

# Diversity and inclusion in Australian policing: Where are we at and where should we go?

Author Dr Abby McLeod

While the promotion of women in policing has long been on the international agenda, in the Australian context a significant increase in attention to women in policing has occurred in recent years, framed largely in terms of the business benefits commonly associated with organisational diversity. Notably, major independent reviews of organisational culture and sex discrimination have been commissioned by Victoria Police, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and South Australia Police, and a number of jurisdictions have announced 50/50 male-female recruitment targets. These initiatives have been simultaneously welcomed and resisted by both men and women (sworn and unsworn), raising a range of questions about how best to promote gender equality in our nation's policing institutions.

The ongoing existence of gender hostility in policing organisations validates the current focus on women in policing. Women are underrepresented in policing, particularly in senior management, and they suffer overt discrimination and higher than average rates of sexual harassment (when compared to the

general community) (Elizabeth Broderick and Co., 2016; VEOHRC, 2015). This makes it difficult for them to contribute their diverse talents and skills, which ultimately disadvantages the contemporary organisation striving to innovate and operate in today's VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) environment.



Against this backdrop, there is growing recognition that gender diversity alone is not the only way to bring about the increased variety in thinking associated with “operational effectiveness” that our organisations are seeking. As such while targets and other measures of improved demographic diversity continue to be important, Australian policing organisations are increasingly aware that it is inclusion rather than diversity which will bring about the positive outcomes hoped for, such as increased creativity and innovation, improved productivity and increased employee satisfaction (see for example McLeod and Herrington, 2017; Workman-Stark, 2017).

Reflecting this shift and to explore these complexities, and capture the current Australian state of play, in February 2017 the Australian Institute of Police Management (AIPM) hosted a workshop, *Building Inclusive Police Organisations*. Here we draw together discussions that occurred on the day, the challenges faced by organisations and their staff, and signpost some future directions for the profession.

### The Workshop

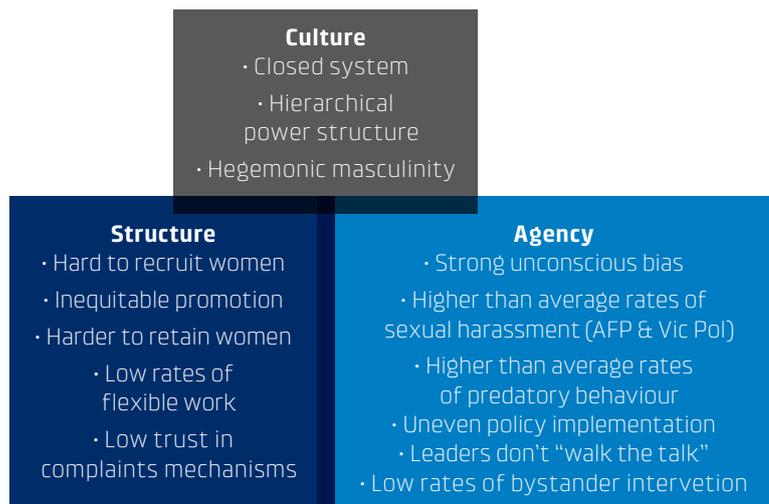
*Building Inclusive Police Organisations* aimed to facilitate discussion about diversity and inclusion amongst law enforcement and emergency services personnel, with a view to building a collective understanding of what does and does not work to promote diversity and inclusion. Attendees included 34 representatives from: the AFP; New South Wales Police Force; Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services; Queensland Police Service; South Australia Police; Victoria Police; Western Australia Police; Border Force; Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC); the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity (ACLEI); the AIPM; and, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

Keynote speakers on the day included Deputy Commissioner Wendy Steendam (Victoria Police), Assistant Commissioner Ray Johnson (the Australian Federal Police), and Assistant Commissioner Carleen York (New South Wales Police Force), all of whom have significant responsibilities for the promotion of diversity and inclusion in their organisations. The workshop was facilitated by visiting scholar Dr Angela Workman-Stark, who has a unique combination of 24 years policing experience with the RCMP and academic expertise in diversity and inclusion, and the AIPM's Visiting Research Fellow, Dr Abby McLeod.

### Talking about gender, or diversity?

The workshop explored current efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in Australian policing, which are overwhelmingly focussed upon gender equality, in large part as a result of reviews commissioned by Victoria Police, the AFP and South Australia Police. Both the *Independent review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour, in Victoria Police*, undertaken by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC, 2015), and the *Independent Review Into Sex Discrimination, Sexual Harassment and Predatory Behaviour in South Australia Police*, undertaken by the Equal Opportunity Commission of South Australia (EOC, 2016), had a more specific focus upon sex discrimination and harassment than *Culture Change: Gender Diversity and Inclusion in the Australia Federal Police*, undertaken by former Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick (Elizabeth Broderick & Co., 2016). Yet the findings of the three reviews were remarkably similar, each identifying a range of issues relating to structure, agency and culture, as depicted below.

### Comparative Review Findings



As highlighted in the above figure, the reviews demonstrate the similarity of the cultural challenges confronting women working in different Australian policing organisations. Each of the reviews tells a worrying story about strongly hegemonic male workplaces, in which hyper-masculine norms prevail to the detriment of those who do not comply, women and men alike. They paint a picture of resistance to change and the pressure to “fit in” in order to “make it”, demonstrating a clear disconnect between the type of organisational culture contemporary policing leaders publicly aspire to, and that which prevails. Across each of the jurisdictions, systemic structural discrimination against women at all major career gateways was identified, against a backdrop of broad tolerance for sexist attitudes and behaviours which are unacceptable at best, and criminal at worst.

In response to review findings, each of the jurisdictions is implementing a raft of recommendations, commonly including: leadership training; improved complaints mechanisms to promote increased reporting of sexual harassment; flexible work by default; and, quotas for female recruitment, access to development opportunities and promotion (the latter of which was proposed by the majority of jurisdictions prior to the release of their reviews) (Broderick & Co., 2016; EOC, 2016; VEOHRC, 2015). The workshop noted that implementation was proving challenging to all.

Participants discussed the challenge of promoting gender equality, and more broadly of enacting a diversity and inclusion agenda, in the continued absence of a sound “what works” evidence base to guide organisational efforts. The need for improved monitoring and evaluation of existing efforts and increased knowledge sharing across the jurisdictions was underscored.

Despite this, participants explored how policing in Australia was well placed to make a difference. Participants noted that:

- the courage demonstrated by the Victoria Police, AFP and South Australia Police Commissioners in opening their organisations to external review has sparked public attention to gender inequality in organisations and has heightened awareness of the need for organisational scrutiny and transparency;
- the “can do approach” of police lends itself to the pursuit of tangible results;
- the establishment of recruitment targets has forced agencies to consider bias in their selection processes and actively address it, including by considering the inherent requirements of the job and removing entry requirements that are unnecessary (e.g. certain physical competencies);
- a number of agencies have strong research partnerships dedicated to development of evidence on key policy matters; and,
- multiple male champions – who outwardly conform to dominant police images of masculinity – are positively influencing change in their organisations.

---

*Gender diversity alone is not the only way to bring about increased variety in thinking*

---

The challenges facing organisations were also explored. In addition to a lack of “what works” evidence, participants noted:

- the absence of effective communication about, and workforce understanding of, the “case for change”, including an overemphasis to date upon the “business case” for change, at the expense of broader social arguments for change;
- inadequate engagement with resistance and fear;
- the existence of low trust organisational environments, characterised by continuing employee mistrust of existing systems and processes (complaint management, transfers, promotions etc.);
- the comparatively limited attention being given to retention, as opposed to recruitment; and,
- the limited utility of single-lens approaches (e.g. gender) to diversity and inclusion.

Dr Workman-Stark expanded this discussion by flagging the need for fundamental cultural change that is meticulously planned, grounded in solid analysis and strategically communicated. Drawing upon her experience of promoting cultural change in the RCMP, she spoke of the need to balance short-term strategies (such as the establishment of gender targets) with deeper efforts to understand and change the “masculine script” so as to shift the ways in which we think about and do policing, and those whom we reward. Drawing upon Yoshino’s (2007) concept of “covering”, she urged for a broader conversation about identity in the workplace, suggesting that a useful measure of inclusion might be the degree to which employees feel they need to hide or obscure specific aspects of their identity in order to “fit in”, be accepted and gain access to opportunities.

### Moving to inclusion

In establishing the distinction between diversity (the mix) and inclusion (making the mix work), a number of strategies were explored:

- structural interventions designed to promote fairness for all (not just women);
- clear messaging about why change is necessary and how it will happen;
- increasing opportunities for employee voice;
- establishing a learning orientation within the police academy environment and enabling the expression of individuality from the outset;
- ensuring that competence is defined in terms of task requirements;
- rewarding learning and expressions of vulnerability; and,
- ensuring that leaders examine their own biases.

Acknowledging the challenges associated with implementation of these strategies, Dr Workman-Stark outlined an “inclusion continuum” along which organisations fall, the majority of policing organisations typically falling between the compliant and proactive stages.

*...the need for fundamental cultural change that is meticulously planned, grounded in solid analysis and strategically communicated*

## The inclusion continuum



Agreeing that Australian policing organisations are largely at the complaint – proactive stage, participants discussed key steps that Australian organisations could take or were currently taking, to progress along the continuum, including:

- exploring blind recruitment, which for some organisations has led to the selection of higher rates of women;
- increasing communication about change and its rationale;
- avoiding the urge to “rush in” in response to employee pressure to get things done quickly;
- clearly defining diversity and helping people understand what it is;
- leveraging the experiences of other organisations and jurisdictions, yet avoiding “copying and pasting”;
- examining core curriculum to ensure that diversity and inclusion are incorporated as cross-cutting concepts;
- acknowledging employee wellbeing and good mental health as positive outcomes of inclusion;
- examining establishment of an external complaints mechanism to enhance trust and encourage reporting; and,
- improving monitoring and evaluation of change initiatives, including through inclusion-sensitive dashboard reporting.

Participants also discussed their own obligations and the commitments that individual leaders and officers needed to make in order to develop inclusive organisations. These included:

- redefining leadership so that inclusive leadership practices are rewarded;
- developing a better understanding of the needs of millennials so that they are fully engaged in the workforce;
- examining the police officer profile and redefining it in terms of the competencies and capabilities that are required to police in the contemporary context (e.g. it's not just about masculinity); and,
- expanding what gets measured to include measures of inclusion and organisational justice.

### Real life experiences

Having explored the ideas and suggestions of workshop participants, a panel of senior officers with significant experience in promoting diversity and inclusion in policing was convened in order to uncover the real-life challenges of developing more inclusive policing organisations. Deputy Commissioner Wendy Steendam reflected upon the Victoria Police experience, with particular reference to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission review, while Assistant Commissioner Ray Johnson reflected upon the AFP experience (with particular reference to the Broderick review), and Assistant Commissioner Carleen York reflected upon her experience as Manager Human Resources for New South Wales Police.

Despite leading different organisations, and having different personal experiences, the panel consistently highlighted a number of key points requiring consideration when leading organisational change. Namely:

- The need for leaders to go first. Leaders must be self-reflective and publicly acknowledge their own roles in perpetuating organisational culture, both historically and in the present. They must be courageous and authentic so as to role model the behaviours expected of the workforce. Organisations must invest in leader development so that leaders are equipped to promote positive change.
- There is a need to focus on the future. Cultural change is a long-term process, which needs to be premised on a clear understanding of the desired future-state. Many jurisdictions are dedicating effort to the development of capability frameworks, which articulate the skills and attributes required of personnel. Victoria Police, for example, is seeking those with “confident humility”. There is an increasing emphasis upon values, notably respect.
- Conversations are pivotal to the change process. Conversations give employees a voice and the organisation an understanding of the facilitators and blockers of change. They help individuals reflect on their own behaviours and role in cultural change, and help organisations understand the likely impacts of changes on particular cohorts.
- Story-telling is both therapeutic and instructive. It is important to involve senior personnel in the process, so that they’re able to develop a genuine understanding of individuals’ experiences of harm. Story-telling is a powerful way of “converting people to the cause” – it speaks to the heart and helps people understand why change is necessary.
- Cultural change is notoriously slow and difficult. It involves significant trial and error. There is great value in consulting with others about their experiences of cultural change, within policing, but also beyond, including private industry and academia. Experimentation is necessary, despite the constant pressure to meet organisational targets.
- Clear messaging and consistent communications are critical to success. There is a need not only for electronic communication but face to face time involving leaders and employees. Communication must be constant and authentic. It must be well thought through and planned. Some agencies have benefited from engaging external experts to maximise messaging efforts.

## An emergent research agenda

The *Building Inclusive Police Organisations* workshop revealed a number of ways in which the profession could be better supported by research on diversity and inclusion, predominantly in policing organisations. Firstly, it suggested the need for a forum through which information could be disseminated and experiences shared, namely a Community of Practice. Secondly, it spoke to the real need for investment in an evidence base on “what works” to promote diversity and inclusion within policing and emergency services agencies.

## Community of Practice

A community of practice may in part address some of the challenges identified by workshop participants. Participants expressed frustration at the lack of time they have to read and think, which makes it difficult to keep abreast of contemporary developments and promising approaches to cultural change, including that intended to promote inclusive workplace cultures. So too, against the backdrop of time constraints, they noted that cross-jurisdictional knowledge sharing is less frequent than it ought to be, given the commonality of the challenges being faced across the nation

Communities of practice are associated with a range of benefits: they connect people with common interests who may otherwise not be in contact; they provide access to new knowledge and foster collaboration; they enable frank discussion outside of organisational boundaries in which dissent may not be encouraged; they create communities of trust; and, they facilitate discussion of “best practice”, enabling innovation and continuous improvement (McDermott, 2000). The UK’s College of Policing, through its Police OnLine Knowledge Area (POLKA) hosts communities of practice across a range of topic areas, allowing practitioners from across the country to share information, advice, knowledge and ideas with colleagues working on similar issues in a secure environment. The workshop highlighted the benefit that a similar system could have in Australia, and in particular in relation to sharing knowledge about diversity and inclusion. Such a forum could provide a platform for:

- discussion and knowledge sharing across the jurisdictions (facilitating learning);
- development of a living database of information relating to “what works” to promote diversity and inclusion (facilitating research); and,
- dissemination of condensed information on key developments in diversity and inclusion (facilitating knowledge sharing).

## Developing an evidence base: What works?

While the case for diversity and inclusion is vociferously made by leaders around the globe, there is a dearth of robust empirical evidence on “what works” to promote them. To that end, organisations around the world are attempting to implement similar strategies, with little evidence that they actually work. Indeed, there is some evidence, as highlighted by Bohnet (2016), that many of the strategies organisations typically employ to promote diversity and inclusion, such as diversity training, don’t work or have unintended consequences. Yet we continue to try them, perhaps due to a lack of imagination, or more cynically because we sometimes take action prior to analysis because being “seen to do something” is actually the end goal. What evidence does exist is largely extracted from private industry and little research has been undertaken to ascertain whether or not the promotion of diversity and inclusion in policing organisations is the same or different to the private industry experience.

To help fill this gap the AIPM is working on a project called *Leveraging Diversity*, which is an empirical cross-jurisdiction study of Australian efforts to promote gender equality, diversity and inclusion in policing.

The study intends to promote both practical and scholarly outcomes, including but not limited to: increased cross-jurisdiction knowledge exchange and learning; a learning and continuous improvement approach to the implementation and measurement of diversity and inclusion strategies; and, an Australian contribution to global scholarship on diversity and inclusion, with a focus upon the efficacy of practical strategies to promote diversity and inclusion in policing organisations.

Specific questions to be explored in the study include:

- What strategies work to promote diversity and inclusion (comparative analysis will provide an ability to look at the impact of contextual factors including time, political climate, leadership etc. upon the success or otherwise of various strategies);
- How do we understand and measure success (quantitative demonstrations of progress towards demographic diversity; behaviour and attitudinal change; shifts in work practices; employee engagement with and resistance to change process);
- Do change leaders see a clear distinction between strategies intended to promote diversity and those intended to promote inclusion? If so, do change leaders believe that the balance of effort is right?
- How can theoretical frameworks such as intersectionality and fault line analysis (theories that examine the ways in which different components of identity intersect, rather than single-lens approaches which privilege a single identity marker such as race or gender) inform practical approaches to the promotion of inclusion; and,
- Does the policing context (culture, systems, processes) pose specific challenges or opportunities to the promotion of diversity and inclusion?

All jurisdictions have been invited to participate and a number have chosen to be involved.

The study is being led by Dr Abby McLeod, who can be contacted at [amcleod@aipm.gov.au](mailto:amcleod@aipm.gov.au) for further information about the project.



Leaders must be self-reflective and publicly acknowledge their own roles in perpetuating organisational culture

## So where to now?

Global attention to gender equality continues across the developed and developing world, not only because it is increasingly proven to make good business sense, but also because it is the right thing to do. In a policing context, diverse – including gender diverse – organisations better represent the communities they serve and more than ever, are seen as essential to the quest for organisational flexibility and innovation. To that end, policing organisations are working hard to increase the demographic diversity of their workforces, in countries ranging from the UK, the US and Canada, through to those in Africa and the Pacific Islands. Yet creating climates in which such diversity can be leveraged remains an ongoing challenge

There is ample evidence that Australian policing leaders are committed to the promotion of diversity and inclusion in their organisations. Workshop participants highlighted the passion and commitment of those (both men and women) working at the coal face to promote diversity and inclusion, retaining great enthusiasm for the task at hand despite widespread resistance and multiple challenges. More than at any other time before, Australian policing and emergency services organisations are leading the way in terms of the rate of effort being allocated to the promotion of diversity and inclusion. The challenge now, as highlighted by senior organisational leaders, is to retain a clear vision of the future, actively engage with resistance, use data to constantly adapt our approaches in response to evidence of effectiveness of otherwise, and maintain momentum in the face of what oftentimes feels like the “glacial pace” of cultural change.

## References

- Bohnet, I. (2016). *What works: Gender equality by design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Elizabeth Broderick & Co. (2016). *Culture change: Gender, diversity and inclusion in the Australian Federal Police*. Retrieved from <https://www.afp.gov.au/sites/default/files/1PDF/Reports/Broderick-Report-2016.pdf>.
- Equal Opportunity Commission of South Australia.(2016). *Independent review into sex discrimination, sexual harassment and predatory behaviour in South Australia Police*. Retrieved from [http://www.eoc.sa.gov.au/sites/eoc.sa.gov.au/files/attachments/SAPOL\\_Review\\_2016\\_Final.pdf](http://www.eoc.sa.gov.au/sites/eoc.sa.gov.au/files/attachments/SAPOL_Review_2016_Final.pdf)
- Holvino E. (2014). Developing multicultural organizations: an application of the multicultural OD model. In B.B. Jones & M. Brazzel (Eds.), *The NTL handbook of organization development and change: principles, practices, and perspectives*, (pp. 517–534). San Francisco: Pfeiffer.
- McDermott, R. (2000). *Knowing in community: 10 critical success factors in building communities of practice*. Retrieved from [http://www.providersedge.com/docs/km\\_articles/Knowing\\_in\\_Community\\_-\\_10\\_Critical\\_Success\\_Factors\\_in\\_Building\\_CoP.pdf](http://www.providersedge.com/docs/km_articles/Knowing_in_Community_-_10_Critical_Success_Factors_in_Building_CoP.pdf)
- McLeod, A., & Herrington, V. (2017). Valuing different shades of blue: From diversity and inclusion and the challenge of harnessing difference. *International Journal of Emergency Services*, 6(3), 1-12.
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. (2015). *Independent review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour in Victoria Police – phase one report*. Retrieved from <http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/our-resources-and-publications/reports/item/1336-independent-review-into-sex-discrimination-and-sexual-harassment-including-predatory-behaviour-in-victoria-police-phase-one-report-2015>
- Workman-Stark, A. (2017). *Inclusive policing from the inside out*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Yoshino, K. (2007). *Covering*. New York: Random House.

---

### AIPM

Collins Beach Road  
Manly NSW

PO Box 168  
Manly NSW 1655

t: +61 2 9934 4800

e: [explore@aipm.gov.au](mailto:explore@aipm.gov.au)