can help individuals critically analyse and question media representations, reducing the influence of stereotypical portrayals.

Diverse representation: Promoting diverse representation in media, education, and other platforms can challenge stereotypes by providing more accurate and nuanced portrayals of different groups.

Building empathy: Developing empathy and understanding for individuals from different backgrounds can help break down stereotypes and foster inclusivity.

Designing Inclusive Policies and Procedures

An activity you could do as a team is to review your organisation's existing policies and procedures to identify any potential biases or barriers that may exist. You can then brainstorm ways to make them more inclusive, and then develop a plan to implement these changes. Doing this as a team will ensure a more comprehensive, thorough review as each person will bring different thoughts and perspectives.

Conclusion – Unconscious bias and stereotypes

Unconscious bias and stereotypes can hinder diversity and inclusion efforts within an organisation. It's important to be aware of the unconscious biases and stereotypes that influence our perceptions and decision making processes. By acknowledging and addressing these biases, individuals can make more objective and fair decisions, fostering an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and supported.

SUMMARY

By promoting diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB), organisations can create an environment where every employee feels valued, and respected, and can fully contribute to the organisation's success. Fostering DEIB in your organisation is an ongoing process that takes time. It's important to monitor your progress regularly and make changes over time to ensure that your organisation is heading in the right direction.

Want to know more?

Visit the *Supporting Diverse Workforces* page on the QCOSS website which includes on-demand webinars and additional resources to get you started.