harmony
in the workplace

delivering the diversity dividend

Fact Sheet 1: **Introduction to Harmony in the Workplace**

Harmony in the Workplace is about working with Australian businesses and organisations to create a culturally diverse and inclusive workforce.

What you'll learn from the factsheets

The following series of factsheets will help leaders, managers, employees and trainers to:

- Discuss the cultural diversity in your organisation and maximise its value

- Encourage positive cultural diversity management

- Remove myths surrounding cultural diversity

- Discuss the legal parameters and frameworks that employers and staff must be aware of to create a harmonious and inclusive workplace culture.

The factsheets highlight open and hidden racial and religious discrimination that can affect the ability of an employee from a diverse background to gain employment and feel positive and connected in the workplace.They also show how your organisation can benefit from Australia's culturally diverse workforce by making full use of the knowledge, experience and diverse skills that workers of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds will bring.

Harmony in the Workplace is about promoting the benefits of an inclusive and culturally diverse Australian workforce.

Three core questions support each factsheet's content and, as an employer, should be considered in relation to your staff:

1. *How do you recognise cultural diversity and the diversity among your employees?*

2. *How do you talk about cultural diversity (if at all)?*

3. *How do you maximise the value of cultural diversity in your workplace and evaluate its effectiveness?*

What is cultural diversity?

While there are many definitions of culture, most have the same core elements. 'Culture' describes a system of values and meanings shared by a group, which shape the behaviours expected in a particular situation and how behaviour is interpreted[1].

Groups with an identifiable culture can be large or small. While 'culture' generally refers to a large group of people, within a group there can be sub-cultures consisting of smaller groups with their own identities. Of course, unique cultures and sub-cultures can develop in any group sharing common characteristics such as age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, education and so on. Cultures of different groups often overlap and one person can have many different cultural influences.

Culture is therefore a relative and contextual concept[2]. This is particularly true regarding assumptions made about culture and stereotypes, which are formed by a generalised view of culture.
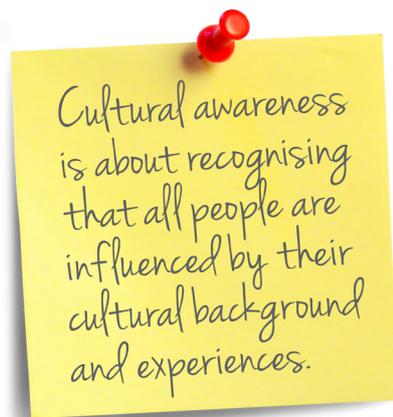
> **For the purposes of these factsheets, 'cultural diversity' refers to differences between cultures which are associated with race, ethnicity, national or geographical origin.**

As mentioned, in the workplace, 'cultural diversity' or 'cultural identity' usually relate to ethnic or national background/origin. 'Culture' can also refer to organisational culture, which put simply means 'the way we do things here'. Again, ethnic/national culture and organisational culture overlap. Your challenge, as an employer, is to ensure that your organisational culture (and its sub-cultures) is inclusive of everyone, including CALD people.

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Terms often used to discuss culture and cultural diversity in the workplace include:

•   'Ethnicity'

•   'Background'

•   'How one identifies themself'

•   'Cultural heritage'

•   'Nationality'

•   'Country of birth/origin'

Language do's and don'ts regarding cultural diversity is covered in more detail in Factsheet 6: Becoming Confident and Competent in Talking about Workplace Diversity.

Cultural awareness is about recognising that all people are influenced by their cultural background and experiences.

Making it work:
cultural awareness in Australia

Being 'culturally aware' means recognising that everyone has a cultural background influencing and impacting how they interpret the world and perceive others around them. So, being culturally aware or 'culturally competent' doesn't mean being an expert on every culture or having an answer to every cultural question and issue. It means acknowledging that different perspectives and experiences exist as a result of everyone's different cultural background and life experiences, and that embracing this difference is the key to exploring cultural issues effectively and appropriately.

Being culturally aware and adaptable is everyone's responsibility. It's also in everyone's interest to gain an understanding of how Australian immigration mechanisms work and how they impact on a person's life experience. While some immigrants undergo a

relatively easy transition, many experience challenges in adjusting to life in a new country.

With these considerations in mind, our factsheets present an overview of the key themes and issues regarding cultural diversity in Australian workplaces, including tips and suggestions on how to enhance the benefits of cultural diversity in your organisation.

About the contributors

We would like to acknowledge the contributions made by participant organisations and the Harmony in the Workplace Project Steering Committee who provided substantive insights and guided the development of resources. The Project Steering Committee included:

•   Mr Pino Migliorino (FECCA Chair) - *Project Steering Committee Chair*

•   Professor Santina Bertone (Swinburne University of Technology)

•   Ms Katriina Tahka (Diversity Council of Australia)

•   Ms Sandra Jeffery (Multicultural and Settlement Policy Branch, DIAC)

•   Dr Loucas Nicolaou (FECCA CEO)

•   Ms Tanya von Ahlefeldt (FECCA Policy Officer) - *Project Coordinator and Lead Author.*

FECCA is grateful for the knowledge and guidance committed by the above people.

References

[1] Peoples, J and Bailey, G. 2012. *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, Ninth Edition.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

[2] Hong, Y, Benet-Martinez, V, Chiu C, and Morris, M. 2003. 'Boundaries of Cultural Influence: Constructive Activation as a Mechanism for Cultural Differences in Social Perception'. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 34(4): 453-464.