TEDx ARISE

Community Conversation

Ideas Worth Doing to Advance Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Australia.

Community Attendee Responses to 4 Questions

What is your direct observation or experience about workplace environments with respect to ethnic/cultural bias/behaviour/discrimination/'bamboo ceiling', etc ?

Meritocracy is working here

I grew up in Melbourne so felt it was as little of an issue as it could be. As I have travelled I have noticed more about the stratification or low diversity of other places.

In terms of workplace, I never felt any issues.

I've noticed more representation of diversity

Challenging

Biases and Barriers

It exists, and people may not be aware, but through education there is a surprising openness to change.

Cultural bias

While I don't have any experience with direct discrimination, I sense that there is a ceiling there due to the lack of representation in leadership across various industries.
Recruitment processes: there have been instances where I feel a sense of indirect discrimination / bias embedded.

It's still a taboo topic in the workplace, in particular, discrimination based on race/ethnicity

Focused on the trivial and comfortable, harmony days, traditional festivals and costumes, exchanging recipes and not a systemic or generational approach to empowering participation and power. This is with a complete lack of accountability for outcomes.

Medium to smaller international organisations do not care much about diversity in Australian offices.

Practice doesn't always follow what people preach

There is a bamboo ceiling

Accepting but glass ceiling exists

Not great! Hard to move up

With regard to observation, I do not see many examples of Asian Australians in positions of higher leadership across government and business that are proportionally representative of the population (17.4%, almost one fifth as of 2021). In the limited three years that I have been working in Australia, I have not experienced any (direct) discrimination per se, but I do wonder if a bamboo ceiling exists. It is quite possible that these statistics also represent more recent immigration and that Asian Australians simply haven't had enough time to work our way into positions of leadership. Cultural values, expectations, geopolitical relations with China, and opportunities for mentorship, I imagine also factor into the complex narrative of Asian Australian leadership and inclusivity in a significant way.

I have experienced two instances in the workplace that have led me to question whether there are ethnic/cultural biases that sit deeper in the Australian general psyche. At the same time, the comments were broader critiques about Chinese foreign policy and to me derived more from a historical Western centric media bias.

That there are many more biases: whether a place is neurodiverse, whether we may be ageist or have biases around accents. For example, when I worked for a large broadcaster in the UK there was just one person in a 50 people team with a cockney accent. I think the diversity conversation needs to be broader than culture and ethnic background.

I think there is a certain social expectation of minority groups. When a CALD person steps out of that 'mould', I am not sure it is completely embraced. Breaking of norms threatens the 'order' of the current power base.

Asians are hired as they often work beyond their required hours and do not question authority and in turn are not a threat to management.

A desire to be better without a willingness to address structural biases
It exists in every country I have lived in. For example, it is no different in Australia (where people of primarily Anglo-Saxon descent are the dominant ethnic group) and Singapore (where people of primarily Chinese descent are the dominant ethnic group). In both countries the dominant ethnic group members either unwittingly or deliberately exhibit ethnic bias in their decision making, causing an ethnic ceiling for people in the minority racial or ethnic groups (I am not calling it the bamboo ceiling in Singapore as that analogy does not apply well...it is some other ethnic ceiling or barrier).

People from cultural diverse background have to work extra hard to get recognised
I haven't experienced much bias or discrimination. While colleagues of the same ethnicity have experienced racial discrimination and vilification, I seem to be oblivious to them. I

experienced more bias and discrimination because of my age, gender, and religion than being Asian.

It is very subtle but usually the higher ups and management are of local race. There is also a ceiling for career progression.

Bias against many groups based on sex, sexuality, disability, race - not in current workplace but in previous ones

Even some Asians have been living in Australia for such a long time and know the local culture and language well enough, it is still really hard for them to be offered a high-level position particularly in some big global companies. They work hard and earned more experience. The only reason they cannot get promoted and become one of the members in the decision-making team is their ethnicity.

Personal experience of observing ceilings set to prevent rise of minorities to C-Suite and shaming for the achievements made

Colleagues feel the right to 'walk on' / over minority groups.

Still trying to break the bamboo ceiling and get a leadership role. I had to start from scratch to build my career in Australia since only local experience is considered. Experienced discrimination when being left out of tea/lunch breaks and not invited to work meetings.

I have had acute discrimination happen to me in the workplace as a graduate just starting in the workforce. Being young and naïve I thought nothing of it until I realised the impact on me many years into my career.

Lots of systemic racism in Australia that prevents people of colour in advancing to higher level roles. Lots of lip service and no real change. DEI is seen as a check box and nothing more

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are subject to assumptions, biases and prejudices. Discrimination can happen. Their skills and experience are not fully utilised in the workplace.

I was born and grew up in Australia, before working in Asia for the past 15+ years. Last year, I returned to Melbourne and started my own business. So I am keen to learn more about others' experiences.

I am Zimbabwean and female, micro aggressions have been part of my experience regardless of the organisation I'm in. Most of the time, I'm the 'only' in a room. There are unwritten and accepted norms prevalent, regardless of the documented organisational values, policies, etc.

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HOW DOES THIS MAKE YOU FEEL?

Hopeful

Good

Indignant

Mostly uncomfortable, especially in certain conversations where I don't know whether to call out a statement that didn't make me feel good about my identity.

Uncertain

SH*T

I am certainly curious to learn more and to find ways to engage in a broader discussion.

That there's a lot of work to be done and that we're not having really difficult conversations.

I don't like what I see.

Despondent

It is unjust. Countries and companies that are truly accepting of cultural and ethnic diversity (and not just paying lip service) are able to harness the best minds and hearts of their workforce to make a big difference in their industry.

Tired

I wondered if I was biased against Asians. Earlier in my life when I felt that I couldn't trust Asians, not because they were untrustworthy as individual people, but because of the 'type of people' I felt Asians were. I confess that stereotyped Asians because I knew too much about how they ticked and intentions behind their actions/words.

It is what it is.

Disgust, Advocacy - need for education and change

Unfair. As a diverse group in Australia, Asians need to study harder and work harder to overcome the challenges of language and culture, but what is waiting for us?

Frustrated and discriminated against.

That it's time for change

Makes me feel like I need to prove to everyone that I'm worthy of my current and future role every minute of the day. There is no scope for any glitches.

Horrible, not worthy, ashamed of myself for not speaking out

Frustrated, defeated, like change is taking forever. Working in the DEI space in can be very draining

Excluded.

This makes me feel really upset and improper, and does not benefit the cohesion of the team and company.

What might be some ways to address this?

Asians should diversify their career choices and break away from the old obsession with highest paid professions instead to those which accord pride and honor of service to humanity.

The only way to fix anything is carrot, sticks and a big chasm of culture in the middle
This question assumed my previous answer was negative

Expensive

Build confidence, Adapt communication styles, and cultivate meaningful connections
It takes the action of a few strong minded, vocal leaders to get things started.

Fair go

Encouraging more allies amongst those who are of more privileged cultural background, this could help spread awareness and eliminate the barriers that everyone perceives is there.

A culture of acknowledging bias exists and we need to continue discuss the challenges and ways of addressing it

Build more consciousness and education around that - the system is based on exclusion, not inclusion and therefore we need to examine the system that creates exclusion, not just the behaviour demonstrated by discrimination or micro-aggressions.

Have locally focused, in-country based HR function.

Meditation, consciousness development so people are more aware
Need to building community and then drive advocacy, education, awareness

Improve myself and build network

I think minority mentorship and leadership programs would be one important avenue to explore. I think solidarity building as well across other Asian leadership initiatives internationally would also be very beneficial.

Accepting that no one is free of bias. Even highly trained professionals like psychiatrists are as biased as everyone else. Instead of proclaiming 'I'M not ....ist!' maybe we could start with 'we all have biases: what we can we do to see our own, instead of pointing the finger at other, equally fallible human beings.

A mindset shift towards strengths-based perspective, how can our differences (as shaped by our childhoods / cultural norms / world views) - enhance decision making?
Asian Australians need to speak up and have courage to ask for promotions, salary increase and courage to provide feedback.

Education needs to change; it needs to show more WIIFM on the topic of teams. We all know the forming/storming/norming terms. We need equivalent terms on what it takes to design a successful (read:diverse) team.

School aged diversity training to nip the problem of racism at its bud, reinforced by organisational policies that promote diversity and acceptance, and ensure the school leadership lives and breathes this not just in words but in action - demonstrating diversity in the own leaders. Teaching the youngest generation how to value diversity will change the workplace of the future. Then replicate this same recipe all the way to today's workplace and the Boardroom (where it will be harder to change behaviour but at least some will adopt).

Create a collective movement and support

I now understand that to bring down walls of discrimination or bias, I needed to respect each person individually, regardless of race, religion, gender, or sexuality. I believe there are a few keys to approaching the racial issue:
1. To deeply listen to each other's stories and understand that there is so much to learn from others.
2. To respect one's beliefs as their own and surrender the need to impose or judge them because of their beliefs.
3.To own our story and be proud of it.
4. To get rid of 'us' and 'them' mentality by seeking common humanity with anyone we meet.

Prove my worth in terms of outcomes. Leave for another company.

Education, Stories of personal experiences, Names hidden from recruiters as many do not seem to be able to be non bigoted,

Creating a fair working environment for everyone, and offering more chances to Asian who have the capability of working in a high position.

Legal interventions and public disclosure to discourage discrimination

Awareness, empathy

Build a support system and connect with people who have broken the bamboo ceiling to understand how it can be done seamlessly.

Institutions and workplaces that build in a fair, equitable system for recognizing talent
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Deepen intercultural interaction and understanding.

Focus on inclusion and the intersectionality perspective. Often, we approach policy making and organisational culture as a mono-cultural edict when society is anything but. Normalise tough conversations and open dialogue as well as focus on creating culturally safe workplaces

Transpositional consideration is a way to address this, how does that make you feel if someone treats you like the same. This is a way to strike a chord.

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Space for you to ask a question / add a comment

Good strategies

In the context of a rapidly deteriorating Australia / China relationship, where do Asians and in particular Chinese Australians have to be particularly sensitive and also politically astute when it comes to navigating higher leadership roles in both government and business in Australia?

What tools can we use to become more aware of our own biases? How can we make others aware of theirs without it looking like finger pointing or virtue signalling?

I don't understand why my Australian-born Asian friends have experienced racial discrimination and vilification while, as a migrant, I haven't. Could it be our social circles? Or is it my obliviousness? Did I have biases and therefore not pick up racist 'vibes'? My parents have not experienced it either. Not in 1960s Australia or London, up to now. However, my nephew, who is an Australian/Malaysian mix, experienced racial bullying in a Christian primary school.

The boundaries and limits for when it is discrimination and bias, and when it is not, are unclear and they differ for each company. Should there be recommended national standards?

What can Asian do to show their ability and let more people realize that? What Asian can do when they are treated unfairly?

What groups are there available to support the voices of minority groups and what initiatives are government funding to address DEI.

The way that the diverse representation narrative has been framed risks creating an 'us vs them' mentality. How can we shift the narrative to focus more on the benefits that diversity offers (for all to benefit from)