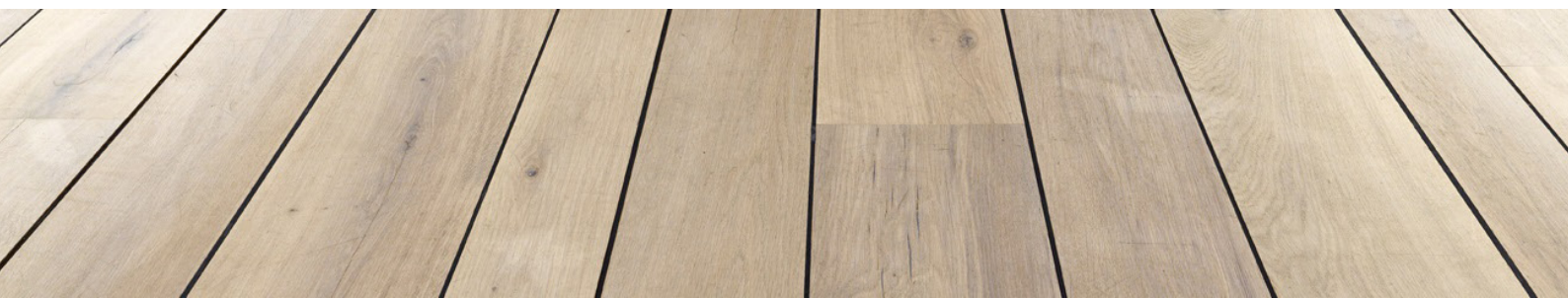


slattery



## Kaizen: Diversity 01

Kaizen: a Japanese philosophy which focuses on continual improvement



# Diving into Diversity

While the diversity drive is making a meaningful impact on the number of women in the property and construction industry, it's time to broaden our focus.

A raft of research has found that diverse organisations are more profitable.

For instance, a study from the La Trobe Business School, released last year, found a correlation between board diversity and superior performance. The largest study of its kind in Australia examined the nation's top 500 listed companies between 2005 and 2011, uncovering a positive and significant association between female non-executives on boards and financial performance.

Last September, Thomson Reuters released an analysis of the practices of more than 5,000 companies in the first Diversity and Inclusion Index. The Index found that diverse companies create more innovative products, happier customers, and financially outperform their peers.

Why? Because diversity powers creativity and acts as an antidote to 'groupthink'. Or as Apple's Tim Cook has said "we rely on our employees' diverse backgrounds and perspectives to spark innovation".

At my firm, the gender diversity score has already been settled. Half of our

company's growth sector leaders are women, and 42 per cent of our workforce is female. Four of our directors are female. Not a bad result, considering the top five QS firms in the country can boast just a handful of female directors.

While I'm proud of my firm's record on gender diversity, it's just one piece of the puzzle. True diversity encompasses a range of factors – from age and ethnicity to religious background and sexual orientation. As the need for advisory services grows globally, most QS firms are in a ferocious hunt for talent. And this means thinking imaginatively and stepping outside the established parameters of what talent looks like.

## Rethinking recruitment

There's a reason why birds of a feather flock together – because it's easy for them to do so.

People usually look for a spark of commonality when they are choosing new staff. Research from the Kellogg School of Management in the United States, for example, has found that

hiring is not just about skills sorting. It is also a "process of cultural matching between candidates, evaluators, and firms". Employers tend to seek out candidates who are not only competent but culturally similar to themselves.

Human resource departments can end up recruiting clones – but if you have a diverse client base, you need a diverse mix of employees.



Our organisation has introduced a recruitment strategy that emphasises personal characteristics over skill sets or exam results. And the impact of this strategy on the composition of our workforce cannot be understated.



We look for people who show an innate sense of curiosity, a capacity to learn, an enthusiasm for our industry, ability to overcome adversity and the confidence to engage with clients. We believe these traits are more important than where someone went to university or how many high distinctions they achieved. Drive and determination don't just come from finishing a Masters' degree. It can be demonstrated by holding down two jobs while at university, balancing the needs of a young family or stepping back into the profession after time away.

We are also conscious of not recruiting too many people with the same personality profile. We don't need an entire office filled with outgoing go-getters who want to spend their days chatting with clients. We also need the thinkers and technical experts who prefer to be in the back office, and without whom we wouldn't get the job done.

## Wise words add value

We also recognise the inherent strength in having an age-diverse team.

While roughly a quarter of Australia's population are 55 year and over, they make up just 16 per cent of the total workforce. A diverse workforce is one that brings people from all age groups – from the enthusiastic Gen Y tech-wizard to veteran Baby Boomer who has seen it all before.

Our workforce ranges from a fresh-out-of-school 21-year-old to a highly-productive 72-year-old. Our elder statesman is known as the 'go to' person when anyone is facing a technical conundrum. He's always available and approachable, and brings depth to our team. We have benefited from older staff joining us from other firms rather than retiring. We recognise their experience and expertise, and they have become valuable members of our team.

Meanwhile, our youngest team members are positively bubbling with enthusiasm and energy. They bring with them new insights gleaned from the cutting-edge of academia and from a lifetime's immersion in technology. Together, youth and experience add strength to our workplace.

## Lifelong learning and development

We recognise learning doesn't stop the day you get your degree, and have created a structured learning and development program to supplement on-the-job skills, retain staff and drive performance. This program covers diverse topics that are open to everyone – from networking techniques to business writing basics, and from preparing for meetings to the art of listening. Other training is focused on technical proficiency, and aligns with our recruitment strategy – because we know people with the right attitude and characteristics can gain the technical skills needed to flourish in our organisation.

## Let's get flexible

The term 'flexible working' is often associated with mothers balancing work with family life – but in our organisation flexibility is a much broader concept.

Many of our staff have adopted some form of flexible working. Our emphasis is on developing individual arrangements for each employee. For some people, flexibility means the opportunity to work from home one day a week, finish at 4pm or incorporate an intense training schedule around work. For others, flexibility is about having time off to travel or have children, to negotiate additional annual leave or work from another office a few times a year so they can visit family.

While flexibility is an ongoing challenge in any small company, we are always looking for creative ways to accommodate work life balance and to help people bring their 'whole selves' to work.



## A culture of contribution

One fascinating study by Deloitte found that more than half of all workers cover up some part of their identity to fit in - with people from the LGBTI community and minority religious groups most likely to feel the need to "check stuff at the door".

At Slattery Australia, we operate with the underlying tenet that each of us is of equal worth. We believe our organisation will be richest when all members of our team can bring their diverse life experiences to work.

But this philosophy is not without its challenges - and creating a culture of inclusion takes time. In our firm, bringing a diverse group of people together doesn't mean they must all participate in team lunches and hang out together at the pub after work.

But it does mean working together to build a common value system.

The people who work at Slattery Australia are motivated to make a positive impact on people, places and the planet. We encourage industry participation and helping our people to 'give back' to their community - whether it's raising money for charity or participating in corporate cycling days. Embracing diversity is in part about recognising that each of us has different drivers. By working with those drivers, people feel valued, part of the team - and ultimately part of their company's success.

We also encourage people to speak up and have a voice. We recognise that this is challenging for some team members, particularly those

from other cultural backgrounds where public speaking isn't a regular part of school life. People choose to contribute in different ways, whether that is through their mentor, in a technical learning and development session or in a staff meeting.

The key is to foster a culture where everyone is encouraged to contribute. We have a structured 'insights' session at our staff meetings, where employees present on a topic that interests them - this may be anything from a technical challenge overcome to a cultural practice explained. For example, one colleague shared insights into Chinese etiquette which helped our staff to liaise more effectively with our Asian clients. Another colleague presented the latest corporate fashion trends. The benefit of getting people to contribute based on what interests them means invariably the topic interests others and the presenter is a confident, inspiring expert.

## Take your eyes off the targets

While businesses across Australia continue to debate the merits of targets and quotas, I think this is a distraction. Any organisation serious about maintaining its competitiveness must embrace diversity as a strategic business imperative - and that makes chasing targets or numbers irrelevant.

Growing a workplace culture centred on inclusion, diversity and respect is what encourages people to flourish. When they can bring their 'whole selves' to work, then they can give everything to their task. Diversity cultivates a sense of belonging, which in turn sustains retention, drives recruitment and creates profitable, high-performance workplaces.

### Diving into diversity at Slattery

- 80 staff around Australia
- 42% of the workforce is female
- 12 cultural backgrounds are represented
- Ages range from 21-72



## About Slattery

Founded more than 40 years ago, our dedicated and experienced team is focused on delivering the most efficient solutions for our clients. Slattery is a property and construction advisory firm, with offices in, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney and Perth, providing end-to-end property and construction cost management services.

A commitment to excellence and innovation, and an ability to become an integral part of the project team has earned Slattery the trust and respect of clients and project teams alike. Slattery will add value to the project by taking control and ownership of the cost management process from the outset.

## Diversity

Slattery takes pride in its workplace diversity and creating an inclusive environment that accepts all individuals. We believe diversity powers creativity and sparks innovation. Our recruitment strategy focuses on personal attributes over skill sets. This new way of recruiting has become a key driver in our growth strategy and is complemented by adopting flexible working arrangements for our staff members. Our emphasis is on developing models that suit each employee's needs – no matter their gender, nationality or lifestyle choice.

For more information about Slattery and our approach to Diversity, please contact Director and National Lead Sarah Slattery at [sarah.slattery@slattery.com.au](mailto:sarah.slattery@slattery.com.au) 0418 330 478