

Professor Santina Bertone

# WHY CULTURAL DIVERSITY ISN'T A PRIORITY - BUSTING MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES THAT HOLD US BACK

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## Background

- Skilled immigrants fuel the economy and fill skill gaps yet under-employment and invisibility at the top continue
- Need to understand the socio-cultural factors behind this
- link to the broader national agenda and legislation

## The Broader Context

- No legal requirement for workplaces to collect data on their cultural diversity
- The myth that if it's not broke, why fix it? – perpetuates the problem
- We are so busy applauding the value of immigration, we neglect workforce integration
- FECCA and the Diversity Council of Australia recognise these issues
- Working together with DIAC on a harmony in the workplace project

## Culture and Attitudes

- Skilled immigrants are proficient in English
- Comfortable working in a professional context but Australian cultural norms and expectations pose challenges
- Intolerance to deviations from the mainstream by those in power
- Fact Sheet 7 Myths and Misperceptions about Cultural Diversity sought to address these issues head on
- Very positive response by stakeholders e.g. AHRC, Cricket Australia, Ernst & Young, Darebin Council, Performance Education, Diversity Council of Australia

## 23 myths presented and debunked by the fact sheet

*Some are presented here:*

- Aussies don't have culture
- Most migrants have English language problems
- Qualifications gained overseas are generally inferior
- Overseas experience is not relevant in Australia
- The majority of migrants are unskilled
- We need to fix the gender problem first
- We're all multicultural so we can't be racist
- All selection decisions are based on merit
- Collecting data on employees' birthplaces and heritage is too difficult

## Talking about Cultural Difference

- Until we address these deep-seated attitudes, change will stall
- Workplaces need to be able to talk about cultural diversity currently, many don't even have the language to discuss it
- Fear of talking about cultural difference
- Yet colour-blind or culturally-blind policies don't work
- This requires leadership by example

## Measuring it

- Pilot study by Diversity Council of Australia (2012) shows low cultural diversity at the top of big companies
- A similar story in the public sector
- Australian Multicultural Council forum in March recently resolved to recommend that government make Data collection in workplaces compulsory
- If we can't measure it, we can't see or prove the problems
- Invisibility will lead to lost opportunities.

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