



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: BUILDING STRENGTH AND CAPABILITY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
Diversity and inclusion: building strength and capability	1
INTRODUCTION	2
BACKGROUND	3
SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY, ECONOMIC AND ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXTS	4
Organisational case studies	4
Economic case study: changing capabilities	5
Community Values and attitude survey	6
Community case studies	7
CONCLUSION	9
REFERENCES	10



ABSTRACT

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: BUILDING STRENGTH AND CAPABILITY

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Diversity and inclusion: Building strength and capability

Although diversity and inclusion (D&I) is not a new concept or area of practice, for the Emergency Management sector there has been little clarity of what effective D&I looks like for the sector. This includes how it is implemented within the emergency management (EM) context, how that context itself is changing due to increasingly dynamic social, environmental and economic drivers and how D&I is best measured and implemented. In its first year, the project Diversity and inclusion: Building strength and capability, has undertaken a number of activities with end users, involving developing a detailed project plan, undertaking a literature review, and conducting three case studies and a community survey. The case studies involved desktop studies of organisational capabilities and histories, and interviewing people within each organisation and in three different communities. This presentation covers the case studies, community interviews and community survey.

Using a systemic analysis that focuses on decision making, it examines the key synergies and differences found in each organisation in relation to past and present practice. Barriers, needs, opportunities and benefits for D&I in each organisation as seen by their employees have been collated. It also examines how each organisation has evolved. Their capacity to serve the changing agenda that D&I needs to operate within, and how D&I can help develop that capacity is also examined. Views from the community of the EM sector are also canvassed. These findings have been used to develop a draft diversity and inclusion framework to guide the next stage of this research.



INTRODUCTION

EMOs are diverse and complex. Their scope of activity spans the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery (PPRR) spectrum, and requires a range of activities that contribute to the wellbeing of communities. “Unacceptably low levels of diversity” in emergency services and a recognition that emergency services need to better reflect the communities they work to serve (National Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2011), is driving the need for EMOs to diversify both their skills, workforce and services to meet the changing needs of their communities.

The context in which many of these organisations operate is changing due to:

- The increasing intensity and frequency of events due to climate change, and the increasing costs associated with these events.
- Changing demographics.
- New technologies, particularly digital.
- Resource constraints and decreasing volunteer numbers.
- The need to build resilience within organisations and their communities, to reduce future costs and impacts of future events.

These dynamic and systemic drivers are changing the focus of EMOs activities from shorter-term tactical approaches across the PPRR spectrum, to long-term strategic approaches that focus on future outcomes. These drivers are also facilitating the need for innovation across the Emergency Management Sector, and the development of new services that aim to increase resilience of the organisations and their communities. It is also fundamentally changing the nature of the relationship EMOs have with their communities, from delivering a service **to** them to working **with** them. Effective implementation of diversity requires inclusion which is a relatively new area of practice and knowledge (Young et al., 2018).

Due to specific changing nature of EMOs service and policy requirements, it is important to assess the system that this encompasses.

This paper presents a summary of key findings from four different areas of work undertaken in the first year of the project to understand the organisational, economic and community context in relation to diversity and inclusion which has provided the basis for the development of a draft framework for diversity and inclusion.



BACKGROUND

The project *Diversity and inclusion: Building strength and capability*, aims to assist understanding and practice of diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the EMOs through the identification of current measurement, strengths, barriers, needs and opportunities in EMOs and the community.

The key need identified in the scoping phase of this project was to understand what effective D&I is, and what this means for EMOs in terms of practice and measurement. As a primary focus to guide the project, we have developed the following definition of effective diversity:

“The result of interactions between organisations and individuals that leverage, value and build upon characteristics and attributes within and beyond their organisations to increase diversity and inclusion, resulting in benefits that support joint personal and organisational objectives and goals, over a sustained period of time.” (Young et al. 2018, p19.)

Using case studies, the project examines D&I systemically through a values, narratives and decision-making context across organisational, community and economic themes. Aspects of diversity being examined are: culture and ethnicity, gender, demographic status (age and education), and disability (physical).

The participating organisations are Queensland Fire and Rescue (QFES), Fire and Rescue New South Wales (FRNSW), and South Australian State Emergency Services (SASES). The community case studies selected are Bordertown in South Australia, Bendigo in Victoria and South-western Sydney in New South Wales, representing rural, regional and urban communities.

The project has three stages:

- Understanding the context in which D&I exists in EMOs and the community.
- Development of a D&I framework suitable for the EMOs.
- Testing and utilisation of the framework.

The aim of this research is to develop a practical framework tailored to the EMOs context that builds upon and leverages current strengths and expertise within the EMOs. This will be developed collaboratively with our end-user group as part of our research process. Its purpose is to support better management and measurement of D&I by providing a basis for more effective evidence-based decision making and provide a foundation that can be built upon by EMOs as practice progresses.



SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY, ECONOMIC AND ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXTS

ORGANISATIONAL CASE STUDIES

Thirty-three semi structured interviews and a desk top review of publicly available materials were undertaken across three EMOs; Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, Fire and Rescue New South Wales and South Australian State Emergency Services. These were examined to ascertain the key synergies and also the different nuances found in each organisation in relation to practice in this area using a systemic analysis of their organisations focused on decision making.

Key findings from this study were:

- Diversity and inclusion (D&I) was present in all organisations, but it was not currently well integrated into organisational systems and processes or connected to day-to-day decision making.
- The largest barrier for D&I was culture and the largest need was in the area of management.
- EMOs lack an overarching framework or process to work within, which has resulted in shorter term, reactive approaches to implementation in many areas.
- Response-based and hierarchical cultures and tactical decision making are predominant in all organisations, and are often at odds with the more strategic-based softer skills required for D&I. There is a need to identify, build, value and reward specific D&I capability, skills and attributes.
- Many activities to date have not been well socialized or communicated and this has resulted in confusion, fear, resistance and difficult behaviours. There is also a lack of awareness of appropriate language use and behaviours in relation to diverse communities and individuals.
- Much implementation to date was felt to have polarized the issues between men and women across EMOs and resulted in a focus on “obtaining diversity quotas” rather than creating an inclusive culture.
- Effective inclusion requires the creation of an environment which is safe for diverse individuals to be their “authentic selves”.
- There was a diversity of organisational cultures present in each organisation and cultural gaps between these, particularly between upper management and brigades and units which were seen to create an “us and them” attitude.
- D&I needs to be understood and framed as a business imperative that enhances organisational performance as well as a moral imperative.
- There are deeply entrenched organisational and personal identities that are often linked to heroism and response. These can be both positive and negative and need to be proactively managed during the transformation process.

Strong organisational and individual identities and the changing nature of EMOs presented a particular challenge in this area. The lack of current visions and narratives of future diverse organisations and the predominant visual narrative of response-based men of men of Anglo Saxon appearance were also found to have



compounded this. There was limited understanding of the benefits and opportunities that D&I have to offer and the specific skills, attributes and knowledge of diverse communities have and how these can enhance EMOs activities.

There were indications that D&I attributes and skills are already present in areas of organisations and also that some agencies contain a higher level of these skills and attributes. Measurement in this area is still developing but there was a lack of consistent D&I data, measurement and analysis. There is a need to build specific measurement models that are tailored to EMOs context.

Examples of effective practice were found in all case study organisations but it was also widely acknowledged that there was still considerable work to be done in this area to achieve effective practice across organisations.

ECONOMIC CASE STUDY: CHANGING CAPABILITIES

The economic case study focused on changing capabilities and tasks. It also identified the following from annual reports and strategy documents:

- Intended changes in capabilities which respond to the changing context in which EMOs operate.
- Actual changes which have been described in annual reports.
- Changes in tasks and the way in which these are a response to the changing context.

This was undertaken through a review of strategy documents and annual reports of the EMOs to track their changing capabilities over the last decade.

In 2004-05, QFES strategic challenge was primarily enhancing its rural/remote and indigenous capacity. By 2016-17, QFES became increasingly focused on its diverse customer base. Key drivers for this were:

- an increase in the severity and frequency of natural disasters;
- changing community expectations;
- changes in the volunteer landscape; and
- an increase in crime and safety threats due to technological advancements, globalisation and violent extremism (QFES, 2017c, p10).

QFES worked to address these challenges through training, recruitment of a more diverse and capable workforce, and technological advancements.

To support its diverse workforce, QFES developed strategies to improve its workplace culture. It also instigated a new human resources management system (NEXUS) to recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce and more flexible work arrangements.



Key challenges for FRNSW 2004–05 were;

- drought
- terrorism
- global warming
- aging population
- natural disasters.

By 2011–12, FRNSW identified particular areas of activities to address these challenges, such as strengthening community resilience. Specific areas of consideration were the impacts and increasing costs service delivery and the need for more environmentally sustainable fighting methods.

It also extended its community focus beyond an ageing population to include:

- the increased risk of social dislocation among the increasing proportions of single person households
- demographic changes due to increased migration
- increases in coastal communities; and
- decline in rural communities.

Advances in technology, the high costs of such technology and the need for upskilling the workforce were also specified.

By 2016–17, the FRNSW tightened its focus on its communities and its workplace culture following investigations into its operations by KPMG and ICAC. Key steps to improve this were; retraining its existing workforce and recruiting staff from diverse backgrounds. In particular it has:

- Developed programs and specifically targeted recruitment from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, women.
- Developed closer ties with CALD communities.
- Improved its response capability through new technologies.
- Diversified services to include assistance to the Ambulance Service at medical emergencies.
- Improved the capability of its workforce through targeted training.

The SASES has experienced difficulties in relation to its volunteer training and retention. It undertook a review of its staffing arrangements in 2011–12 and developed a new workforce plan in 2012–13. Since then it has a significant workforce mapping project. Its Strategic Directions 2017–2020 report mentions the need to promote diversity and inclusion in its workforce, and also the need to develop and implement a flexible volunteering model, volunteer retention strategies and improving skills to manage volunteers.

COMMUNITY VALUES AND ATTITUDE SURVEY

Values are the basis of decision-making and are the beliefs that determine what is most important and what motivates action (Schwartz, 2016, p4).

Understanding differing and similar values is increasingly being used by organisations as a way to understand gaps between their organization, clients and communities they serve. For emergency management services to better represent the diversity of



the communities they work, they need to not just understand the demographics of those communities, but also the values across their communities, particularly in relation to diversity.

This study undertook a community survey across 539 community members to ascertain values and attitudes in relation to the EMOs. The survey used Schwartz's measurement of values which comprises of ten different values, based around four key areas: openness to change, self-transcendence, conservation and self-enhancement, as a basis. Questions from the Schwartz values study were amalgamated with the World Values Survey to develop the survey. The demographic varied across age, gender and cultural spectrums.

Key findings were:

- 25% of survey respondents in this study spoke a language other than English at home. Twenty-seven different languages were cited as being used, with the most common being Chinese, Hindi and Italian.
- While women-only answers to some gender-based questions elicited significant differences to the general community, there were indications that there may be some strongly-ingrained gender stereotypes that exist amongst both men and women, that may need further research.
- Findings from younger people did not reveal vast differences between general community values across the study, indicating that studying the nuances in responses will be important, and relying on stereotypes of 'Millennials' may be very misleading.
- How the community viewed emergency services workers, and their expectations of skills needed at different times relating to an emergency, was of significant interest.

The data from this survey provided a baseline for the diversity of community values that exist which can be potentially be compared to the values of EMOs and their staff. This has potential to help discern where there may be significant differences of both diversity and also values between EMOs and the community.

COMMUNITY CASE STUDIES

Three case studies were undertaken to explore diversity and inclusion in communities. The locations included Bordertown (SA), Bendigo (Vic.) and the City of Parramatta (NSW). Objectives included to: understand the changing nature of diversity and inclusion in communities; identify community perceptions of EMOs; identify barriers and opportunities for community inclusion in EMOs; and, provide examples of how diverse communities relate to EMOs. The case studies were informed by secondary data and in-depth interviews with informed community stakeholders.

Each of the case study areas are being shaped in the larger context of economic transformation, changing settlement patterns and increasing population size, diversity and mobility. Social inequality was widening and systemic disadvantage faced by specific groups within communities was entrenched.

Community perceptions of EMOs were diverse and ranged from them being seen as respected to being "taken for granted" by many parts of the community. Others



were either unaware, disconnected from, or fearful of EMOs. Some newly arrived communities believed their cultures and languages were not recognised. People with disabilities believed that there are few opportunities for participation. There was a wide perception EMOs are a “closed shop” with few opportunities for engagement.

The image of EMOs held by many interviewees was one that was male, heroic and predominantly “white” which was alienating for many women and those from culturally diverse backgrounds. A lack of understanding of cultural diversity also created a disconnection and limited modes of communication preventing the building of community relationships. The increasing mobility of the population was also a barrier with place-based services not keeping pace of their changing community demographics. Declining resources for community agencies was also an issue.

Despite barriers, there are many examples of EMOs and community engagement particularly in relation to community education. For example, EMOs are actively involved in settlement services for newly arrived communities and the joint production of community resources and engage in community liaison programs. Strategies that were based on long-term relationship building, mutual understanding, respect and collaboration, were regarded as most sustainable and productive.

These initiatives can be built upon and there is a need to address gaps such as.

- Visible representation of women and men from diverse backgrounds to provide aspirational role models for young people.
- The expansion of the modes of communications to diverse communities to more clearly articulate and encourage the possibilities for engagement with community members.
- To identify and understand new communities such as temporary migrants and new refugee communities more broadly.
- The need for closer understanding of, and connections between, EMOs and community sectors.

Overall, communities welcomed EMOs engagement to improve safety and participation of community members with their agencies. Many interviewees raised that there was a key opportunity to improve the effectiveness of EMOs activities through harnessing the skills and knowledge that diverse communities possess.



CONCLUSION

“change is coming we need to be ready for it”

Although D&I is not new to EMOs, effective implementation in this area has often remained elusive. It is clear from the research undertaken that the context in both the organisations and communities is highly dynamic, complex, fragmented and disconnected. The synergies of themes that have arisen across these areas of work highlight the need for organisations to work more systemically, inclusively and strategically in this area. It also highlights the opportunities in this area, particularly in relation to identification and leveraging of community skills and knowledge to enhance services and increase community resilience.

Effective D&I requires persistence, long-term commitment and planning and allocation of resource. It also requires a systemic approach to implementation that reaches beyond the organisations and includes their communities and external stakeholders.

Innovation and change are key aspects of D&I, so it is an uncomfortable and difficult process where not everything will work. Ongoing learning and adjustment are critical to the process. Currently there is a need for EMOs to stop and reflect on where their organisations are now and where they wish to be in the future. This way they can plan more effectively plan their transition towards the diverse organisations they wish to become.

How opportunities are capitalized on and whether they are realised will be very dependent upon how well organisations connect and leverage the skills, knowledge and attributes both within their organisations and their diverse communities. Also, how well they persist down the difficult and challenging road towards inclusion.

Reports pertaining to this research can found at:

<https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/research/hazard-resilience/3392>



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