

DIVERSITY TO INCLUSION: EXPANDING WORKPLACE CAPABILITY THINKING AROUND ABORIGINAL CAREER PROGRESSION

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ABSTRACT: Optimally all individuals should contribute fully to the collective spirit and human capital within the workplace, supporting and enabling the development of a mature workforce. Human resource policies endeavour to address diversity and inclusion in the workplace through a variety of methodologies including training and professional development programs. However the shift from achieving organisational diversity to organisational inclusion is not automatic. Organisational maturity demands careful diversity planning to embed inclusive practice. The Office of Environment and Heritage² (OEH), is on track in providing opportunities for a diverse range of employees. In 2015 OEH exceeded the Council of Australian Government (COAG) target for Aboriginal Employment. OEH is role modelling best practice for Aboriginal recruitment within the Public Sector. Once employed however, Aboriginal staff are not progressing to higher salary bands. This paper attempts to prompt thinking around Aboriginal Progression in OEH and look at ways to achieve the NSW Public Sector Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2014-2017 which sets a target of 1.8% salary band increase across all classifications for Aboriginal people by 2021.

Keywords: Australia, Aboriginal, Diversity, Inclusion, Workforce Capability

There is a commitment to developing and nurturing Aboriginal capability across the NSW Public Service. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Indigenous Reform Agreement clearly outlines the need for all governments to “Close the Gap” on Indigenous disadvantage. The NSW Government, along with state and territories have committed to increase Aboriginal representation in the public Service to 2.6% by 2015 (NSW Public Service Commission [PSC], 2014).

The NSW Public Sector is a major employer of Aboriginal people and continues to demonstrate best practice in Aboriginal employment. In fact The NSW Public Sector has made good progress in Aboriginal employment over the last ten years, with Aboriginal employment being the highest it has ever been. Currently the NSW Public Sector is enacting the NSW Public Sector Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2014-2017, which

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² OEH cares for and protects NSW’s environment and heritage, which includes the natural environment, Aboriginal country, culture and heritage, and built heritage. OEH provides services and other support to the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust, NSW Environmental Trust, Western Sydney Parkland Trust, Parramatta Park Trust, Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust, Historic Houses Trust, Taronga Conservation Society Australia, Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust, and the Environment Protection Authority. The Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) consists of seven functional areas: Policy: National Parks NA Wildlife: Customer Experience: Regional Operations: heritage: Science and legal Services.

falls out of the NSW Governments Plan for Aboriginal Affairs: Education, Employment and Accountability. This strategy outlines the key initiatives to be implemented across NSW Public Sector to implement strategies to achieve improvement in aboriginal employment (PSC, 2014).

The strategy includes an aspirational target of 1.8% salary band increase across all classifications by 2021. This target is in response to the current “pyramid effect” of aboriginal employment, whereby the highest numbers of staff are employed in the lowest salary bands. It is this aspirational target that has inspired the exploration of Aboriginal Professional development within OEH and the subsequent thinking around Workforce Capability to enhance and support career development and progression for Aboriginal staff.

OEH Employment Statistics –Overview

Currently the Office of Environment and Heritage employs 3,241 full time and casual staff, comprising a gender breakdown of 56.1% male and 43.9% female, with a median age of 46 years. In 2015 Aboriginal staff levels within OEH account for 10.13% or 347 employees (255 permanent and 92 casual) well above the COAG target of 2.6% (See Table 1) (Office of Environment and Heritage [OEH], 2014).

Table 1

OEH Trends in the Representation of Workforce Diversity Groups 2012-2014

Workforce diversity group	2012	2013	2014	Benchmark/ target
Women	40.8%	41.0%	41.0%	50%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI)	11.0%	11.0%	10.8%	2.6%
People whose first language spoken as a child was not English	7.8%	7.7%	7.8%	19.0%
People with a disability	4.0%	3.8%	3.5%	N/A
People with a disability requiring work-related adjustment	1.2%	1.1%	1.1%	1.5%

Source: Office of Environment and Heritage Annual Report 2013-14, p.105. (Public Document)

Table 1 shows the benchmark COAG target of 2.6 % for ATSI employment has been exceeded, while the benchmarks for women of 50% and staff whose first language is not English of 19 % has not been reached.

Although the employment benchmark for Aboriginal employment has been exceeded, deeper examination of employment circumstances for the cohort reveals a disconcerting pattern. The salary for the majority of Aboriginal staff falls well below the OEH mean. Average salary for Aboriginal staff is \$69,436 per year versus \$88,640 per year – the average for all other OEH staff. Aboriginal salary also compares unfavourably to the salary of all other diversity groups within OEH. OEH staff with a disability average \$90,144 per year and staff whose first language is not English average \$94,528 per year.

Table 2 highlights this pattern by examining the Distribution Index of Diversity groups within OEH. The Distribution Index of 100 indicates that the centre of the distribution of the Workforce Diversity group across salary levels is equivalent to that of other staff. Values less than 100 mean that the Workforce Diversity group tends to be more concentrated at lower salary levels than is the case for other staff. The more pronounced this tendency is, the lower the index will be. In some cases the index may be more than 100, indicating that the workforce diversity group is concentrated at higher salary levels.

In 2014 Aboriginal staff had a Distribution Index of 73 indicating that the majority of staff are clustered in the lower salary levels. In sharp contrast to Women with a Distribution Index of 108. Interestingly people with a disability who require work related adjustment, possess a Distribution Index of 114, indicating that this cohort is clustered in higher salary bands (OEH, 2014).

Table 2

OEH Distribution Index: Trends in the representation of workforce diversity groups

Diversity Group	2012	2013	2014	Benchmark
Women	107	106	108	100
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders	71	73	73	100
People whose first language spoken as a child was not English	107	107	107	100
People with a disability	104	106	106	100
People with a disability requiring work-related adjustment	114	113	114	100

Source: Office of Environment and Heritage Annual Report 2013-14, p. 105 (Public Document)

NB: The Distribution Index is not calculated where workforce diversity group or non-workforce diversity group numbers are less than 20.

OEH diversity strategies are working; employment for Aboriginal people is exceeding government targets; unfortunately, however, equitable representation of Aboriginal staff across all bands is still to be realised.

The disparity in salary banding is clearer when you examine the employment positions of Aboriginal staff across OEH (See Table 3). In table 3, the salary bands are matched back to the clerical based equivalent, for ease of Public Sector tracking. As can be seen from table 3 the majority of OEH Aboriginal staff are employed in positions below a salary range of a Clerk 5/6 equivalent, with the largest cohort of staff currently sitting in the salary band of \$57,256 per year.

Table 3 highlights that Aboriginal staff are underrepresented in senior roles within OEH, with only 4% or 16 Aboriginal staff members holding senior management positions equivalent to Clerk 11/12/Senior Officers (Middle Managers).

Table 3

OEH Permanent Employment Positions for Aboriginal and Non Aboriginal Staff across all Salary Bands.

Salary Band	Band Equivalent	Aboriginal Staff in Band	Total Staff in Band	% Aboriginal Staff in Band
<\$57,256	General Scale equivalent	78	281	27.8
\$57,256 \$64,008	Clerk 1/2 equivalent	67	488	13.7
\$64,008 \$75,559	Clerk 3/4 equivalent	29	294	9.9
\$75,559 \$86,868	Clerk 5/6 equivalent	26	503	5.2
\$86,868 \$97,883	Clerk 7/8 equivalent	24	353	6.8
\$97,883 \$113,212	Clerk 9/10 equivalent	15	603	2.5
\$113,212 \$170,250	Clerk 11/12/Senior Officers (Middle Managers)	16	398	4.0
\$170,250 \$242,801	Band 1 Executive	0	53	0
\$242,801 \$305,401	Band 2 Executive	0	10	0
\$305,401	Band 3 Executive	0	3	0
Total		255	2,986	8.5

Source: Mr Arginovski, OEH (personal communication, August 26 2014)

*Salary bands used are those as set out by the PSC for future tracking and reporting. They match back to the Clerk Grade classification

Recruitment within the Public Sector

Workforce planning within the Public sector is a priority under the new Government Sector Employment Act 2013 (GSE Act). Under section 63 of the act the head of a Government Sector Agency is responsible for incorporating Workforce diversity into workforce development. The GSE Act also allows for government departments to employ “eligible persons” which allows for the advertising of identified positions. An identified position can be restricted for certain priority groups (i.e., Aboriginal people). In addition, other “eligible persons” may include the disabled, people under 25 years and people disadvantaged in employment (i.e., identified cultural groups). Identified positions are usually utilised for lower level positions and are not offered at management and senior management roles.

The Government Sector Employment Act outlines how employees are selected at recruitment. The act utilises the Public Sector Capability Framework which outlines the skills and behavioural characteristic that are required to fulfil a position within any government agency. The framework clearly states the prescriptive skills and behavioural characteristics required for the role. In addition, the occupational specific requirements for middle management and senior management roles require educational qualifications at a tertiary level.

Salary Band Progression

OEH actively encourages people from all diversity groups to apply for roles. In 2014/2015 financial year 4.4% of all candidates were Aboriginal, securing 8.7% of the roles available. The majority of roles secured by Aboriginal staff were for Aboriginal identified positions within National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS).

Within OEH Aboriginal, staff usually choose to work in specialist targeted roles that provide services to Aboriginal people and communities interacting with OEH. Aboriginal staff bring their unique capabilities to such roles, but there is potential for more Aboriginal staff to bring capabilities to other roles within OEH that they may not have previously considered. The majority of roles that Aboriginal staff occupy within OEH fall in a salary band below clerk 5/6 or equivalent. Although workplace requirements for a 5/6 clerk equivalent calls for adept people skills and occupational knowledge, the role requires only a minimal formal qualification, vocational Certificate III being the most commonly held qualification within this salary band. As the salary bands increase, the tertiary qualifications to support the position become a prerequisite. Moving from a lower salary band to higher salary band will therefore be impeded if formal educational qualifications are not held by the applicant.

To determine if current Aboriginal staff seek progression to a higher salary band requires a detailed assessment, not undertaken in this paper. However what can be ascertained is the workplace motivational level of Aboriginal staff, which is reflected in their involvement in workplace professional development.

Professional Development

OEH Aboriginal staff across all salary bands (n=347) are actively engaged in workplace learning and development. In the financial year 2014/2015, 62 % or 216 Aboriginal staff enrolled in at least one professional development activity. The 216 Aboriginal staff who undertook training engaged in 644 individual training events, each person averaging 3 training events per year.

Upon examination of the non-Aboriginal cohort n= 3241, 83% or 2894 staff enrolled in at least one training event. Interestingly, however, this cohort engaged in 5014 individual training events averaging 1.8 training events per year. Examinations of the nature of the training events reveal they can be broadly classified into Occupationally Specific Training³ and Personal Development Training⁴. When examining the nature of the training events undertaken by Aboriginal staff across all salary bands, 495 or 76% of the training events were Occupationally Specific and 149 or 23 % were of a Personal Development nature.

For the majority of Aboriginal staff the choice of occupationally specific training indicates a commitment to professional workplace development and job maintenance while the personal and behaviour development activities may signal a desire for professional extension and possible career advancement. A significant trend is seen for Aboriginal staff who are classified as senior officers, above the salary band Clerk 11/12/Senior Officers (Middle Managers) who selected Personal development training 81.5 % of the time and occupationally specific training only 18.5% of the time.

Clearly Aboriginal staff across all salary bands are actively engaged in training. Their engagement in individual training events is double that of non-Aboriginal staff.

Measuring Management Capability

In 2015, OEH engaged in a large scale needs analysis to determine manager capability. MANAGECAT®, a self-assessment capability analysis tool (CAT) was utilised to analyse individual skills and knowledge and to gauge individual's needs for professional development. A total of approximately 700 managers were invited to participate in an on-line survey with 342 managers completing the task. Of the 342 managers who completed, 11 managers identified as Aboriginal.

The survey revealed that 10 of the 11 Aboriginal Managers have only been in a management role in the public sector for three (3) years or less. With only one female Aboriginal Manager being in the Public Sector for greater than 3 years. The length of service for this cohort indicates that Aboriginal Managers are a new and emerging

³Occupationally specific training includes Fire Preparation Day, Senior First Aid, Chainsaw-L2 Basic Fell, Aircraft Safety 4-Wheel Drive, Chemical Handling, Winch / Hover Refresher, Firearms Training.

⁴Personal and professional development training includes Resume/Interview Skills, Writing Well at Work, Workplace Bullying, OEH: Merit Assessment Program, Respectful Workplace Manager, Respectful Workplace Staff, Dealing with Aggressive Situations

management group and that they are not moving from other management positions within the Public Sector.

The results of the capability assessment across all management skill clusters were evaluated. The Capability Analysis revealed low management skill perception within the Aboriginal Manager cohort. The MANAGECAT® capability analysis results revealed that Aboriginal Managers perceive their own ability as lower than non-Aboriginal Managers across nearly all management capability areas. A summary of the most significant features of the analysis appear below:

- Of the 29 skill clusters evaluated, 28 skill clusters were rated lower by Aboriginal Managers
- Only one skill cluster was rated higher by Aboriginal Managers – i.e., *Managing Team Direction*
- Only one skill cluster was rated equal by Aboriginal Managers - *Managing Diversity and Culture*
- Aboriginal Managers scored themselves significantly lower (20% lower) than non-Aboriginal Managers in eight areas of management capability. Management areas included:
 - ❖ Managing workplace development
 - ❖ Managing business operations and plans
 - ❖ Managing financial resources
 - ❖ Managing technology
 - ❖ Managing change
 - ❖ Managing professional practice
 - ❖ Managing professional development
 - ❖ Managing procurement and contracts

The low self-rating by Aboriginal Managers may reflect their lack of Public Sector management experience and/or indicate a need for professional development.

Conclusion

Aboriginal employment within OEH sits predominantly at the lowest salary band levels, lower in fact than all other equity groups across OEH. Moreover, perceived impediments to salary progression may include lack of formal qualifications, for lower band levels, and poor self-perception amongst Aboriginal managers.

There is an imperative to review workplace planning and improve career mobility for Aboriginal staff and to equip aspiring managers with the skills they require to compete for career positions in an open merit based recruitment process.

OEH has exceeded the COAG target for Aboriginal employment; however, there is still work to be done to achieve the NSW Public Sector Aboriginal Employment Strategy

2014-2017 imperative of a 1.8% increase in Aboriginal employment across all salary bands.

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