



Phase 1: Review of the literature

THEME 6: Enhancing Workplace Diversity



**Australian
Chamber of Commerce
and Industry**

Working for Our Future: Modernising Workplace Relations in Australia

Authorship:

Tim Mazzarol, University of Western Australia email: tim.mazzarol@uwa.edu.au

Gudrun Gilles, GoodRun Solutions Pty Ltd email: gudrun@goodrunsolutions.com.au

Tui McKeown, Monash University email: tui.mckeown@monash.edu

Miria Lazaris, Monash University email: miria.lazaris@monash.edu

Small Enterprise Association of Australia and New Zealand (SEAANZ)

Phone: +62 9209-4888

Fax: +612 9209-4887

Email: seanz1@gmail.com

Website: www.seanz.org

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Note:

This report has been prepared by SEAANZ for the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Department of Employment. The report presents a review of the literature and is not a policy document. It presents a broad analysis of the specific research questions addressed by this study.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of the first of a multi-stage project commissioned by the Australian Chamber titled '*Working for Our Future: Modernising Workplace Relations in Australia*' with funding from the federal Department of Employment. This first stage provides a review of the literature relating to five specific themes and the research questions associated with them that were identified by the Australian Chamber as vital to a vibrant and inclusive workplace relations system in Australia. The current report addresses *Theme 6: Enhancing Workplace Diversity* and draws on more than 132 sources including academic research papers and selected "grey" literature from government and industry over the time period 1987 to 2016.

Key findings

Australia's future workforce will reflect the diversity of its population. It will be particularly important for organisations to manage the diversity of their workforce, with attention to factors such as age, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, culture, family structure and sexual preference. The pattern emerging from this analysis of the literature identified that diversity and flexibility are both poorly defined and understood within the context of the Australian workplace. The strong legislative and regulatory environment operating in Australia in the form of anti-discrimination laws influences the workplace environment and focuses diversity management (DM) to one of the legal rights of employees and the legal obligations of employers. However, DM as a management concept has a long history and should be viewed as a strategic HRM process to enhance the overall productivity of the Australian economy. However, little research has been undertaken on this in Australia.

By contrast flexibility and flexible work arrangements (FWA) have been given more attention in the literature. However, much of the focus has been applied to gender differences and the needs of women and family work-life balance. There is evidence that FWAs can be a useful tool to assist with the implementation of DM programs within the workplace. However, there remains only limited research evidence as to how this is done. The Australian workforce is now highly diverse with groups segmenting via gender, ethnicity, family structure, age, disability and sexual orientation. Each group brings to the workplace specific needs and requirements, and managers must learn to address these for both legal and productivity related reasons.

More research is required to fully understand the specific needs of individual employees and the overall economic and social benefits of DM strategies implemented in the workplace. A better understanding of the challenges facing managers, in particular SME owner-managers in meeting these diversity management issues is also required.

INTRODUCTION

This report, is one of a series produced by the Small Enterprise Association of Australia and New Zealand Ltd (SEAANZ) for the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Australian Chamber) and the Australian Department of Employment as part of a larger study "*Working for Our Future: Modernising Workplace Relations in Australia Study*".

SEAANZ is examining five out of a total of seven themes within the larger study and this report examines the background literature relating to Theme 6 'Enhancing Workplace Diversity'. It has examined the literature relating to the impact of regulatory frameworks on the behaviour and productivity levels of SMEs, start-ups, early-stage and family owned firms. This first phase of the research study provides a

series of focused reviews of the literature with this report being dedicated to the theme of workplace regulation.

The methodology followed

The review of the literature presented here drew on over 132 sources. The initial selection of papers for review were guided by a set of research questions provided by the Australian Chamber, derived from preliminary research undertaken by the University of Queensland (Gollan & Steele, 2015).

The approach taken to this literature review drew on a systematic approach recommended by academic sources (e.g. Webster & Watson, 2002; Ridley, 2008; Fink, 2010; Denney & Tewksbury, 2013). It commenced with a definition of key terms, in particular the classification of SMEs, which is a major area of focus for the study. An examination of online bibliographic databases was then undertaken with search parameters guided by the key words. The Endnote bibliographic database was used to store these documents which included both peer reviewed academic research papers and quality “grey” literature from mostly government and industry sources.

These sources were then examined using Leximancer text analytic software that uses algorithms to identify word frequency and co-occurrence counts to group words into concepts (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). These concepts are then graphically mapped to show their concentration and interrelationships within the wide corpus of text contained within the source documents. These are also grouped into themes to show the overall structure of the literature. This provided an initial foundation for the examination of the literature sources and assisted in helping to revise the initial research questions. The data used in the analysis included details of the author, title, abstract, journal of the material manually reviewed.

In addition to the Leximancer analysis NVivo a qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software that enables the management and analysis of large quantities of rich text-based and/or multimedia information, where deep levels of analysis on small or large volumes of data are required (QSR, 2016). This analysis followed the process recommended by di Gregorio (2000). As a more manual analysis tool than Leximancer, NVivo offered a means of independently examining and coding the source data.

Finally, the literature was examined using a manual thematic analysis involving a review of each document. This was subsequently incorporated into the final report. Using both computer-aided and then manual analysis means enabled the confirmation of patterns identified in one method with those found in the other two and minimised the potential for researcher bias. The multiple perspectives provided from these three methods of manual and computer aided analysis provide a robust basis for further refinement of the research questions which were then used to guide the overall study. Further details on the methodology can be found in McKeown *et al.* (2016).

The structure of the report

The first section presents an overview of literature that is relevant to the five research questions. It summarises the key findings from the Leximancer and NVivo analysis that was used to get an understanding of the overall shape and structure of the literature. The next section examines the nature of diversity and flexibility in the workplace and the concept of “Diversity Management” (DM), which has become a specific and established domain within the academic literature. Although flexibility within the workplace has been addressed in another report undertaken by the Australian Chamber, attention has been given to “Flexible Work Arrangements” (FWA) because they are a commonly used tool for the management of workplace diversity.

A brief overview of the history of how DM and FWA have been used within Australian workplaces follows. This also makes reference to the relatively large body of state and federal legislation relating to anti-discrimination and equal employment opportunity (EEO) that exists in Australia. The review then examines the issue of whether diversity in the workplace leads to more productive enterprises. This pays specific attention to the role of DM, FWA and productivity within small to medium enterprises (SMEs). The specific issues relating to groups such as women, older workers, people with disabilities, workers from different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, and those with family responsibilities are also discussed. The responses by employers to the needs of a diverse workforce are examined.

Finally, the findings are summarised with reference to an Australian Diversity Management model originally proposed by Sayed and Kramer (2010). This has been adapted to the particular context of this study. Conclusions and directions for future research are then outlined.

Limitations

In approaching the methodology, we have been guided by best practice principles using software analysis tools (e.g. Leximancer, NVivo), and distributing the coding and analysis findings across several chief investigators who have independently assessed the results. Discussions in relation to the refining of the initial research questions were also held with our industry partner ACCI and other senior academics within the SEANZ community to review the work in progress before the finalisation of this document.

However, it should be noted that while 132 sources were examined for this literature review we do not claim this to be a full review of all available literature. Given the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the study it was not possible, for reasons of time, to examine every source that may be relevant to this theme. In selecting documents, we have deliberately focused on publications generated within the past decades and given priority to more recently published works. Some readers may identify missing sources or disagree with our conclusions. We welcome any feedback in this regard as part of the process of developing this study.

EXAMINING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This section examines the research questions specific to this theme and provides a summary of the initial findings from the Leximancer and NVivo analysis. The specific research questions guiding this literature review were:

Research Question 1: *What is meant by flexibility and diversity of employment in Australia today?*

Research Question 2: *What is the Australian evidence that diversity leads to more productive enterprises?*

Research Question 3: *How can flexible work arrangements (FWA) be strategically developed to meet the needs of all parties?*

Research Question 4: *What are the requirements for flexible work from different types of employees and businesses?*

Research Question 5: *What are the barriers and opportunities to satisfy these requirements?*

Summary of Leximancer and NVivo results

The use of both Leximancer and NVivo analysis to undertake an initial review of the literature provided a more robust overview of the sources and how they mapped into themes associated with the research questions. This combination of visual and textual interpretation allowed concepts to be viewed in different ways, thereby improving the reader's interpretation. Comparing the results from the two separate analyses enabled a review to confirm findings, or raise new issues that were not apparent from a single form of analysis. The results suggested a need to revise the initial research questions supplied by Gollan and Steele (2015).

An examination of the two separate analyses found a high degree of consistency with the two most important Leximancer themes “**work**” and “**balance**” closely approximating the two most important NVivo nodes (issues relating to workplace diversity; gender diversity). These highlighted the general attention within the academic literature over flexibility in the workplace, which has focused on the need amongst employees – particularly women – to establish suitable work-life balance. It has also pointed to the attention given to gender diversity.

What was also interesting was the relatively modest attention found in relation to the specific research questions, which suggests that they address gaps in the literature. These findings provided the beginnings of the final set of questions.

This initial analysis of the literature found through the Leximancer analysis highlights the importance of workplace and employment flexibility within academic research. This is linked on the employer side to hours worked and the arrangements that must be negotiated with employees seeking such flexibility. For employees, the issue of time spent working and time spent with family or personal matters is also an important part of this “flexibility” within the workplace. How individual workers can find sufficient work-life balance is an important consideration in the design of employment contracts and the outcomes that such arrangements produce for both the individual employee and their employer.

It is worth noting that the way in which employees are managed within the firm and the human resource management (HRM) practices and role of workplace regulation (WR) such as the *Fair Work Act* were relatively minor themes within the literature. This suggests that there may be a relative lack of research on how workplace diversity and flexibility are managed within the business as compared to the employee perspective of how people try to balance work and life commitments.

The NVivo analysis provided similar findings to those generated by the Leximancer analysis. Most of the literature relating to workplace diversity was concentrated in areas such as gender diversity and the role of women employees, best practices in DM, and multicultural or cross-cultural diversity. Less attention has been given to other areas such as:

- Diversity in teams;
- How FWA can be strategically aligned to meet the needs of employees and employers
- The requirements for FWA found amongst different types of employee and different types of business;
- The role of unions;
- Organisational culture and diversity;
- Lesbian, gay, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) employees;

- Barriers and opportunities to satisfying these requirements;
- Generational diversity (e.g. older versus younger employees);

***Take away:** The Leximancer and NVivo analysis highlighted the importance placed on workplace and employment flexibility within the academic research. However, it also identified significant gaps in the literature with relatively little extant research that has specifically addressed the five research questions.*

DIVERSITY AND FLEXIBILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

The concepts “diversity” and “flexibility” in the context of the workplace are both complex constructs that have numerous meanings within the literature. In order to address the research questions for this theme it is first necessary to examine the nature of these concepts, define them and place them into context within the study. Our review of the literature identifies the field of “Diversity Management” (DM) as a specific and established domain of academic research that we feel forms a useful foundation for future understanding of the “diversity” concept. Similarly, the term “Flexible Work Arrangements” (FWA) emerges as a sub-domain of academic research and will form the basis of our examination of that concept. Both areas are complex and evolving with supporters and critics to be found within the academic research community. However, in the interests of finding a starting point around which to focus what are substantial and multi-disciplinary fields these two areas have been selected for this research.

Diversity Management (DM)

The concept of “Diversity Management” (DM) has its antecedents in the United States Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and the passage of the *Civil Rights Act 1964*, which made discrimination unlawful (Davis, Frolova & Callahan, 2016). However, it was during the 1980s when the Hudson Institute published a report *Workforce 2000* that the concept of DM began (Johnston & Packer, 1987). This report examined the economic, social and technological trends taking place in America and the shift from manufacturing to services as a base for the national economy. It noted that the population was aging and in need of a much higher level of skills and education to maintain competitiveness. In examining these trends the study identified the need for more women, ethnic minorities and migrants to play a role in the workforce. This highlighted the importance of learning how to manage diversity within the workforce.

Prior to the publication of the *Workforce 2000* report the term “Diversity Management” was not widely used and the report’s impact on government and corporate decision makers and the academic community was significant (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). The outcome of the report was the emergence of DM as a focus for workforce management and development at both the government and business level. Its focus was on enhancing opportunities for ethnic minorities, women and immigrants within the workplace in order to ensure that the best productivity levels could be obtained from the available human capital (Johnston & Teicher, 2010).

Integration of women, ethnic minorities, migrants and also people with disabilities into the workforce had been approached through calls for policies of affirmative action (AA) and equality of employment

opportunity (EEO). However, this was viewed by conservative political forces as a leftist or “liberal” agenda pandering too much to “political correctness” and it quickly became a politically charged issue (Lorbieck & Jack, 2000; Johnston & Teicher, 2010). By comparison DM was viewed as a more attractive strategy without the political overtones and was voluntary in nature (Lorbieck & Jack, 2000).

During the 1990s academic research into DM enabled it to take on a “business case” with foundations in both economics (see: Gordon, 1992; D’Souza, 1997; Owens, 1997; Rice, 1994; Segal, 1997; McCune, 1996; Capowski, 1996; Miller, 1994) and social policy (see: D’Souza, 1997; Laabs, 1993; Thornburg, 1994; Smith, 1991; Harris, 1995; Dodd-McCue & Wright, 1996; Rossett & Bickham, 1994; Carnevale & Stone, 1994). The concept spread to the United Kingdom (UK), Australia and other countries during the past 25 years. Lorbiecki and Jack (2000) provide two definitions of DM, the first from the UK and the second from the USA:

“The basic concept of managing diversity accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people. The diversity consists of visible and nonvisible differences which will include factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability, personality and workstyle. It is founded on the premise that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everyone feels valued, where their talents are being fully utilised and in which organisational goals are met.” (Kandola & Fullerton, 1998)

“Diversity management refers to a strategic organisational approach to workforce diversity development, organisational culture change, and empowerment of the workforce. It represents a shift away from the activities and assumptions defined by affirmative action to management practices that are inclusive, reflecting the workforce diversity and its potential. Ideally it is a pragmatic approach, in which participants anticipate and plan for change, do not fear human differences or perceive them as a threat, and view the workplace as a forum for individual’s growth and change in skills and performance with direct cost benefits to the organisation.” (Arrendondo, 1996)

As can be seen from both definitions, the concept of DM is focused on the management of a highly diverse workforce with the aim of achieving positive outcomes for both the employees and the organisations that they work for. It is also clearly focused on enhancing productivity for the organisation, and approaching the management of workforce diversity in a strategic but pragmatic manner. DM is not affirmative action, but a systematic process of shaping the attitudes and behaviour of the workforce to allow people of all backgrounds to work together in a harmonious and productive way.

However, Liff and Wajcman (1996) raised the point that DM is not the same as EEO. The concept of equality opportunity is based on the assumption that everyone is the same, while DM assumes that people are different. This “sameness” versus “difference” dichotomy is important as the former suggests that everyone has the same opportunities based on their having similar backgrounds, abilities and skills. By comparison the notion of difference assumes that because not everyone is the same, it is potentially detrimental to some individuals to treat everyone the same and expect everyone to behave the same way.

This division between “sameness” and “difference” has resulted in DM coming under criticism for being little more than “window dressing” and failing to address real inequality. Rather than viewing all people as equal, DM has been accused of treating some as “different” to the mainstream culture (one that is typically white and male). Further, DM is seen as being largely left to the voluntary discretion of employers and organisations rather than the regulatory route of affirmative action or equality of employment opportunity, and in the case of some groups such as women may have failed to achieve its ambitions (Johnston & Teicher, 2010).

Litvin’s (1997) analysis of the biological, sociological and managerial literature relating to diversity concluded that diversity is generally comprised of a set of “dimensions of difference”, of which six are fixed and of primary importance, and eight are fluid and of secondary importance. The six primary fixed dimensions are: i) age; ii) gender; iii) ethnicity; iv) race; v) sexual orientation; and vi) physical attributes.

These are inborn to each individual and immutable (Lorbecki & Jack, 2000). The eight secondary dimensions that can be changed are: i) educational background; ii) marital status; iii) level of income; iv) parental status; v) religious beliefs; vi) work experience; vii) geographical location; and viii) military experience. Her analysis of the management literature relating to diversity suggested that DM was at risk of becoming “a divisive and disabling discourse”.

According to Litvin (1997) the reason for this divisiveness was due to the way in which management textbooks sought to classify people according to the six primary fixed dimensions and then treating them as different. The classification of an individual into a specific category (e.g. age, gender, disability) and then trying to treat them differently on the basis of their category membership risked “reinforcing divisions while obscuring commonalities” (p. 207). Some critics have accused DM of having been built on shaky foundations because it assumes that diversity is always positive when there is clear evidence of discrimination against workers who are older, disabled or female on the grounds that they are “less flexible” (Nazarko, 2004).

Understanding and developing DM strategies and policies is therefore a process of understanding those dimensions that are primary and cannot change, and those that are secondary and can (Hubbard, 2004). DM requires that the organisation creates an environment in which the differences found in a person are recognised and accepted within a culture that is both tolerant of difference and able to leverage such diversity for enhanced productivity (Mateescu, 2015). It should also be recognised that professional boundaries in the diversity management field are porous due to the lack of professional criteria for entering into the field (Tatli, 2011). In essence DM has no clear, unambiguous definition, and it has been used interchangeably with the term managing diversity and it is also poorly examined within the literature and therefore “ripe for research” (Kramer, 2012). Finally, Mateescu (2015) outlines some of the background that may have led to the lack of clarity around DM:

“The issue of diversity at workplace is the preferred field of study of cross-cultural management. Cross-cultural management has developed as a field of study in its own right in the 1980s...One of the factors that generate this lack of clarity is the overlap with the scope of other disciplines studying the cultural phenomenon in the organization, such as: international management, international human resource management, international marketing, intercultural communication, organizational sociology, organizational psychology, organizational behavior etc.” (Mateescu, 2015 p. 82)

Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA)

While DM is predominately a strategic HRM issue, FWA is more operational in nature. The FWA concept encompasses provisions within the workplace whereby employees are able to take advantage of reduced hours and/or working days, telecommuting or working non-standard hours (Almer, Cohen & Single, 2003). There is little consensus over an exact definition of FWA or what has also been termed workplace flexibility practices (WFPs). This is to be expected when taking into account the wide interest in their utilisation from government, policymakers, and practitioners (Whyman *et al.*, 2015).

Human Resource Management (HRM) systems within organisations use FWA to achieve flexibility for both the employees and the business (Stavrou, 2005). The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2001) defines FWA as comprising:

“...working patterns involving modifications to the regular week, work at nights and at weekends, as well as work schedules where the starting and finishing times are at different hours of the day, the week or a longer reference period.” (Stavrou, 2005 p. 924)

FWA may include part-time work contracts, sub-contracting arrangements, working from home and teleworking via use of information and communications technologies (ICT) (Stavrou, 2005). Another definition in relation to FWA is:

“Flexible work practices have been defined as including remote working (including working from home), reduced hours (part-time), different hours (flexi-time), annualised hours or ways in which periods of work can be broken up, such as career and employment breaks, job sharing, and family and carers leave.” (Johnston & Teicher, 2010 p. 36).

For many organisations FWA provide an opportunity to assist with aligning the goals of the workforce with those of the business (Wilson *et al.*, 2008). They allow flexibility in the scheduling of work without having to formalise it into the company’s official HRM policies (Yang & Zheng, 2011). Two major forms of FWA that emerge in the literature are flexibility in terms of time (*flexitime*) and flexibility in terms of physical location (*flexplace*) (Allen *et al.*, 2013).

Flexibility in the time and location of work has been shown to facilitate work–life integration particularly when employees have access to the options that are most well suited to their own needs and life circumstances (Valcour *et al.*, 2011). FWAs that enable individual employees to have some choice in relation to where, when and for how long they perform their work are recognised as “flexible workplace policies” (FWP) (Hill *et al.*, 2008).

The use of FWA has been highlighted in the literature as being of particular importance to women seeking to balance family and work responsibilities (Shockley & Allen, 2007; Masuda *et al.*, 2012; Allen *et al.*, 2013). However, it has also been applied to people with disabilities (Woodhams & Corby, 2007; Hindle *et al.*, 2010), older workers (MacDermott, 2014), as well as those employees simply seeking lifestyle choice (Lambert *et al.*, 2008).

Hill *et al.* (2008) noted that employers and employees have differing expectations and objectives in relation to FWA that need to be aligned through negotiation. For employees, the key issues comprising FWA are associated with their ability to secure flexibility in the time or hours (*flexitime*) they work, the locations where they work (*flexplace*), as well as the duration of their work and the benefits they receive in such work. In turn, employers are responding to these employee interests with policies and practices that seek to address *flexitime*, *flexplace* and what we might refer to as *flexlength* (duration of a work contract) and *flexbenefit* (the benefits for a given flexibility option). These employee and employer interests and options for FWA are summarised in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1 FWA requires a trade-off of time, space, employment duration and benefits in order to accommodate the interests of both the employer and the employee. Hill *et al.* (2008) describe it as a process of considering the individual employee’s characteristics, home and family situation on the one side, and the characteristics of the workplace and the expectations of the wider community. The overall aim is to find a “work-life fit” between the employee-employer needs to ensure that all parties are able to accommodate each other’s needs.

FWA is a useful tool for organisations seeking to adopt DM strategies and policies. It enables employers to address the needs of individual employees with specific characteristics (e.g. gender, age, family status, disability) by adapting workplace conditions to accommodate this diversity. Hill *et al.* (2008) conclude their review of FWA with a quote from Lingle (2005) that summarises the potential value of workplace flexibility:

“Flexibility is one of the most powerful drivers of retention and engagement today...it is empirically linked to higher levels of productivity, resilience and shareholder value...yet achieving workplace flexibility is the most difficult task the work-life professional engages in, and success often requires an organization to reinvent its culture.” (Lingle, 2005 p.2)

Table 1: Employee and Employer interests and options in FWA

Employee FWA interests and options	Employer FWA interests & options
<p>Flexibility and time – “Flexitime”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible options in work scheduling. • Flexible options in working hours (e.g. reduced hours or overtime). • Flexible options for entering/exiting workforce (e.g. maternity/paternity leave). • Flexibility for managing unexpected personal or family responsibilities. 	<p>Schedule flexibility – “Flexitime”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to choose when workers engage in work-related tasks. • Flexibility of scheduling work for employees that fits within acceptable options. • Compressed working weeks (e.g. 4-day week).
<p>Flexibility and place of work – “Flexplace”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible options for working off-site. • Flexible options for selection of one or more worksite locations. 	<p>Location flexibility – “Flexplace”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling use of ICT to permit “telecommuting” or remote working. • Creation of “virtual offices” using ICT to allow choice of workplace.
<p>Flexibility in employment structures – “Flexlength”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible options employment and career paths. • Flexible options for employment contracts (e.g. full-time, part-time work). 	<p>Employment duration flexibility – “Flexlength”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to offer flexible work contracts determining the duration of employment (e.g. part-time and casual work contracts). • Scheduling of annual or long-service leave.
<p>Benefits flexibility – “Flexbenefit”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible options for benefits selection (e.g. tailored to personal or family circumstances). 	<p>Equitable benefits in flexibility – “Flexbenefit”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling part-time and casual workers to avoid “falling behind” in career path, pay and conditions.

Source: adapted from Hill *et al.* (2008)

In a study of FWA within service industry organisations in the UK Michielsens, Bingham and Clarke (2014) explored the nexus between DM and FWA. They noted that the academic research highlights the importance of FWA as a tool for implementing DM strategies and policies. Among the key elements that comprise FWA are time and the level of commitment from the employee. However, they note that the extant literature relating to FWA and diversity “is disproportionately associated with gender”. Their case studies of four large British services firms, selected on the basis that they were considered to be best-practice employers, found that managers and employees were not able to provide a consensus view on what FWA or DM programs were about. Further, there was a sense that such policies and practices were only relevant if they did not interfere with the efficient running of the business:

“Our respondents gave a variety of definitions for flexibility and diversity, all based on the impact they felt it has on their own workplaces. It was apparent that FWA are not wholly inclusive, offering only a partial or “bounded” sense of diversity: acceptable only when they do not impact on existing work values, such as availability to clients, long working hours and presenteeism.” (Michielsens et al., 2014 p.63)

DIVERSITY AND FLEXIBILITY OF EMPLOYMENT IN AUSTRALIA

The first of our research questions asks what is meant by flexibility and diversity of employment in Australia today? As discussed in the previous section the definition of these concepts is relatively fluid within the published literature. Diversity is perhaps more clearly defined than flexibility due to the more structured research that has taken place since the 1980s in the field of DM. However, as noted the predominant focus of diversity within the academic literature has been on gender, in particular the need to give women more access to senior management and board roles, or the need to give women more

flexibility over family and work-life balance (Albion, 2004; Barrett & Hede, 2005; Davis *et al.*, 2016; Hayman & Rassmussen, 2013; Thornton, 2016). By contrast workplace flexibility has primarily been addressed within industrial relations (IR) law and the provisions for flexible work arrangements in industrial awards and regulations (Baxter, 2011; Knox & Walsh, 2005; Roan *et al.*, 2001).

As noted above DM is essentially a strategic HRM process and since its emergence in the 1980s has become a well-established HRM technique underpinned by a substantial body of interdisciplinary research (Johnston & Teicher, 2010). However, although DM has been around in Australia since at least the 1990s relatively little research has been undertaken on it in this country. As noted by Davis, Frolova and Callahan (2016):

“A review of recent literature reflected that relatively little scholarly research on DM programs has been conducted on Australian organisations. Further, the literature that does exist is somewhat dated now.”
(Davis *et al.*, 2016 p. 82)

Australia’s approach has been more about EEO than DM

Until the mid-1960s Australian workplaces were predominantly Anglo-Saxon and the “White Australian Policy” had ensured that a relatively uniform “mainstream” culture existed (Lewis *et al.*, 2000). The passing of the federal *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* was a major legislative turning point for Australia, providing a legal framework to address discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity. Other national legislation followed including the: *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*; *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986*; *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*; and *Age Discrimination Act 2004*. State and territory acts relating to anti-discrimination and equal opportunity were introduced between 1977 and 2010 (AHRC, 2016a).

There are at least 16 federal, state and territory legislative Acts dealing with discrimination, each of which has application to the workplace. Table 2 provides a summary of the key federal laws. These laws seek to protect individuals from discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, family status, disability or age. They make Australia one of the world’s most proactive countries for recognising diversity, but also one that has a strong legislative EEO regime (Burgess, French & Strachan, 2009). However, while these laws impose a relatively strong regulatory regime on Australian workplaces from an EEO perspective, they don’t provide much guidance to employers over DM (Syed & Kramar, 2010).

Over the past 35 years Australia has integrated its EEO and IR legislation to provide a strong regulatory environment to protect individuals against discrimination. There has also been a move towards building on EEO legislation to affirmative action (AA) with a view to getting more women and ethnic minorities into employment and occupations where they have not previously had strong representation. Although this has not seen the setting of targeted quotas, it has involved firms with more than 100 employees having to report progress in affirmative action plans to government authorities (Sayed, 2006).

Despite this apparently strong EEO and AA legislative regime Australian workplaces continue to demonstrate less engagement with DM strategies and policies than might be anticipated. For example, a survey of HR managers across large Australian firms undertaken by Davis *et al.* (2016) found DM was not widely understood or appreciated. There was a general lack of knowledge of the value of strategies and policies relating to DM, and that it was not viewed as a priority by most organisations. This may be due to the inability of DM to demonstrate clear financial or other performance benefits to the business. However, it may also be a reflection of what some researchers describe as an emerging “multicultural rollback” in recent years, with opposition to multiculturalism and diversity expressed at the political, media and community level (Syed & Kramar, 2010).

Table 2: Federal Anti-Discrimination and Equal Opportunity Laws

Legislation and grounds of discrimination

Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986

Discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, social origin, age, medical record, criminal record, marital or relationship status, impairment, mental, intellectual or psychiatric disability, physical disability, nationality, sexual orientation, and trade union activity. Also, covers discrimination on the basis of the imputation of one of the above grounds. Includes discrimination in employment or occupation.

Age Discrimination Act 2004

Discrimination on the basis of age – protects both younger and older Australians. Also, includes discrimination on the basis of age-specific characteristics or characteristics that are generally imputed to a person of a particular age. Includes discrimination in employment.

Disability Discrimination Act 1992

Discrimination on the basis of physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory, neurological or learning disability, physical disfigurement, disorder, illness or disease that affects thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement, or results in disturbed behaviour, and presence in body of organisms causing or capable of causing disease or illness (e.g., HIV virus). Also, covers discrimination involving harassment in employment, education or the provision of goods and services. Includes discrimination in employment.

Racial Discrimination Act 1975

Discrimination on the basis of race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin and in some circumstances, immigrant status. Racial hatred, defined as a public act/s likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate on the basis of race, is also prohibited under this Act unless an exemption applies. Includes discrimination in employment.

Sex Discrimination Act 1984

Discrimination on the basis of sex, marital or relationship status, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, breastfeeding, family responsibilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, and intersex status. Sexual harassment is also prohibited under this Act. Includes discrimination in employment.

Fair Work Act 2009

Discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, age, physical or mental disability, marital status, family or carer responsibilities, pregnancy, religion, political opinion, national extraction, and social origin. Includes discrimination in employment.

Source: AHRC (2016)

DOES DIVERSITY LEAD TO MORE PRODUCTIVE ENTERPRISES?

Our second research question asks what evidence exists to show that diversity, and by implication DM, leads to more productive enterprises? As noted in the preceding discussion the focus of DM in Australia has been predominately around EEO and organisations have responded to the introduction of federal and state legislation relating to anti-discrimination laws relating to race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, family and marital status, age and disability.

The underlying “business case” that justifies the focus on DM is the argument put forth by Johnston and Packer (1987) in their *Workforce 2000* report of “Demographics as Destiny”. This suggested that the United States had to embrace demographic diversity within its workforce if it was to secure the best economic and social outcomes in the future. This recognised that women, ethnic minorities, older workers and migrants were going to increasingly provide a larger proportion of the American workforce and this made the development of effective DM strategies and policies imperative.

Ali, Kulik and Metz (2011) investigated the relationship between organisational gender diversity and employee productivity in over 200 Australian publicly listed companies over the period 2002-2005. Their study found significant and positive relationships between workplace gender diversity and employee

productivity. However, there was little difference found between manufacturing and service industries in relation to gender diversity in the workplace. However, there were differential effects that suggest managers in services and manufacturing industries need to approach DM in different ways. In service industries, the close proximity of the employee to the customer suggests that DM strategies need to be targeted at the employee-customer interface. This is not the case in manufacturing firms where the focus should be on areas where DM can have the most benefit (e.g. innovation, creativity, R&D). Their study also found that gender diversity in the workplace and productivity followed a “curvilinear” pattern, which meant that small increases in the number of women employed would not lead to productivity enhancements. As they note in the paper’s conclusions:

“The results show that managers may need to ‘grow’ gender diversity substantially to experience positive effects: the benefits of diversity were most visible at the peak point of 28/72 gender proportions. Furthermore, managers may need to be patient: significant results were found only when there was a time lag of five years between gender diversity and organizational performance.” (Ali et al., 2011 pp.1480-1481)

A further study undertaken by Ali *et al.* (2015) investigated the relationship between DM and FWA programs to help parents, in particular women, manage work and family commitments, and productivity within the firm. This study found partial support for a relationship between gender diversity within the non-management workforce and the presence of DM/FWA “family-friendly” programs. It also found partial support for a relationship between the presence of such programs and productivity in the firm (as measured by financial performance). They concluded that where firms have such family friendly programs there is a signalling of the organisation’s commitment to gender diversity, but where they don’t exist the opposite is the case and that this may be causing differences in productivity.

Diversity Management and productivity in SMEs

International research has suggested that DM can be beneficial for SMEs. Mohr and Shoobridge (2011) suggest that workplace diversity can assist SMEs seeking to engage in international markets. An ethnically and culturally diverse workforce and management team can potentially help an SME to secure and expand its presence in global markets. However, they noted that research into DM has been focused primarily on large firms and that many of the findings are contradictory, suggesting DM has positive benefits to innovation, creativity and responsiveness on one hand, or the creation of conflicts, misunderstandings and lower productivity on the other. They also found that there was relatively little research undertaken on DM in SMEs.

Diversity within a workforce within an SME may enhance the overall level of innovation through introducing new ideas and fostering a culture of change (McGuirk *et al.*, 2015). However, the informal nature of management within most SMEs and the engagement of many family members as employees within such businesses make it difficult to establish formal DM programs (Mateescu, 2015). In fact, most SMEs are very small organisations and lack formal HRM systems with the owner-manager being the key arbiter of any policies that might encourage diversity as positive or a strength within the business (Carroll *et al.*, 1999; Bacon & Hoque, 2005; De Kok *et al.*, 2006; Srimannarayana, 2006). It is only when the SME grows from a micro or small firm into a mid-sized enterprise that formal HRM practices and systems are likely to be adopted, and with it formal or systematic approaches to DM (Kotey & Sheridan, Kotey & Slade, 2005).

Flexible Work Arrangements and productivity in SMEs

While most SMEs lack formal HRM policies and practices (Matlay, 1999), and very few will have a formal approach to DM, the research literature does highlight a relatively strong engagement with FWA

policy and practice that has a *de facto* influence on addressing diversity issues within the workplace. In fact, there is recognition within the management literature that high-performance work systems (HPWS) and flexible work process are closely aligned (Evans & Davis, 2015).

Whyman and Petrescu (2015) in a study of SMEs in the United Kingdom identified a range of FWA initiatives that owner-managers might use to enhance performance. These included flexitime, family friendly policies, job sharing, remote or telecommuting, and training or job enrichment. However, the impact of such measures is likely to depend on the size and gender composition of the business. The provision of flexitime was found to have a relationship with lowering absenteeism and offering family friendly policies with reducing redundancies. Overall FWAs were found to have a positive impact on absenteeism. These findings were similar to those found in a study of FWAs within Europe where the use of FWAs such as flexitime and flexplace helped to reduce employee turnover and absenteeism (Stavrou, 2005).

Recent research of Australian SMEs suggests that FWA policies and practices are relatively common (Kotey & Sharma, 2015). Australian SMEs appear to be making good use of flexible leave entitlements, flexible working arrangements, paid parental leave and job sharing, as well as telecommuting via ICT. The larger the firm grows in terms of its workforce the more that such FWA practices will increase.

For many small business owner-managers the need for flexibility in the workplace is high because the small workforce requires all employees to multi-task (Carroll *et al.*, 1999). The relatively strong EEO and IR laws in Australia mean that most SME employers are conscious of the need to provide employees flexibility and workplace fairness (Roan *et al.*, 2001; Lyons *et al.*, 2007; Reeve *et al.*, 2012). It is also a major area for SME owner-managers to have to deal within in relation to their workforce (Mankelow, 2008).

IS IT POSSIBLE TO SATISFY EVERYONE?

Our third research question asks whether FWAs can be strategically developed to meet the needs of all parties? Related to this are our fourth and fifth research questions that ask what are the requirements for FWA from different types of employees and businesses; and what barriers and opportunities exist to satisfy these requirements?

In the following sub-sections, we examine some of the primary determinants of difference such as gender, family, culture and race, age, disability and the adoption of ICT enabled telecommuting. We then consider the needs of different types of employer.

Gender

As noted above a high proportion of the workplace diversity literature has focused on gender. This has addressed the need for women to balance work-family responsibilities and to do so in order to participate in the labour market (Warton, 1994). In comparison to men, women have generally been found in research to experience more difficulty balancing work-life or work-family issues. This is due to their carrying the burden of child care and household responsibilities (Gaze, 2010; Ahmad *et al.*, 2011). They are also more likely to place these issues as a higher priority than do their male counterparts (Hayman & Rasmussen, 2013).

Research with professional employees in accounting and auditing services suggest that the adoption of FWAs are more likely to be motivated within women by family considerations than in men, and men were found to be significantly less interested in FWAs out of a concern over “stepping off the fast track”

in their careers (Almer *et al.*, 2003). This view by men that seeking FWAs to help them balance their work-life demands would “stigmatize” them was also identified in other research in which flexible work was viewed as “feminine” while full-time work was “masculine” (Vandello *et al.*, 2013).

These differences between women and men were also found in Australian research where men sought FWAs that did not impact on their career or financial remuneration. By comparison women were willing to trade-off pay and conditions to achieve work-life balance. Family-friendly FWAs were viewed as a “gendered topic” (Albion, 2004). A study of regional and metropolitan small to mid-sized accounting practices in Australia found a mixture of best practices in FWA and DM. Regional firms were less likely to have flexible work practices than their metropolitan counterparts and more likely to have stereotypical views of gender roles, although this was not universal (Adapa *et al.*, 2015).

Within Australian law firms the pattern of long working hours and limited work-life balance was also highlighted. Although legal firms offered FWAs, which women were more likely to take up, the view remained that “flexible” did not equate to “reliable” (Thornton, 2016). As cited in the study:

“Flexible work is nevertheless beset with ambiguities and continues to be associated with residual discrimination as the ideal legal worker is still a male lawyer committed to the norm of full-time work in situ: “Men are always available, so women look like the troublesome ones” (Survey Respondent). Flexible work is ostensibly gender-neutral but, because it is coloured by the long association with caring work, it has become feminised. Consequently, flexible work continues to stereotype working mothers as uncommitted and incompetent—at least in the eyes of some.” (Thornton, 2016 p. 25)

Research undertaken in the United States suggests that many men may be unaware of FWAs that offer family-friendly options because they may see themselves to be ineligible for such benefits, or that they should remain at work to help provide for their family (Baird & Reynolds, 2004). The finding of women being more likely than men to seek FWAs to achieve work-life balance was also reported in comparable research from Greece (Giannikis & Mihail, 2011).

Differences between men and women in relation to FWAs were also reported in a further study undertaken in the United States (Glauber, 2011). This found that both men and women would not take lower paid jobs to gain more flexibility, but women were able to get more FWAs when employed by large organisations, while men gained more flexibility working in smaller ones. Women also benefited more from FWAs than men, and both genders were likely to get more flexibility in the workplace if they had higher income occupations. Experimental research undertaken in the United States found managerial biases in which FWAs were more likely to be granted to male employees of high status to enhance their careers than women regardless of their position (Brescoll, Glass & Sedlovskaya, 2013).

However, Shockley and Allen (2012) in a study of employees from a large US university found no gender bias in decisions to adopt FWA; although the organisational context in which the study took place may have influenced this outcome. Another study of university employees in Australia found that men were less likely to have maintained a positive work-life balance than their female counterparts (Hayman & Rasmussen, 2013). A study of Australian public service employee’s use of flexible leave entitlements found that men were more likely to benefit from such FWAs than women (Troup, 2011).

In addition to the need for flexibility to achieve work-life balance the issue of gender diversity has focused on the “glass ceiling” that many women experience in securing senior management roles and board director positions (Bytheway & Archer, 2003; Dalton & Dalton, 2010; Johnston & Teicher, 2010). This is particularly noticeable in some industry sectors such as ICT which appear to be male dominated (Riemenschneider *et al.*, 2006).

Research has suggested that gender diversity in senior management and company director roles is a positive thing with women assisting to increase board attendance and corporate monitoring (Adams & Ferreira, 2009). Further, more gender diversity at the company board level does not appear to translate

directly into more gender diversity at the company executive level. More than half the board would need to be female before this might occur. However, more female representation at the board level does seem to create more opportunities for career advancement of women in managerial levels (Skaggs *et al.*, 2012).

Gender diversity is therefore a complex and often politically charged area of workplace relations. It is also an area that has attracted much of the research attention over recent years with a focus on EEO for women and also the work-life balance that family and child caring responsibilities can impose.

Age

The area of workforce diversity in relation to age has received much less attention in the literature. As noted above Australia, like many countries, has adopted legislation to outlaw age discrimination. The aging of the population is also seeing a higher proportion of older workers remaining in or returning to the workforce and FWA can play a key role in assisting such employees to remain in employment. This might take the form of shorter working hours or weeks, and provision for carer leave to look after an invalid partner, as recognised under Australian labour laws (MacDermott, 2014).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2010b) has reported that in 2009-2010 there were about 5.5 million people living in Australia who were aged more than 55 years or about one quarter of the total population. Of these people 1.9 million, or approximately one-third, were actively participating in the workforce. In general, terms the labour market participation of people older than 55 years has increased significantly over the past 30 years rising from around 25% to 34%.

As outlined in the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC, 2016) *Willing to Work* report, life expectancy in Australia is also increasing and it is anticipated that by 2055 the average person born then may expect to live to around 95 years if they are a man and 97 years if a woman. This will see the proportion of the population aged over 65 years' double in the next 40 years.

Federal government policy has seen the retirement age being extended as recognition of this increasing longevity. Currently the workforce participation rate amongst mature-aged women in Australia is around 60 per cent, and for men around 73 per cent. However, while some 74 per cent of people aged between 55 and 59 years are employed, the proportion declines to 56.5 per cent for people aged between 60 and 64 years, and 12.7 per cent for those aged over 65 years (AHRC, 2016).

As noted by the AHRC (2016) report:

"While mature-age people have a lower unemployment rate than younger people, older people tend to have greater difficulty finding subsequent employment when they do become unemployed. In November 2015, the average duration of unemployment for mature-age persons was 68 weeks, compared with 30 weeks for 15-24 year olds and 49 weeks for 25-54 year olds." (AHRC, 2016 p. 37)

This is a similar pattern found in New Zealand where Barrett and Bourke (2013) identified "ageism" as a challenge that needed to be overcome with recourse to DM strategies and policies. Common problems were "cohorting" whereby people are grouped according to age, the presumption that age will result in mental decline, and the stereotyping of older workers as being less adaptable or able to learn new skills. As noted by AHRC (2016) many Australian employers have no-hire policies for people aged over 50 years. Further, although compulsory retirement has been abandoned in most state jurisdictions research suggests that workplace stereotyping based on age continues to pose a problem in the Australian workplace (Barrett & Hede, 2005).

However, in a study of older workers in the German automotive industry Streb and Gellert (2011) found that with appropriate management effective teams employing older employees could still function. They note that it is important that organisations appreciate age and experience and that this is a necessary pre-requisite for any successful team management process. This is necessary in order to overcome stereotypes, which are often generated from younger workers. It is also important to build trust so that an older worker can communicate with team leader supervisors about issues that might relate to their physical or mental conditions without the fear that this might result in dismissal or penalty. Managers should also monitor any specific physical or mental job requirements that might impact the older worker's performance and take steps to mitigate these through training, medical support (if required), ergonomics and coaching. Finally, if job requirements impose too many unfair demands on the older employee the management should consider redeployment or relocation (if possible) into areas where such requirements are not present, but where they can still make a solid contribution.

People with higher skills are more likely to work after 65 years of age. However, in absolute numbers, most working pensioners are employed in low and medium skilled professions (European Commission, 2016). It is also important that employers who wish to retain older workers engender a supportive work environment in which managers and co-workers recognise and respect older workers and offer training as well as the opportunity for them to pass on their knowledge and experience (Mountford, 2013).

According to the AHRC (2016) report there are many cases of discrimination in the workplace and job market due to a person's age. A number of specific challenges were identified as facing many older employees. The first of these is isolation and bullying, with evidence that older workers are subjected to discrimination by younger workers, managers and employers in relation to their age. Another concern was the need that many have (particularly women) in balancing their commitments to work and their need to provide care to partners or other family members. Many older workers have carer responsibilities either for a spouse or for children and grandchildren. They therefore need more FWAs, which may or may not be easily negotiated with employers. In addition, many older workers find that they are limited in any career progression due to their age. Many employers view older employees as not being worth the investment in training and development, or even lacking the capacity to learn new skills. Finally, there is evidence that older employees are often the first to be dismissed when the firm is engaged in organisational restructuring leading to redundancies.

Disability

According to the ABS (2012a) an estimated 3.96 million Australians have a disability, which is around 20 per cent of the total population. Of those people with a disability the majority (86%) experience limitations in core activities such as self-care, mobility or communication, or restrictions in education or employment. A smaller proportion of people (6.3%) have a profound or severe disability that can impose a significant limitation on their core-activities. Most people with a disability have physical conditions (83.9%), while smaller proportions have mental and behavioural disorders (11.3%), or intellectual and developmental disorders (4.8%).

Despite the existence of anti-discrimination legislation, the AHRC (2016) states that ABS research suggests many Australians with disabilities are facing active discrimination in the workplace and job market. For example, 8.6 per cent of respondents to a 2015 survey reported having experienced unfair treatment or discrimination based on their disability. Younger people (aged 15 to 24 years) were also more likely to report this discrimination (20.5%) than their older counterparts. Of more concern is that nearly half of all respondents (46.9%) reported that this discrimination was coming from employers. According to the ABS (2012a) the labour force participation rate for working-age people (15-64 years) with disability was at 52.8 per cent.

This seems to be a pattern found in other countries. For example, in the United States although discrimination against people with disabilities in employment is illegal, many employers were found to be following prejudicial HR policies in relation to how they dealt with employees with disabilities (Chima, 2001). A report by the Business Council of Australia (BCA, 2015) into employment for people with disabilities highlighted that data by the Australian Network on Disability revealed a significant difference between reported (often based on self-identification) levels of disability among employees, and levels recorded by the ABS. The results show a 9.2 per cent employment rate in the private sector and 9.4 per cent in the government sector across all three levels of jurisdiction (e.g. local, state and federal). The BCA (2015) report identified that 65 per cent of companies do not ask as part of their recruitment process whether the applicant has a disability.

As reported in the AHRC (2016) report there is evidence that many employers are ignorant of the nature of disabilities and have a misunderstanding or negative assumptions about the capacities of people with disabilities and their ability to perform as employees. This has often related to the worker needing special access or equipment to allow them to work, and/or needed more flexibility in their working arrangements to address their specific disability. This may include requirements in many jobs for people to have a driver's licence, which may actually not be necessary but is often included in job descriptions. Many workplaces also lack appropriate physical access for disabled workers, or poorly designed wash room facilities, car parking or proximity to public transport. Employers are also failing to provide disabled employees with facilitative ICT equipment that enable them to perform their work tasks. Disabled workers also face problems with career progression and the same isolation and bullying that older workers experience.

Despite these negative issues British research has suggested that when proactive DM policies and practices are implemented within strategic HRM programs across sufficient organisations the workforce participation rates of people with disability will increase (Woodhams & Corby, 2007). However, this change was triggered by the introduction of legislation relating to anti-discrimination on the grounds of disability. It should also be noted that Australian research focusing on SMEs found that workers with disability were no less productive than their fully able counterparts (Hindle *et al.*, 2010). As that study concluded:

"The axiom that workers with a disability are less productive is not tenable. It is exposed by the results reported above as a myth...Enhanced employment of workers with a disability can and will create a more diversified, harmonious and productive workforce befitting a planet that however belatedly is now realizing that sustainable human relations are indivisible components of the same necessity. It can no longer, ever, be 'us and them'. We are all in it together." (Hindle *et al.*, 2010 pp. 211-212)

Culture and ethnicity

Australia is one of the world's most culturally and ethnically diverse nations. There are more than 270 different ancestries recognised within the wider population, with just over a quarter (26%) of all Australians having been born overseas, around 20 per cent speaking a language other than English at home, and nearly half (46%) of the population having at least one parent born outside the country (AHRC, 2014). Although the United Kingdom and New Zealand continue to be the main sources of new immigrants, the proportion of migrants from those traditional countries of origin has declined in the past decade with China and India becoming increasingly important (ABS, 2013). In addition to people born overseas or to non-English speaking parentage, there are more than half a million (548,370 in 2011) people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin living in Australia (ABS, 2011).

Although Australia has adopted multiculturalism as a broad philosophical underpinning within its society this is not universally accepted (Syed & Kramar, 2010), and previous research into Australian workplaces suggests that managers need more training and development in the management of a

multicultural or multi-ethnic workforce where different leadership styles are often required (Lewis, French & Phetmany, 2000). In addition to Australian citizens and permanent residents Australia is receiving a large number of temporary workers coming under student or 457 Visas. International research suggests that such workers can make a positive contribution in sectors such as hospitality (Devine *et al.*, 2007). However, Australian experience paints a less than positive view of many 457 Visa workers (Velayutham, 2013).

Barrett & Hede (2005) note that people of non-English speaking backgrounds often find it harder to get work, or achieve recognition for their qualifications, than do people from the United Kingdom or New Zealand. They also point to the difficulties that many Indigenous Australians also face in securing work, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women often experiencing more problems than men. For example, the ABS (2012c) estimated that in 2011 employment amongst Indigenous Australians aged over 15 years was only 46 per cent with males (52%) more likely to have secured employment than females (41%). Unemployment amongst Indigenous Australians was at 16 per cent, which was substantially higher than the non-Indigenous population at around 5.7 per cent.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community has much younger age demography than the mainstream community (ABS, 2012c). However, older Indigenous workers find it much harder to secure entry to the labour market. The workforce participation level amongst those aged between 45 and 54 years is around 62 per cent (compared to 86% for non-Indigenous people), but it declines to 43 per cent for those aged between 55 and 65 years (compared to 67% for non-Indigenous people) (AHRC, 2016).

For people of cultural and linguistically different backgrounds securing and retaining employment is also a challenge. This is particularly the case for older workers where around 33 per cent of such individuals who were unemployed in 2015 were aged over 50 years (AHRC, 2016). Religion may also be an issue for some workers. For example, people from Muslim backgrounds might experience conflict in relation to working hours such as having to work on Fridays and not being able to secure time out for prayers (Sav, Harris & Sebar, 2013).

Family work-life balance

One of the key issues facing both employees and employers is the need to find an appropriate solution to work-life balance (Gaze, 2014; Piszczek & Berg, 2014). Research suggests that families address work-life balance in at least three ways. First, they may choose to limit their career options by taking time out of the workforce or declining promotions, transfers and overtime work to focus on family responsibilities. Second, they may choose to have a “one-job, one-career marriage” in which one of the partners focuses on a career while the other (usually the woman) addresses family duties. Third, they may both “take turns” managing family and work tasks at different points in their career cycle (Albion, 2004). This is particularly important to people with young children, and tends to impact on both men and women, with the latter often experiencing greater pressure (Baird & Reynolds, 2004; Strazdins *et al.*, 2007).

This need to find work-life balance is increasingly a challenge for both employees and employers seeking to retain good staff and “family-friendly” workplace policies can enhance employee morale and improve job satisfaction (Fiksenbaum, 2014; Stock *et al.*, 2016). Further, as women are most affected by family work-life balance issues it is important for organisations to establish a “supportive gender diversity climate” (Ali *et al.*, 2015). There are also likely to be differences across industry sectors and while managers are generally willing to try to accommodate the needs of employees, they also need to consider the efficient and profitable operation of their organisations (Reeve *et al.*, 2012).

The “multi-tasking” that balancing work and family responsibilities imposes on workers has been found to impact more on better educated “white collar” professional employees leading to longer working hours and stress (Schieman & Young, 2015). However, some individuals, such as those with children with special needs, may face even more significant workplace challenges and require more flexibility in working conditions (George *et al.*, 2008). Although legislation prohibits discrimination against employees on the grounds of family responsibilities, complaints have been made against employers and disputes heard in the courts (Bytheway & Archer, 2003).

Addressing the needs of family related work-life balance issues is being undertaken by many firms through the use of FWAs (Shockley & Allen, 2007; 2012; Sarder, 2011). Some research suggests that the use of FWAs as a tool for managing work-life balance issues impacting on the family are more likely to be of interest to women than men (Almer *et al.*, 2003), who are more likely to be aware of family leave benefits and associated entitlements that their male counterparts (Baird & Reynolds, 2004).

Research into the use of FWAs as a means to help resolve family work-life conflicts suggests that to grant flexibility may not actually have as much effect as anticipated. This seems to particularly be the case for “flexplace” measures as compared to “flextime” (Allen *et al.*, 2013).

Some evidence also suggests that even when more “flextime” is granted to parents, they actually spend no more time with children than they might otherwise do had they continued to remain at work (Baxter, 2011). Further, there seems to be a difference between parents with young children and those with older ones in terms of the amount of time that must be spent with the younger child, and what impact that has on the time that the parents have to devote to work-related activities, particularly of a social or collegial nature (Brummelhuis *et al.*, 2010).

For some employees with family commitments job sharing may be a means of allowing parents or carers more capacity to coordinate work, family and other commitments and reduce conflicts between work and personal responsibilities. In turn it can assist employers to resolve work-life family problems for their staff (Lafferty, Bohle & Giudice, 2002). However, it is important for employees to feel that the FWAs offered by the employer are useable within their own work-life context (Hayman, 2009).

Employer responses

For employers, the Australian workplace is fairly heavily regulated by federal and state legislation to ensure that employees do not suffer from discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity, culture, age, gender, disability or sexual orientation. These EEO legal provisions have created an environment where employers need to be mindful of their legal obligations. However, employers should also seek to proactively address diversity in the workplace as part of a DM strategy that is incorporated within their HRM strategy framework. Although there is a need for more research, the evidence that is available suggests that organisations will be more likely to achieve better workplace harmony and more productive employees if they adopt DM strategies and policies.

In addition to compliance with EEO legal requirements, employers can make use of FWAs as a tool to help them manage workplace diversity. One of the key strategies for DM is to “dissolve difference” whereby the differences found within diverse groups of employees (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, culture) are removed through intelligent use of FWAs, guided by EEO considerations, to recognise the value of all employees and enable them to make productive contributions (Doherty, 2004). However, the use of FWAs will need to provide not only benefits to the employee but protection of the employer’s interests (Fereday & Oster, 2010).

Greenberg and Landry (2011) in a study of women seeking to negotiate FWAs identified four interrelated factors that may impact on the employer-employee negotiation process. The first of these

is “power”, whereby the individual has or lacks power in the negotiation process relative to the employer. The second is “organisational work-life support”, which relates to the support the employee may or may not get in relation to the structure and culture that exists within the workplace as it impacts on supporting them in any negotiation process. The “negotiation process” is therefore influenced by the first two factors and may be characterised by a collaborative tone and process. Finally, the “negotiated outcomes” that emerge from the FWA negotiation process will be influenced by the first two factors. They found that cultural support (e.g. social norms and interpersonal relations) plays an important role in affecting how individuals and managers negotiate FWAs. This seems to be of particular importance to women. However, the outcomes of the FWA negotiations are determined more by the structural support that exists (e.g. formal HR policies over FWA).

Table 3: Literature relating to FWA dimensions

FWA flexibility dimension	Indicative literature
Flexibility and time – “Flexitime”:	Allen <i>et al.</i> (2013); Brescoll, Glass & Sedlovskaya (2013); Kelly & Kalev (2006); Masuda <i>et al.</i> (2012); Shockely & Allen (2013); Hayman (2010).
Flexibility and place of work – “Flexplace”:	Alizadeh (2012); Ross & Ressia (2015); Marmot (1992); Masuda <i>et al.</i> (2012).
Flexibility in employment structures – “Flexlength”:	Adapa <i>et al.</i> (2015); Brescoll <i>et al.</i> (2013); Crowley & Kolenikov (2014); Leslie <i>et al.</i> (2012); McDonald <i>et al.</i> (2007); Michielsens <i>et al.</i> (2014); Mountford (2013); Newman (2011); Sarder (2011); Vandello <i>et al.</i> (2013)
Benefits flexibility – “Flexbenefit”:	Baird & Reynolds (2004); Cairns (2013); Giannikis & Mihail (2011); Marmot (1992); Lafferty <i>et al.</i> (2002); Pitt-Catsoupes <i>et al.</i> (2015).

The role of organisational work-life support (i.e. culture and structure) remains important when employees seek to negotiate FWAs to manage personal or family commitments. However, regardless of the amount of support from managers, colleagues or the organisation’s formal systems, for most employees moving away from a full-time working arrangement will have potentially serious consequences for their career development (McDonald *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, the available evidence suggests that awareness of diversity and the possession of DM strategies and policies remain low within Australian organisations (Davis *et al.*, 2016).

As previously discussed Litvin’s (1997) dichotomy of identifying fixed and changeable dimensions of diversity provides a useful framework around which employers might consider shaping a DM strategy. The “primary” dimensions that remain immutable (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation and physical attributes) cannot be treated as a potential barrier to employment within existing EEO laws. However, the “secondary” dimensions in particular education and training, work experience and geographical location can be changed and managers are able to apply FWAs to help manage diversity in the workplace.

The work of Hill *et al.* (2008) outlined in Table 1 provides a framework of what employees and employers might need to consider in negotiating FWAs. The key elements of “flexitime”, “flexplace”, “flexlength” and “flexbenefit” are potential starting points for any employer response to DM using FWAs. Depending on the background of an employee one or more of these four “flexibility” dimensions is likely to be of importance, and they are likely to change over the work life of any individual person.

Our review of the literature has identified a good deal of work that has been undertaken into diversity in the workplace and the interrelationship between DM, EEO and FWA. Table 3 provides a snapshot of

some of this literature and maps it against the four dimensions of workplace flexibility that provide a “toolbox” for employers seeking to develop FWAs to manage diversity in their workforce.

SUMMARISING THE FINDINGS

Workplace diversity is a broad-ranging topic that encompasses substantial academic disciplines. As noted by Kramer (2012) the concept of diversity from a management perspective (e.g. DM) is understood in very different ways from one country to the next and across different organisations.

Table 4: An Australian Diversity Management model?

National Level	Organisational Level	Individual Level
Multiculturalism; EEO for women; diversity management in APS □ Emphasis on corporate voluntary initiatives (Bertone and Leahy, 2001)	Diversity Works Policy; human capital orientation (Syed, 2008)	Individual-oriented (Deery and Mitchell, 1999)
Anti-discrimination legislation; weakened by decentralized IR (Waring et al., 2006) Demographic and socio- economic considerations Limitations	The business benefits case of diversity management (COA (Commonwealth of Australia), 2005)	Special focus on women; minority ethnic women remain ignored (Syed, 2007)
Lack of a socially responsible approach towards diversity management (Syed and Kramar, 2007)	Legal compliance orientation; some evidence of progressive diversity initiatives □ Influence of multinational HQ diversity policies (IBM, 2006)	Intersecting and multiple identities remain ignored (Syed, 2007)
Socio-cultural and structural challenges remain ignored; social justice remains a low priority	Lack of an integrated approach towards diversity management	Group identities remain ignored (Muir, 2006)
Lack of strict benchmarks and monitoring (Nicholas, 2000)	Inefficient social and business outcomes	Perspectives of disadvantaged groups including minority ethnic women remain ignored
Complaint-based system; weak legal accountability (Thornton, 2006)	Under-representation of women and ethnic minorities in positions of power (EEONA, 2005)	NESB persons generally lack awareness of and access to legal rights (Syed, 2007; Syed, 2008)
Way forward – a relational, integrated approach Macro-national level: multicultural policies; elimination of discrimination in socio-economic, legal and cultural contexts	Employees exploited by unscrupulous employers, particularly in small organisations in the private sector	Micro-individual level: consideration of intersecting and multiple identities
	Inclusive workplace structures and routines	

Source: Adapted from Sayed & Kramer (2010), page 109

Despite having been a topic of some interest since the 1980s, the field of DM has continued to lack a strong “business case” that can clearly demonstrate that diversity improves productivity in the public or private sector. There are also a number of often competing theories and models associated with DM and how it might be implemented. In Australia, the various claims made about DM in the workplace

have been driven more by compliance with EEO and discrimination legislation than a dedicated focus on using diversity as a productivity enhancer.

Sayed and Kramer (2010) provide an “Australian model for managing cultural diversity” and we have replicated this with some adaptation in Table 4. As shown the national context in which any DM takes place in Australia must consider the state and federal anti-discrimination EEO laws and the strong regulatory environment (e.g. Fair Work, Human Rights Commission).

This impacts on the organisation and while business groups seek to achieve or enhance DM outcomes, there remain gaps, challenges and a requirement for better frameworks and structure. Finally, at the individual employee level there are a wide-range of groups with different characteristics and needs (e.g. older workers, women, parents, disabled, Indigenous, migrants) who require DM policies and strategies as well as FWAs offering combinations of flexibility in relation to time, place, duration and benefits within their work.

Conclusions and future directions for research

Our review of the literature relating to diversity in the workplace has provided some deeper insights into the five research questions outlined earlier as well as highlighting gaps in the current body of knowledge that require further investigation. With this background, we can summarise our findings for the five research questions as follows. These questions broadly segment into the areas of diversity management and the provision of flexible work arrangements.

Managing diversity in the workplace

The first two research questions address the issue of diversity management (DM) within the workplace and its implications for enhanced productivity:

Research Question 1: *What is meant by flexibility and diversity of employment in Australia today?*

Research Question 2: *What is the Australian evidence that diversity leads to more productive enterprises?*

Our review of the literature suggests that flexibility and diversity are two separate although related concepts that are currently not well-defined or understood within the context of the Australian workplace. Diversity within the Australian workplace is strongly associated with the legal and regulatory frameworks associated with anti-discrimination legislation and EEO (Syed & Kramer, 2010). Further, although DM has been a subject of interest within HRM for much of the past two and a half decades relatively little academic research has been undertaken in the area in relation to Australian organisations and much of what exists is now dated (Davis *et al.*, 2016).

By contrast more work has been undertaken in the field of workplace flexibility, although much of this has focused on gender, in particular the challenges facing women in relation to work-life balance and career development. Gaps appear to exist in relation to the nexus between diversity and flexibility, in particular how DM may be facilitated by FWAs. The specific needs of employee groups such as older workers; Indigenous employees, people with disability and those from non-English speaking migrant backgrounds are also not well researched.

As noted above the extant literature on diversity in the Australian workplace remains limited and dated. Only modest numbers of studies could be found on the nexus between diversity in the workplace and productivity (e.g. Ali *et al.*, 2011; 2015; Mohr & Shoobridge, 2011; McGuirk *et al.*, 2015). More studies have addressed the relationship between flexibility and workplace productivity (e.g. Evans & Davis, 2015; Whyman & Petrescu, 2015; Stavrou, 2005). However, only a few of these studies were undertaken in Australia. Future research should investigate the relationship between workforce diversity,

workplace flexibility and organisational productivity using longitudinal data. This research should examine these relationships by size of firm and industry. The influence of FWA as a moderating variable might be a relevant point of focus.

Managing flexibility in the workplace

The remaining three research questions focus on the management of flexibility within the workplace and how this can be undertaken to satisfy the needs of both employees and employers within a highly diverse workforce:

Research Question 3: *How can flexible work arrangements be strategically developed to meet the needs of all parties?*

Research Question 4: *What are the requirements for flexible work from different types of employees and businesses?*

Research Question 5: *What are the barriers and opportunities to satisfy these requirements?*

The research literature suggests that FWA can be a tool for the implementation of DM strategies (Ali *et al.*, 2015; Whyman & Petrescu, 2015; Stavrou, 2005). Attention is needed to understand the needs of each group of employees within the organisation and aligning HR policies and FWA guidelines within a broader DM strategic framework to ensure that fairness, EEO compliance in relation to the employee are congruent with the best interests of the organisation and other employees. As noted by Greenberg and Landry (2011) “organisational work-life support” is likely to be important with both “structural” and “cultural” elements working together to assist employers and employees make appropriately negotiated FWAs. Future research into this question is potentially best undertaken via case studies as this would provide an opportunity for a more in-depth and rich exploration of how FWA and DM strategies have been effectively used to negotiate successful outcomes.

Research question 4 is difficult to answer based on the available literature. It is clear that different types of employee will have different needs depending on their personal circumstances. It is also clear that firms of different size and industry may have different requirements in relation to FWA. However, no evidence could be found of a comprehensive taxonomy that categorised each type of employee or business in relation to their specific flexibility requirements. Future research should examine this question via online surveys of employees and employers with a view to understanding specific needs in relation to FWAs.

In relation to research question 5: once again the available literature does not provide much evidence to allow us to address this question with any confidence. As outlined in Table 9 the barriers and opportunities for managing diversity within the workforce, and delivering it through FWAs that address the needs of both the employee and employer, need to be examined at the national, organisation and individual level (Sayed & Kramar, 2010).

Kramar (2012) has provided a well-considered analysis pointing to the national EEO anti-discrimination legislation and National Employment Standards (NES) that allow employees rights to request flexibility for various situations (e.g. parental, carer and compassionate leave). The adoption of strategic HRM policies and practices within which a coherent DM strategy might exist is an opportunity at the firm level where both “soft” (e.g. cultural, peer and supervisory support) and “hard” (e.g. rules, policies and systems) structures need to exist to help the negotiation process (Greenberg & Landry, 2011). Future research should undertake an investigation of employer and employee perspectives of this question via direct interview and through case studies. This will allow a more in-depth investigation into these issues.

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