

HEALTH WEALTH CAREER

DIVERSITY FATIGUE THE STRUGGLE IS REAL



MAKE TOMORROW, TODAY



WE NEED TO TALK
ABOUT IT...

IS YOUR ORGANISATION
PLAGUED BY DIVERSITY
FATIGUE?

A NEW APPROACH
COULD BE THE COST-
EFFECTIVE SOLUTION
YOU'RE SEEKING.

Sick of spending millions on ineffective diversity programs? Tapping into a sense of inclusion and belonging could halt diversity fatigue in its tracks – and it starts at the top.

Diversity has been a workplace buzz word for years now, motivating companies to spend billions annually on leadership development. You can't walk into a university or college without falling over a leadership degree or course. And on paper, many organisations are doing a lot to create better leaders and establish a more diverse and inclusive culture – but is it working? **Overwhelmingly, the statistics say no.**

Just ask Aubrey Blanch, head of diversity and inclusion at Atlassian – she's in the trenches of the overly white, male-dominated tech industry. Blanch commissioned a survey on diversity fatigue, and [recently told the LA times](#) that the tech workers she surveyed were frustrated and burned out. "We've been talking about diversity for so long, they're exhausted hearing about it," she said.

Diversity fatigue is happening at large organisations because the focus is often only on one dimension of diversity: gender. Many are sick of the 'men are bad, we need more women in leadership' unintended message (including female employees, just quietly). We're numbed by it.

That's not to say that women in leadership isn't an important message. It absolutely is. But we need to become more strategic around how we engage with people, to tap into a deeper motivation: the sense of inclusion and belonging. The focus should be on the opportunity to make a difference, and be part of a team where you're recognised for your individuality and what you bring to the table. There's no doubt that leadership and development plays a big role in this conundrum – both individually and at an organisational level.

“...we’ve been talking about diversity for so long, they’re exhausted hearing about it.”

RIGHT INTENTIONS WRONG IMPACT

A large proportion of organisations understand the value of diversity and inclusion and want to implement sustainable change. Unfortunately, many companies struggle to do this, don’t measure or track their efforts – or rely on dated leadership programs and diversity strategies that don’t work, according to research.

One common approach is training the ‘in’ groups (in most cases, older white males) about their unconscious biases. Another is to empower the ‘out’ groups (typically women and other under-represented groups) to lean in, step up and take control. Studies show that the first approach tends to activate bias rather than reduce it – people rebel against rules that look to control behaviour – and the second ‘fix

them’ approach doesn’t address the systemic barriers you face if you’re on the fringes.

Other reasons the ‘old ways’ aren’t working? McKinsey & Company’s 2014 study ‘[Why Leadership Development Programs Fail](#)’ touched on a few, including the assumption that one-size-fits-all when it comes to leadership programs. Organisations are also not addressing how mindset influences behaviour, and why leaders act the way they do.

Here’s the thing: identifying those deep thoughts, feelings, beliefs and assumptions is what leads to behavioural change, and the ability to see the world from a different AND equally valid perspective.

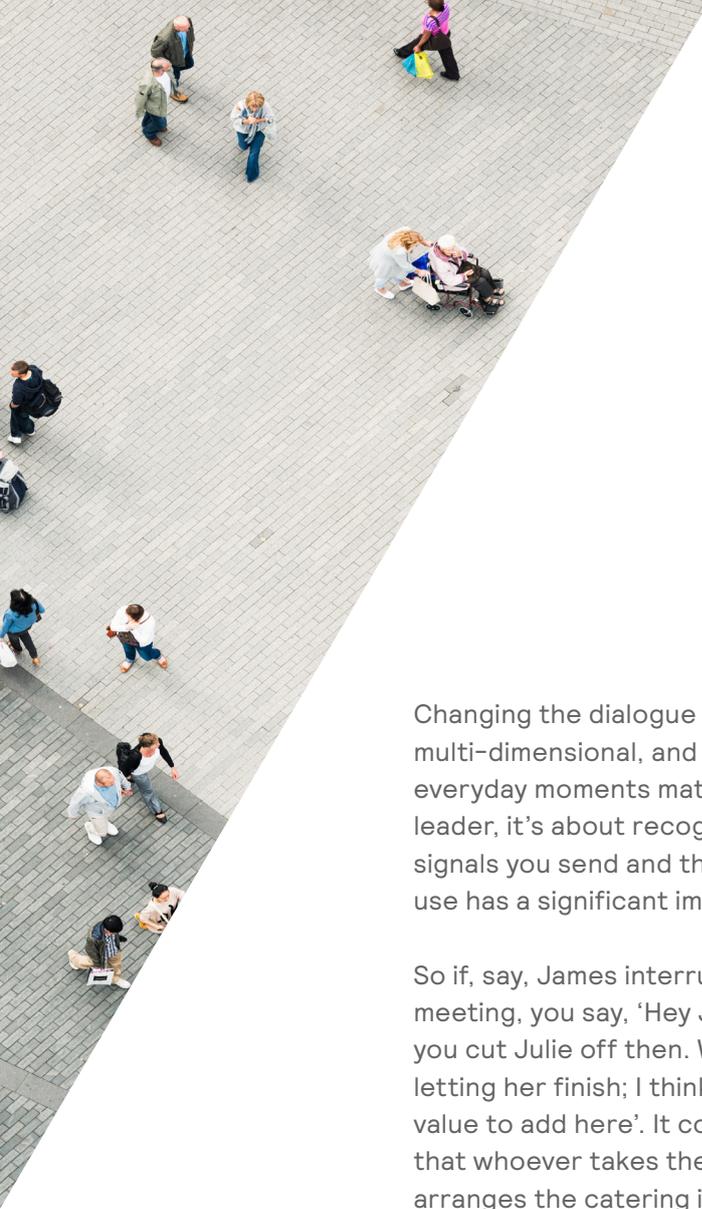
TUNING YOUR ANTENNA AS A LEADER

Diversity fatigue occurs when organisations do a lot of talking, but don’t walk the walk. Companies who have done the hard yards are the ones holding all their leaders accountable, ensuring they have their antenna up around inclusion and exclusion. They understand inclusive leadership needs to happen at the senior levels and the next layer down, because that’s where change is role-modelled and can cut through the cultural barriers of ‘the way things are done around here’.

Successfully implementing inclusion is more about increasing the contact the ‘in’ group has with the ‘out’ groups, as well as tapping into their desire to look

good within their group when presented with a collective challenge. It’s a strategy that’s been proven to affect the proportion of women and other under-represented groups in leadership.

The role of a good leader is learning how to ‘involve’ difference more effectively, enabling employees with unique skillsets, experiences and perspectives to contribute and be heard. Do this, and you’ll see an increase in productivity, efficiency and in your effectiveness as a leader. If your focus is transactional and results-driven, there’s a good chance you’ve got wasted potential going unnoticed and unfulfilled.



Changing the dialogue to be more multi-dimensional, and being aware of everyday moments matters, too. As a leader, it's about recognising that the signals you send and the language you use has a significant impact.

So if, say, James interrupts Julie in a meeting, you say, 'Hey James, I noticed you cut Julie off then. Would you mind letting her finish; I think she's got more value to add here'. It could be noticing that whoever takes the minutes or arranges the catering is the woman in the room – and you delegate those tasks so everyone gets a chance to contribute. These are practical actions allowing leaders to walk the walk.

It's also about looking beyond gender. If, as leaders, you're asked to speak on panels or present internally, are you being representative of your organisation? Are you asking diverse people to speak? Those speakers might not be at leadership level, but it sends a message to everyone in

the company that voices are valued, and you don't have to be senior to be heard. And sometimes, that person's ingenuity contributes to a far greater discussion than hearing the same people talk about the same things.

If you're successful, this integrated approach becomes embedded within the culture, is seen as imperative to the way the organisation does business, and the change suddenly becomes far more sticky and therefore, sustainable.

Looking to drive a culture change to help your organisation thrive into the future? Reach out for a discussion about the ways we can help empower your leaders and bring more inclusion into your workplace.

Go to www.mercer.com.au/P2YP to learn more about Pathway to Your Potential™ experiences or [click here](#) to connect with Jess.

AUTHOR



DR JESS MURPHY

Dr Jess Murphy is in the business of disrupting traditional corporate structures to move them into the 21st Century mindset. She has over 20 years experience in Corporate Australia, achieving results in dynamic roles – from generalist to specialist; individual contributor to leader of leaders. This, plus ongoing academic contributions as an Adjunct Professor in business leadership means you can expect progressive thinking with practical application.

Dr Jess Murphy recognises the importance of working with today's leaders to create a brighter tomorrow working closely with senior leaders and executives to develop their own

confidence in terms of how to effectively 'involve difference' as well as advocate and support those different to them. This involves challenging leaders to step outside their comfort zones and view the world from a different but equally valid perspective.

The recent strategic alliance between Mercer and Dr Jess Murphy will focus on accelerating change in this space through empowering talented individuals to take action and put themselves forward with confidence as well as tapping into the latent potential of leaders to become more effective in involving and advocating for those 'different' to them.



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