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Transforming through diversity and inclusion capability – the pathway to achieving diversity benefits

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Abstract

A key driver for building diversity and inclusion (D&I) in emergency management organisations (EMOs) is to better represent diverse cohorts and ensure EMOs and their communities become more resilient to natural hazards. While EMOs have made some progress, dynamic transformation is required to effectively manage the rapidly changing contexts they and their communities face. Central to this is the need to expand the current service–client relationship to become a more inclusive partnership model that builds resilience.

This paper reports on Phase 2 of the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre project *Diversity and inclusion: Building strength and capability*, which aimed to develop a D&I framework for the emergency management sector (EMS). Key aspects are: [1] A process framework to guide organisations by linking strategic objectives to day-to-day decision making and integrates D&I practice into organisational systems; [2] Identification and development of specific strategic and people-based capabilities and skills; [3] Management of risks arising as a result of D&I shocks; and [4] A process to measure and manage progress and assess the benefits derived from investment.

Introduction

If only senior managers dealt with this situation in the same way they deal with an emergency incident - by giving it their full attention.

Ex-firefighter, Dr Dave Baigent

Over the past decade, D&I has become a major focus for the EMS. Organisations such as Women and Firefighting Australasia (WAFA), and initiatives such as AFAC's Male Champions of Change have been intrinsic in broadening awareness and providing focus in this area. Evidence shows that D&I is being integrated into many organisations, but this agenda is still vulnerable (Young, Taylor & Cramer 2019). Diversity concerns more than diversity of people in the workforce (paid and unpaid) and in the community, but includes diversity of thought, roles and tasks, and relationships. These are all required for EMOs to negotiate the changing risk profile and the increasingly diverse communities they work with.

Like driving a car with a standard transmission for the first time, changing a hardwired organisational habit can be nerve-wracking.

Rock & Swartz (2007, p.4)

The D&I agenda is a key part of the transformation of the EMS – from one that has a focus on response during and immediately after emergency events, to one that improves community health and safety during the entire risk cycle, while expanding to embrace a multi-hazard approach.

A key characteristic of the EMO workforce is the 'fit in and fix it' culture that is highly skilled in tactical, command and control decision making (Baigent 2001, Young 2018). The mental maps required for effective D&I are different, and require changing organisational structures, and developing thinking pathways that require different 'mental muscles' to be exercised. Discomfort is to be expected in organisations with strong, inbuilt traditional and hierarchical cultures, and this needs to be managed throughout the process. Organisations also need to develop solution-focused

approaches that encourage people to 'go through the process of making connections themselves' (Rock & Swartz 2007, p.4).

This paper presents a process-based framework that can be used to develop implementation plans capable of supporting the D&I-led component of the transformation process.

Project background

The project (2017–2020) aims to develop a practical framework for the implementation of D&I that builds on and leverages current strengths and expertise within EMOs and their communities. Its purpose is to support better management and measurement of D&I by using evidence-based decision making. The project has three phases:

- understanding how D&I operates within emergency services systems
- developing a suitable D&I framework for the EMS
- testing and using the framework.

The first phase surveyed the D&I literature to determine what constituted effective D&I, and surveyed the sector through interviews, group discussions and feedback from practitioners (especially those on the end-user working group), in relation to barriers, needs, challenges and opportunities. Case studies and a community survey examined what the sector and D&I within the sector looked like from the community's point of view. An economic component collected the broad D&I benefits in preparation to identify those most relevant to emergency services. These were combined to present a draft Diversity and Inclusion Framework for development in Phase 2.

Phase 2 activities

Phase 2 included the following activities:

- A workshop 'Into the future: Building skills and capabilities for inclusive and diverse organisations' (December 2018)
- Six semi-structured focus groups with members of agency brigades and units
- Testing processes developed for the framework with stakeholders
- An economic assessment of the Indigenous Fire Indigenous Fire and Rescue Employment Strategy (IFARES) program.

The workshop aimed to improve understanding to support effective D&I practice within EMOs and throughout the sector, and how it related to specific tasks. The workshop was attended by 20 people representing 10 EMS agencies, representatives from industry and not-for-profit (NFP) organisations and researchers. There was a varied representation of gender, ethnicity and a mixture of executive, management and officer level in attendance. The participants were active in areas of D&I practice and were invited due to their expertise.

The key questions were:

- What skills and capabilities are needed for inclusive practice in EMOs?
- Do these skills and capabilities change during specific aspects of the transformation process? If so, how?
- What specific skills and capabilities are needed to solve D&I issues that people and organisations may encounter?

Participants worked through a structured process, where three groups were presented with a scenario containing D&I shocks, and which required specific D&I management:

- Scenario one involved a large influx of climate refugees from different cultures into a high-risk environment.
- Scenario two outlined a social media storm due to a lack of cultural awareness in a local brigade, and
- Scenario three outlined a policy reversal on D&I that required a sector wide response in relation to the benefits.

Participants were asked to propose their interventions, list their benefits and the most important attributes, capabilities and skills needed to support this intervention.

The workshop was synthesised by categorising data using a grounded-theory approach to extract key themes and identify synergies and patterns of decision making across the three groups. The data was coded and basic statistical analysis was undertaken. The key themes to emerge were D&I risk, capabilities and skills, and D&I benefits.

Data was also collected through six semi-structured interviews with focus groups comprised of people from brigades and units to determine how D&I is understood and linked to day-to-day tasks. These groups were diverse in age, race, gender and disability, and included paid and unpaid workforce members. Key tasks relating to D&I activities were then extracted and coded.

These tasks were then mapped using the following categories:

- Risk category
- Type of risk
- Primary capitals at risk
- Risks
- Impact and consequences
- Treatment
- Benefits
- Key tasks
- Attributes
- Skills
- Capabilities.

Key phases of successful programs were mapped to identify the steps needed to support the framework's development. This was then synthesised with findings from Phase 1 to refine the draft framework, and follow-up consultations were

undertaken with project end-users. Key findings were presented to end-user organisations to verify key findings, and to test the processes for salience and usefulness.

The economic case study estimated the benefits of the IFARES program by modelling different benefit and cost components (see 'Summary economic case study').

Workshop findings: D&I risk

Our focus was to explore which D&I attributes, skills and capabilities were most salient to EMOs, and how these related to day-to-day functions and tasks. The most prominent theme that emerged was the risk associated with poor, or lack of, management of D&I. Responses indicated that these risks were not uncommon or unexpected, with participants having a collective, almost visceral, reaction to the scenarios recognising aspects such as:

- how easily such shocks could occur
- the degree of damage they could produce, and
- the extent of time and resources required to recover.

Out of the 32 responses in relation to consequences, 65% of these were directly related to risk. The scenario related to political shock was identified as the most risk to organisations.

Common themes that arose were:

- increased conflict
- competing agendas
- increased risk
- erosion of trust in between the community and EMS, and
- reduction in effective responses.

Twenty-one perceived consequences for the community were broad-ranging, but all three scenarios were felt to increase risk to the community and negatively impact public safety. Eighty percent of all consequences were directly related to risk.

Themes that were common to all three scenarios were:

- Increase/amplification of community risk and impacts, particularly psychosocial impacts
- Decreased public safety, community cohesion
- Loss of trust, reputational damage to EMS
- Increased conflict, community tensions, factions
- Program failure
- Negative effect on regional sustainability.

Twenty-four consequences were also identified in relation to a specific activity each group selected. Challenges identified pertained to social licence, loss of trust, technology, external factors and behaviours. Positive actions included championing and sustaining impetus for improvement and broader community acceptance.

What is at risk?

Social and human capital are the areas most at risk from direct impacts caused by D&I shocks, and the following section summarises findings from Young & Jones (2019).

Human capital can be defined as:

The knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic wellbeing.

OECD (2016a, p.29)

This encompasses skills that support D&I and the growth of new knowledge. For most organisations, human capital is usually an internal consideration, but EMOs need to extend that notion to the community. This is important due to the substantial role volunteers play in service delivery, and the role the community plays in partnering with EMOs to build resilience and exercise risk ownership.

Social capital is described by Woolcock (2002) as:

One's friends, family and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called on in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake or leveraged for material gain.

Woolcock (p.20)

Social capital is seen as pivotal to social cohesion and equity. It is also defined as:

Networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups.

OECD (2016b, p.103)

Effective relationships generated by interactions are central – manifesting between different networks and groups within and between organisations and communities. The quality of these interactions can be a key determinant in whether there is a positive or negative outcome. In particular, they determine the level of trust generated by the building of social capital that is critical for the delivery of effective services and organisational development. The development of human capital is critical to being able to manage this effectively. Of particular importance is the need to understand and proactively manage the difficult and, at times, destructive behaviours that can occur in response to the supportive changes EMOs need to make.

The need for organisations to address D&I from a risk perspective is not a new concept. Holzmann and Jorgensen (1999) presented a set of conceptual components making up social protection and applied them to social risk management – making particular reference to equity and measurement of risk through a welfare lens. The Opening up on Diversity report

(Price Waterhouse Coopers 2017) also explored reputational risk, stating:

Your record on diversity and inclusion is now a key, though generally under-managed, source of reputational risk as it comes to play an increasingly powerful role in shaping stakeholder perceptions.

Price Waterhouse Coopers (2017)

The focus on wellbeing (where inclusion plays a role in ensuring the wellbeing of workers), covers their physical and psychological workplace safety (Worksafe Victoria, 2017), thereby creating new responsibilities and liabilities for EMOs.

These risks can be direct and indirect. Table 1 outlines the major categories of risk identified from the workshop, and subsequent interviews and end-user feedback.

Direct risks to the organisation are the result of specific action(s) from within the organisation or external parties. An example of direct risk would be due to an act of a directed, destructive action that impacts an organisation, such as behaviour with a cultural or gendered bias resulting in damage to a specific individual or cohort.

Indirect risks result from flow-on effects from a direct impact that reacts within the organisation and community and creates new risks. The impact of indirect risks can be just as severe as those from direct risks. An example is breakage of trust, which

can reduce the ability of EMOs to take part in and encourage collective behaviour. This can reduce community safety and effectiveness of service delivery.

D&I risk can also affect multiple areas through risk contagion. This is when a risk 'infects' another area beyond the initial impact. This type of risk contagion can result in compound risk (the combination of two or more risks). For example, a lack of inclusive practice can result in vulnerable community fragmentation, and in longer term impacts such as a negative image of a community, which can have economic impacts for local businesses.

Pre-existing risks can also become amplified as a result of a diversity shock. For example, resistance to an increase of diverse cohorts in organisations or communities can increase their vulnerability.

Workshop findings: capabilities and skills

A key aspect of transformation is the development of new attributes, skills and organisational capabilities to support D&I implementation beyond the usual technical skills needed for risk and natural hazards management. The focus for D&I is on people within organisations and the community, understanding and managing their behaviours and responses to difference and change. This suggests that D&I itself is a key organisational capability.

Table 1: Risks where the origin is predominantly related to D&I (Young & Jones 2019).

| Risk category | Impact type | Primary capital at risk | Risk example |
|--|---------------------|-------------------------|---|
| OHS | Direct | Human | Decreased wellbeing |
| Reputational | Indirect | Social | Poor public perception, loss of social licence with community |
| Operational (service delivery) | Direct | Human | Reduced service/response capability |
| Regulatory and legal | Direct and indirect | Human | Legal action for discrimination |
| Innovation | Direct | Human | Reputational damage and disengagement due to perverse outcomes |
| Programmatic risk (D&I program implementation) | Direct | Social | Inability to fulfil future community needs due to resistance |
| Strategic | Direct | Human | Inability to transform and secure organisational sustainability due to lack of vision |
| Political | Direct and indirect | Social | Disruption of D&I programs and strategies due to changing agenda |
| Social (community livelihoods) | Indirect | Social | Reduction in safety, increased vulnerability in diverse cohorts |
| Economic | Indirect | Financial | Unforeseen liabilities (e.g. increased premiums due to discrimination claims) |
| Cultural | Indirect | Social | Breakage of trust, cultural values at risk |
| Environmental | Indirect | Natural | Community risk increases due to loss and degraded natural environment |

Table 2 provides a snapshot of the attributes, skills and capabilities that were most allocated and given the greatest importance by workshop participants. They are relational rather than functional, showing that relationships rather than things such as program delivery are considered the highest priority. Of particular interest is the listing of empathy as an attribute, which is not a feature of many current D&I frameworks.

D&I benefits

The 35 benefits identified fell across three categories (Table 3), and built upon previous work:

- benefits for the organisations
- benefits for the community, and
- mutual benefits for both.

The highest level of benefits were for the community, and included social benefits such as reduction of risk, increases in resilience, ability to recover and social cohesion. Economic benefits, such as increased investment, a more integrated and healthier economy and increased business were also identified. In terms of organisations, trusted economic benefits were also identified.

Our research has shown that there is little, if any, measurement of D&I-related community benefits, and that measurement is mostly focused on diversity aspects within organisations. It also reinforces previous findings identifying the need for development of understanding and better measurement of D&I benefits, particularly at the community level.

Joining the dots

Risk identification can help provide a pathway that joins the dots between D&I principles and day-to-day organisational tasks with the benefits that can be derived. It also helps pinpoint the specific nature of the skills, capabilities and attributes needed to support practice and build future capability. An example of this mapping is shown in Table 4.

Summary economic case study: IFARES (Maharaj & Rasmussen 2019 forthcoming)

IFARES was initiated in 2013 by the Fire and Rescue New South Wales (FRNSW) to help breakdown longstanding barriers to Indigenous recruitment. IFARES data demonstrates the program's success, with registrations increasing from 18 in 2014 to 235 in 2016. Overall, 49 fire fighters have been employed from the program and 1 into administration.

The program also promotes greater engagement with Indigenous communities, improving fire safety and learning from traditional knowledge about fire management.

This study modelled the program's benefits by considering the reduced unemployment benefits, working life returns after leaving the program, health benefits to the recruited fire fighters and the community, health benefits arising from graduates bringing increased awareness of health issues and making healthier choices. The study also estimated the cost-benefit ratio.

The economic assessment found an estimated \$8 million benefit to the community, with a cost-benefit ratio of 20, and a range of invaluable intangible benefits, such as building community pride and strengthening social cohesion.

Table 2: Most allocated and prioritised attributes, skills and capabilities (Young & Jones 2019).

| | Attributes | Skills | Capabilities |
|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Most allocated | Empathy | Communication | Agility, adaptiveness |
| | Emotional intelligence | Listening | Collaborative |
| | Integrity | | |
| | Trustworthy | | |
| Greatest importance | Empathy | Listening | Agility, adaptiveness |
| | Emotional intelligence | Reflective | Cultural competency |
| | Inquisitive | | |

Table 3: Identified benefits from specific workshop activities (Young & Jones 2019).

| Organisations | Community | Mutual benefits |
|---|--|--|
| Better targeting of resources to risks | Ability for individuals to manage their own risks better | Clearer mutual understanding and increased trust |
| Expanded capabilities across sector | Better engagement | Shared responsibilities |
| Continuous improvement through assessment | Inclusive communities | Empowerment |
| Engaged workforce | Increased resilience | Non-political |
| Trusted economic benefits | Community cohesion, capital, connectedness, engagement | Self-sustaining |
| Gaps identified | Increase business | Threat proof |
| Better engagement and understanding of community values to steer activities | More integrated economy | EMS part of the social fabric of the community |
| Effective relationships | Sustainability | Safe by design |
| Social licence | Social cohesion | |
| Increased trust in government agencies | Harmony | |
| | Increased investment | |
| | Greater capacity to recover | |
| | Healthier economy | |
| | Attractive place to live | |
| | Community agency | |
| | Increased community resilience, connectedness | |
| | Confidence in public safety | |

Table 4: Pathway from risk to benefit (Young & Jones 2019)

| Risk category | OHS |
|---------------------|--|
| Risk | Exclusion or discrimination due to difference |
| Consequences | Low morale, disengagement, WorkCover/liability claims |
| Treatment | Develop inclusive culture program, education, measurement of wellbeing |
| Benefit | Decrease in insurance premiums, increase in trust, wellbeing and community safety |
| Key tasks | Monitoring/evaluation, engagement/communication, program development, project and risk management, innovation, education |
| Attributes | Cultural and emotional intelligence, sensitivity, trustworthy, empathy |
| Skills | Engagement, communication, educational, strategic, innovation, project and risk management |
| Capability | Risk management, self-care, cultural and emotional capability |

D&I framework: supporting management and measurement

In addition to D&I risks, the innovation required to undertake transformation and build capital carries its own risk. Innovation risk is associated with the uncertainty of the unfamiliar, as new strategies and actions are tried and tested. Social and innovation risks can increase if D&I is poorly managed and/or implemented.

Aspects of risk can be managed using a process-based framework that links bottom-up and top-down processes, undertakes monitoring and assessment to feed information on progress back into the strategic planning component, and builds trust amongst the people undertaking the work. The key areas of organisational activity are shown in Figure 1:

- Strategic – process of transformation and change
- Programmatic – continuous improvement models using monitoring and assessment
- Organic growth – bottom-up engagement and relationships.

The strategic process of change provides the overarching framework for the programmatic actions and organic growth needed to support change and innovation. This framework will be supported by four practice documents across the areas of managing behaviours, change and innovation, engagement and communication, and measurement.

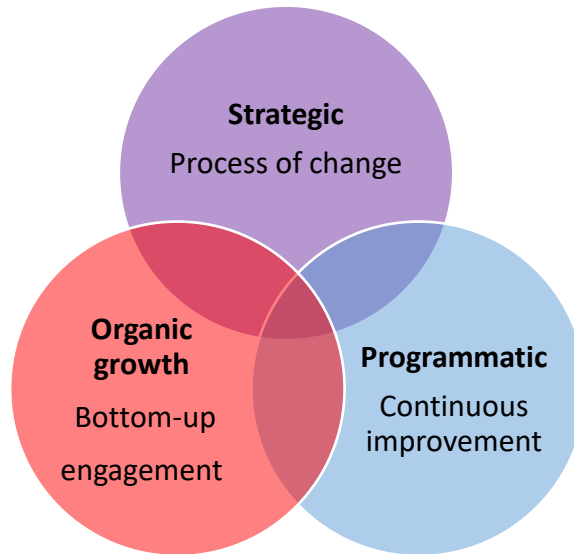


Figure 1: Conceptual D&I management and measurement model.

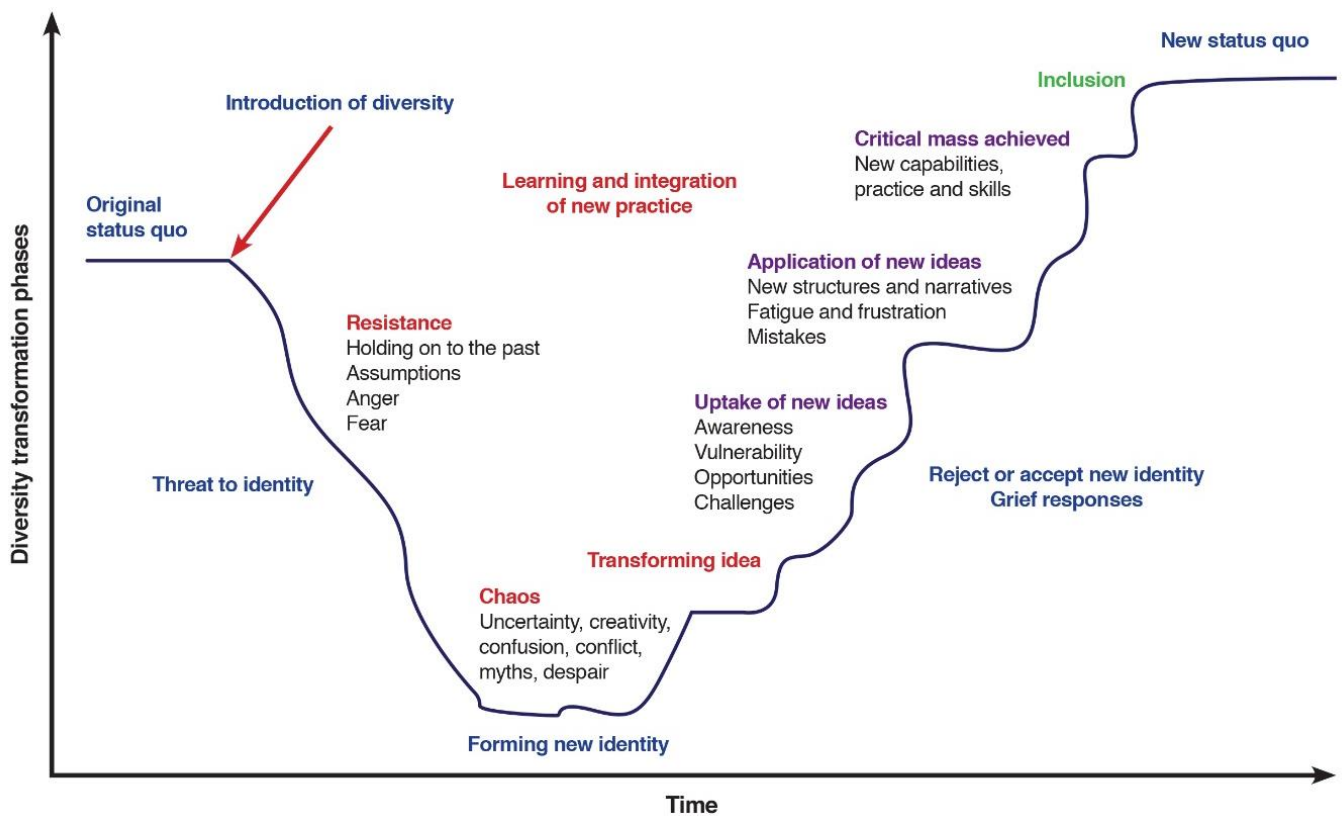


Figure 2: D&I transformation process phases. Young et al 2018 (Adapted from Satir et al. 1991; Kübler-Ross 1993; Gardenswartz & Rowe 2003; Rogers 2010).

The strategic transformation process

EMOs need to transform to provide cultures and structures that support diversity of people, thought, roles and tasks. This requires a systemic and strategic approach using a complex change process that includes management of innovation, changing identity, establishing a new status quo and grief (Figure 2)

This process can help organisations understand the potential responses that might be encountered, and can also be used to plan long-term resourcing needs. A critical component is the development of a future vision of what the organisation wishes to become. That will determine the types of programs, structures, capabilities needed to provide the basis for monitoring and measurement. It also provides the forward focus that is needed to shape expectations and support meaningful engagement.

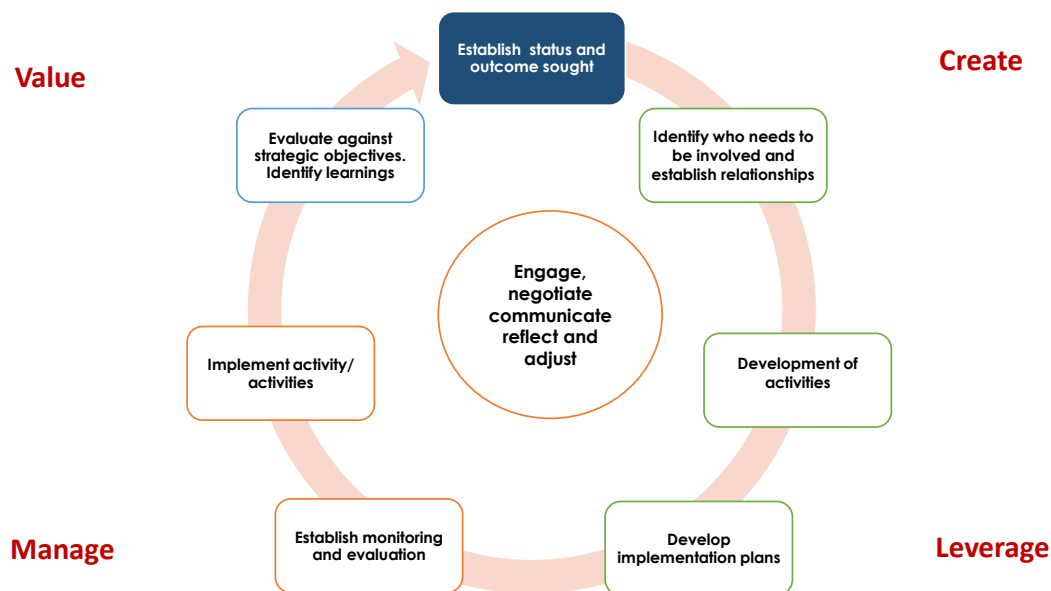


Figure 3: Programmatic continuous improvement process.

Table 5: Key actions and supporting tasks for creating an inclusive culture supporting D&I led change.

| Key action | Supporting tasks |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Connect and understand | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe, listen Seek out ideas |
| Developing relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome difference Enable ideas, trust Build common language, purpose Establish boundaries Build on existing values, strengths Be reflective, flexible |
| Collaborate and empower action | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enable leadership, ownership of actions Leverage capabilities, skills Create pathways for two-way dialogue/feedback Acknowledge, respect contributions Watch, listen, learn, reflect, adjust |
| Celebrate and share | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate, celebrate, share achievements/learnings Acknowledge, reward achievements/contributions |

Programmatic – continuous improvement

Due to the evolving nature of D&I, a continuous improvement model is best suited for implementation (Figure 3). This iterative process connects long-term strategic change with transitional activities that provide feedback on progress, providing a management and evaluation structure as part of an ongoing process. Creating, leveraging, managing and valuing activities and evaluation outcomes are activities needed throughout the process. Implementation starts late in this process due to the need for bottom-up-based activities that require managers to [1] engage and socialise new ideas and activities to support acceptance and success; and [2] manage the innovative nature and risk associated with program implementation.

Organic growth

Relationships and trust building are critical for leading and managing change, providing the safe environment needed for innovation and effective action where people can take risks to create opportunity. A key aspect of this is the adoption of solution-focused approaches that support people to 'go through the process of making connections themselves' (Rock & Swartz 2007, p.4). The four areas of activity help define how this can be achieved through specific actions and tasks that support the growth of safe and inclusive practice and work environments (Table 5). A key component is the development of healthy feedback and communication pathways that enable learning, promote the growth of innovative ideas and effective management of risk. It also helps organisations determine specific approaches, attributes and skills best suited to these types of programs and implementation.

Conclusion

Building D&I in the EMS is not an end to itself, but part of the required transformation as the risks they manage and the society they work in, are also transforming. The goal of Phase 2 of the project was to further develop the draft D&I framework (devised in Phase 1) for implementation. The framework builds on a strategic process of change, a continuous improvement model and a bottom-up organic model of engagement, building an organisational culture through relationships, trust and collaboration.

A key part of that framework is the management of the systemic and pervasive D&I-related risks that can manifest in many different ways. The workshop highlighted the potential, substantial impacts of these – the most serious potentially leading to a loss of social licence that can affect the ability of an organisation to function effectively, potentially reducing community safety and security. D&I risk can also be associated with innovation and transformation if the change process is considered to threaten existing culture, identify or function, leading to resistance.

To date, D&I risk has been poorly defined, and further research is required, particularly in relation to the sort of impacts they can have for organisations and communities.

More importantly, risk provides a rationale for how D&I can be connected to the core function and tasks that EMOs undertake and connects it to community safety, which is central to mitigating and managing natural hazard risk. One of the key benefits of D&I is safer and healthier communities and organisations. The IFARES economic case study has also shown the substantial community benefits and return on investment.

In terms of attributes, skills and capabilities, the workshop and interviews reinforced previous findings in relation to the need to build specific strategic, people-based skills and capabilities that enhance the EMO workforce's existing technical and generic skills. The need to identify, develop and grow D&I skills and capabilities that exist in organisations and communities and build on existing strengths was also identified. The framework also provides the key processes and activities for D&I to support management and measurement.

Often lost in the dialogue surrounding the D&I agenda is how it connects to core business functions of the EMS and why it is so important to their communities. D&I risk has been implicit for a long time, but has generally not been formally recognised or managed by EMOs. Effective D&I provides a tangible mechanism to address this. Our research strongly suggests developing inclusive cultures that embrace diversity is no longer an 'add-on' activity, but a critical capability that EMOs need to develop.

Acknowledgements

The project relies on the generosity and willingness of our end-users to open their organisations and give their time to explore difficult and potentially contentious issues. D&I research requires the same environment that implementing D&I needs – mutual trust and safe spaces where open and honest conversations can be had, and a willingness to be candid about the challenges. We are grateful to the D&I practitioners who have shared their invaluable experience and knowledge with us.

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