



Submission – Multiculturalism in Australia

Beasley Intercultural is a consultancy and training company supporting clients to enable greater effectiveness in globally connected and culturally diverse workplaces. We provide services to: multilateral agencies, Austrade, AusAID the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and corporate clients such as AMP, ANZ, Electrolux, QBE, Honeywell and Pricewaterhouse Coopers, both in Australia and across the region.

Participating in a diverse or global workplace is no longer a choice. Australia is connected and culturally diverse now, and our economic future is in the Asian region. Forty five percent of Australians were born overseas, or at least one of their parents were. The fastest growing languages in Australia are Mandarin, Arabic and Hindi. Our children are growing up in an interconnected world where Asian economies are having increasing influence.

The ability to recognise the strength and validity of diverse perspectives, to negotiate difference and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes are essential skills for a rapidly changing world. The issues we face as Australians can not be solved by technical knowledge, or by ourselves. Australia's ability to thrive and prosper as a nation is dependent on our ability to collaborate with our fellow citizens, and our neighbours, to work toward solutions on shared issues.

Diversity management is about enabling participation and inclusion. While cultural festivals, and celebration of the external 'cultural' artifacts of diversity are opportunities for communities to come together, real community cohesion comes with greater understanding of, and an increased ability to negotiate values-driven behaviour. It is normal for deeply held values to differ in diverse groups. It is a sign of our maturity when we can engage in dialogue and respectfully engage with perspectives with which we may not agree, and seek to achieve common ground. Until we are able to openly address these multiple realities, we cannot move to a more truly collaborative and engaged culture.

There is currently a significant focus on the 'gender' element of diversity within corporate Australia, particularly due to the ASX requirements for reporting on gender participation. While gender participation at senior levels of Australian business should be an imperative, it is equally important to address diversity more broadly. The themes of inclusion, subconscious bias, the power to exclude or include, are applicable to 'gender' as well as diversity.

At a personal level, awareness raising is only the first element of addressing intercultural competency. If someone needs to be a good leader, we don't invest in 'leadership awareness' training. Cultural 'awareness' is not enough. Extensive research shows, individuals who are most effective across cultures have highly developed people skills, empathy, self awareness and a tolerance for ambiguity. Such skills make us better citizens and fully contributing members of



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society. It is these skills which we need to be focusing on developing in our schools, our workplaces and our broader community. Recognition of the validity and strategic importance of Asian language skills is essential. While we applaud the government's \$64 million commitment to the National Asian Languages Studies in Schools Program (NALLSP), this is but a drop in the ocean when schools need a cohesive, consistent and ongoing approach to Asian cultural and languages literacy from primary to tertiary levels.

The ability to navigate difference, to find common ground with people from diverse backgrounds, and to deepen our knowledge of our cultural starting point will stand us in good stead. We applaud the recent speech by Minister Chris Bowen emphasising government commitment to multiculturalism, and clarifying the associated responsibilities which come with Australian citizenship. We hope the bipartisan support for multiculturalism continues.

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