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Utilising a capability maturity model to leverage inclusion and diversity in public sector organisations

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Abstract

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) bring many benefits to society, particularly in public sector organisations servicing increasingly diverse communities. To deliver public value, government agencies at all levels must more intentionally direct public sector knowledge, skills, and experiences to shape the current and future capabilities of a more diverse and inclusive workforce. Fully optimising workplace D&I has proven elusive. An evolving array of new and residual policy and practice elements has led to a mismatch of goals and outcomes. Moreover, many accepted 'best' practice approaches are out-of-step with rapidly shifting societal and workforce compositions and mechanisms and societal expectations for organisations to reflect and embrace D&I. Accommodating these shifts demands a bolder, more agile 'next' practice approach that is fit-for-purpose in creating and maintaining a modern, diverse, inclusive workplace. This practice-focused article constructs a Capability Maturity Model to guide D&I decision-making and support continuous improvement.

KEYWORDS
capability maturity model, diversity and inclusion, public sector performance, workforce change

1 | INTRODUCTION

The benefits a diverse and inclusive workforce convey to society are understood by academics and corporate leaders but less so by the broader workforce or the wider public (Bourke & Dillon, 2018). Indeed, Davis et al. (2016) note the significant differences in awareness of the benefits of diversity between HR and other managers. Diversity refers to the range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin, and political beliefs (Roberson, 2006). Realising the benefits of diversity requires adopting strategies, practices, and behaviours that enable all workers to make meaningful contributions and sustain a sense of organisational belonging (Offerman & Basford, 2014).

Inclusion refers to the degree to which people of all identities feel a sense of belonging and being valued for their uniqueness, such that their authentic selves are welcomed to contribute as full members to their workplace (Bailinson et al., 2020; Shore et al., 2018; Shore et al., 2011). Through genuinely inclusive processes, including a facilitative organisational culture and leadership role modelling, individuals with diverse backgrounds bring alternative perspectives, ideas, and life experiences helping workplaces approach business differently. Diversity through inclusion contributes to greater creativity and innovation; better problem-solving processes; more robust decision-making and governance; and increased productivity and performance (Davis et al., 2016; Hunt et al., 2020; Shore et al., 2018) – especially when inclusion is institutionally embedded in the organisation's culture and practices (Urwin et al., 2013; Hunt et al., 2020). Additionally, and importantly, workforces that embrace diversity and inclusion (D&I) better reflect and engage with an increasingly diverse and sophisticated citizenry reflective of changing social norms. Such nuanced understanding of community needs helps craft superior solutions to public issues (Derven, 2014; D'Emidio et al., 2021).

For governments, the case for a diverse public sector workforce with a social infrastructure supporting inclusion is compelling. Australian, U.S., and Canadian governments have recently issued strategic orders for a renewed focus on D&I (Australian Public Service Commission, 2020; Treasury Board of Canadian Secretariat, 2021; The White House Briefing Room/Presidential Actions, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the need for a diverse and inclusive workforce, agile in its reach, understanding, and response to all communities (Flock, 2020; KPMG International, 2021), especially to prevent backsliding occurring when organisational attention is directed toward more 'immediate' responses (Hunt et al., 2020). Additionally, the pandemic has highlighted the criticality of leaders placing inclusion as a core focus to maintain organisational productivity and employee well-being (Lundy et al., 2021).

Despite long-held and escalating efforts, entrenching D&I principles into practice has been patchy and slow (Hunt et al., 2020; New South Wales Government, 2019). This principle–practice gap is attributed to many factors, including inadequate funding and overall organisational support and leadership (Kalev et al., 2006; Llopis, 2017). For Kramar (2012, p. 245) and Soldan and Nankervis (2014), the 'mosaic of concepts, practices, and rhetoric' surrounding D&I has been central to mismatched approaches and poor implementation. Others (Bourke & Dillon, 2018; Offerman & Basford, 2014; Roberson, 2006; Strachan et al., 2007) point to the varying attention on inclusion holism as a significant deficit in many D&I efforts.

This article traces Australia's primary approaches to D&I. While acknowledging past 'best' practices, it forecasts the need for 'next' practice to reflect a changing workforce embracing D&I, especially inclusion, as a guiding organisational principle.

The paper also points to the transformations of work practices arising from digital amplification, including, for example, flexible and remote working, and D& I mechanisms, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning, virtual reality, and advanced analytics, to attract, support, and engage with workforces of the future (Bednar & Welch, 2020; Daub et al., 2020; Shore et al., 2018).

Drawing from academic literature and multiple industry-based studies, a D&I Capability Maturity Model (CMM) is constructed. It unpacks the evolving maturity levels of D&I approaches across four dimensions: drivers/focus; responsibility/leadership; measurement; and mechanisms/defining features. Each level offers greater potential for creating better public sector outcomes. The CMM offers a comprehensive yet straightforward self-assessment of the current D&I maturity and public agencies' capacity to face 'next' practice modernising challenges and future societal threats. Well designed and grounded in research, D&I CMMs can support the development of a roadmap of where an organisation wants to go and how to get there.

2 | APPROACHES

Over time, changing social contexts and requirements, along with a maturing practitioner knowledge base, have led to the maturation of approaches, strategies, and associated initiatives to support workforce D&I. The four approaches presented in this paper, Compliance, Managerial, Integrative, and Transformative, capture this evolution of purpose, form, process, and, in particular, the increasing attention to inclusion.

2.1 | Compliance

The United Nations Human Rights Declaration (1948) and subsequent social movements, including the American Civil Rights movements of the 1960s, provided the catalyst for legislation prohibiting discrimination against certain groups based on individual characteristics to promote equal treatment (Davis et al., 2016; Tsutsui et al., 2012). Here, the power of the law became an instrument for workplace change (Evan, 1965, p. 286), albeit limited to basic protections rather than obliging employers to actively facilitate the cultural, behavioural, and attitudinal change to support diversity (Pyke, 2005; Strachan et al., 2007).

In Australia, two main types of legislation emerged: anti-discrimination legislation in the mid-1970s, followed by affirmative action or equal opportunity (EEO) legislation in the 1980s (Burgess et al., 2009; Davis et al., 2016). The key difference between these two types of legislation was that anti-discrimination legislation made it unlawful to discriminate in the workplace based on a number of identity differences, whereas EEO legislation took a more systematic approach to the removal of barriers faced by disadvantaged groups in the workplace (Burgess et al., 2009; Davis et al., 2016). Taksa and Groutsis (2017) depict these progressive legislative reforms from the 1970s onwards as the 'legal compliance' model because of the reliance on legislation to address past disadvantage, to promote equality of opportunity, and to prevent discrimination. A clear distinction between anti-discrimination and EEO legislation has been prevented by the confluence in the use of these terms, with different jurisdictions titling their acts Anti-Discrimination or Discrimination and others titling theirs Equal Opportunity (Taksa & Groutsis, 2017). Commonwealth legislation (in particular, the Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986, Sex Discrimination Act 1984, Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Age Discrimination Act 2004, and the Racial Discrimination

Act 1975) supported by state-based equivalents dictated equal treatment, in turn supporting some progress in workplace diversity. The specification and codification of actions and enforcement mechanisms established a legal framework guiding policy, practice, and compliance. Collectively these mechanisms outlined responsibilities regarding compliance with non-discrimination obligations in Australia but provided few positive obligations on employers to review and report on the composition of their workforce (Dawson & Peacock-Smith, 2020). Although compliance with each of these legislative instruments remains compulsory for those organisations that fall within its ambit (Burgess et al., 2009), there is some legitimate criticism that such legislation fails to pursue the social goal of equality or equity beyond the baseline level (Burgess et al., 2009; Taksa & Groutsis, 2017). Taksa and Groutsis (2017) suggest statistics show real or perceived discrimination in employment has remained problematic in Australian organisations, despite the operation of this legislative framework and associated policies and initiatives. The notable exceptions which create a positive obligation on employers are the requirement for 'relevant employers' to report on the gender composition of the workforce under the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 (Australian Government, 2016; Dawson & Peacock-Smith, 2020) and a requirement in the Public Service Act 1999 for agency heads to establish a workplace diversity program to promote employment equity. The Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 requires non-public sector employers with 100 or more employees to lodge reports each year containing information on various gender equality indicators, for example equal remuneration between women and men (Australian Government, 2016; Workplace Gender Equality Agency, n.d.).

Although all employees were and remain obligated to comply with non-discrimination obligations outlined in legislation and policies, managers have added responsibility for championing fairness and equality in the workplace. Complicating this further is the fact that the laws apply in slightly different ways between different states and territories and at a Commonwealth level with some gaps in the protection offered. This requires close scrutiny of obligations against both the Commonwealth legislation and the state or territory legislation in which organisations operate (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d.a, n.d.b). These limited rights and compliance-based legislative instruments were extended to accommodate diversity principles aimed at increased inclusion, such as flexible work arrangements and compassionate leave in the Fair Work Act 2009.

The legislative approach provided a foundation for diversity procedures and practices in the Australian workforce, even if it were passive and focused on compliance with non-discrimination provisions, without fully addressing issues related to inclusion (Dawson & Peacock-Smith, 2020).

2.2 | Managerial

From the 1980s, the traditional, legalistic public service approach was considered too large, unaffordable, unresponsive, and needing reform. New Public Management (NPM) (Hood, 1990, 1995; Ferlie et al., 2005) responded to demands for more efficient and effective government services and better value for public funds, holding that government should be designed, organised, and managed quasi-business, emphasising incentives and performance monitoring (Alford & Hughes, 2008). It introduced citizens as customers and proposed a decentralised control of resources, including personnel, and a contractual approach to service provisions, such as purchaser–provider separation and public–private partnerships (Hughes, 1998). Along with this came labour market deregulation, with collective agreements replaced by individual rewards and contracts (Williamson et al., 2020).

Underscored by free-market principles and reduced regulatory oversight, NPM reframed employees and their skills as resources or commodities to be deployed by the organisation for increased performance and productivity (Crowley & Hodson, 2014). Organisational practices and culture were adjusted to manage a diverse workforce and leverage enhanced worker performance and efficiency to increase productivity and competitive advantage (Diefenbach, 2009; Somani, 2021). A transactional relationship ensued with payment exchanged for performance and productivity (Cardona, 2000; Teicher & Gramberg, 1998). With this re-orientation, diversity was not just accommodated but harnessed and actively managed through practices that converged workers' needs with organisational goals (Kirton & Greene, 2005; Pyke, 2005).

In the managerial approach, senior management provides the strategic vision and rationale for workforce D&I, while devolving to managers responsibility for daily work assignment, performance assessment, and compliance (Denhardt & Zinzant, 2000; Hoggett, 1996; Lapuente & van de Walle, 2020). The alignment of work roles and practices to operational goals, however, falls primarily to the strategic human resources function (Offerman & Basford, 2014), through targeted recruitment, education and training, career development, and mentoring to increase and retain workforce heterogeneity and performance (Ingraham, 2005; Ivancevich & Gilbert, 2000).

D&I policies and initiatives focus on overcoming institutional barriers preventing employees from applying their full complement of skills to work tasks (Syed & Kramar, 2010). A more comprehensive range of programs and initiatives emerge, including targeted recruitment, training and development, career advancement, engagement, and benefits programs to encourage employees to use their personal assets to work more effectively (Soldan & Nankervis, 2014). Program effectiveness is, in turn, measured using diversity measures to capture various diversity dimensions, whereas inclusion measures start to focus on perceptions of work experiences.

The managerial approach gives organisations more control of their D&I direction and the extent of their implementation, including which D&I elements are prioritised (Strachan et al., 2007). Following this, Williamson et al. (2020) and others (Kramar, 2012) contend that NPM's efficiency reforms, such as the devolution of managerial responsibility, stalled earlier equity advancements.

Despite advancing D&I thinking and actions, incorporating nascent inclusion practices (Kirton & Greene, 2005; Syed & Kramar, 2010), managerialism's reliance on HR to drive processes undermined optimal inclusion levels (Llopis, 2017). This approach, in concentrating almost exclusively on identity diversity dimensions, can produce interventions deficient in addressing other factors that account for individual uniqueness crucial for improved inclusion outcomes. This ultimately contributes to sub-optimal deployment of scarce D&I resources. Finally, even while espousing inclusion, the approach preferences improved performance and productivity over employees' sense of organisational connection, satisfaction, and well-being (Cardona, 2000).

2.3 | Integrative

The integration of D&I into all organisational components (strategy, structure, staff) and systems (HR, finance, information technology, and communications) aims to achieve a closer alignment between strategic goals and worker efforts to enhance performance and productivity (Offerman & Basford, 2014; Hussien et al., 2014). Here, D&I moves from an 'add-on' to a core, strategically driven organisational function (Kramar, 2012; Pkye, 2005), with proactive senior management providing overall direction, authenticity, and cultural leadership. To support this work-based alignment/shift, HR deliberately focused on developing processes designed to increase employee involvement and satisfaction and facilitate middle and line managers' more direct involvement

in the implementation of D&I (Offerman & Basford, 2014). Mor Barak (cited in Shore et al., 2011) posited that that efforts to increase employee involvement through participation and influencing decision-making processes led to a range of positive individual and organisation outcomes including job satisfaction and commitment. Diversity indicators centre on worker profiles, satisfaction levels, and D&I culture audits (increasingly captured by computer technology, such as online surveys). Organisations progressing to an integrated approach define diversity as individual differences and focus inclusion efforts on the employee's lived experiences. Under this approach, employers demonstrate that they listen and act on employees' and other stakeholders' preferences and that they are open to dialogue about enhancing a sense of belonging and recognising uniqueness. This emerging focus on belonging and uniqueness requires managers to work towards a work environment where diverse subordinates feel they belong and are valued for their unique characteristics (Shore et al., 2011).

Engagement is a strategy to raise workers' emotional and intellectual commitment to work and, in so doing, direct discretionary effort toward organisational interests (Saks, 2006; Winter & Jackson, 2014). It draws on intrinsic incentives, such as flexible conditions, shared purpose, input into work design, and skills deployment and development, to make work more meaningful and employees feel valued and included (Saks, 2006). Personal experiences, preferences, and work relationships are captured best through qualitative processes and inclusion metrics (Shore et al., 2018). This focus on engagement and inclusion facilitates development of feelings of obligation and trust, in turn encouraging reciprocation in the form of organisational citizenship behaviours, organisational commitment, and work performance (Shore et al., 2011). Engagement strategies extend to external stakeholders, whose expertise can enhance performance and support the organisation's social licence (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005; Keast, 2021; KPMG International, 2021; Kramar, 2012). Community-centric inclusion initiatives include stakeholder engagement and other outreach programs, with end-user values, languages, and expectations increasingly incorporated into public sector goals and materials (Stewart, 2009; D'Emidio et al., 2021).

Transformational leadership is a crucial antecedent to public sector D&I change (Wright & Pandey, 2010) and is also argued to be supportive of building inclusion and reducing detrimental diversity-related outcomes (Gotsis & Grimani, 2016; Kearney & Gebert, 2009; Shore et al., 2011). It relies on demonstrating authentic values and actions to build followers' sense of self-worth and organisational commitment and positively influences performance (Muchiri & Ayoko, 2013), especially when personal interests become forfeited for shared goals. At the same time, the transformational leader's focus on individual consideration helps ensure that team members feel acknowledged and appreciated in their uniqueness while they foster collective team identification in diverse teams thereby helping to tap the benefits of team diversity (Kearney & Gebert, 2009). Simultaneously, leadership supporting inclusion is distributed to those best placed for broader championing of D&I and implementing associated changes (Bolden, 2011), along with adequate resources and delegation to do so.

Integrating D&I into and across systems to harness individual and collective effort and commitment is a fundamental shift in the way organisations interact with and use their workforce and stakeholders' capabilities for enhanced performance and scaled productivity. Informed D&I design is needed to increase inclusion and ensure engagement delivers both organisational and worker benefits (Cardona, 2000).

2.4 | Next practice

Grounded in current knowledge and contexts (Derven, 2014; Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelley, 2006; Kreitz, 2008), current 'best' practices are a poor fit for emergent and continuous workplace technological and social changes. 'Next' practice D&I approaches are needed to better cope with the resulting continuous disruptions and opportunities (Bednar & Welch, 2020). 'Next' practice is future oriented, emergent, and without guiding exemplars. It is adaptable, able to identify, interpret, act on multiple change signals, and privileges experimentation, discovery, co-creation, and genuine inclusion (Prahald, 2010; Prahald & Ramaswamy, 2004). Managing the future requires the public sector to prepare itself for 'next' D&I practice, with the transformative approach the next iteration.

2.5 | Transformative

Although a multi-generational workforce drives transformational D&I, younger worker cohorts are often the primary advocates. This group is more digitally connected, cognitively diverse, and socially minded, prioritising the alignment of personal, social, and business values (Claus, 2019; KPMG International, 2021). Accordingly, they have a higher commitment to and expectations of diversity and especially inclusion as a conduit to meaningful work experiences and societal outcomes (Li et al., 2019; Winter & Jackson, 2014). This standpoint extends diversity beyond narrow demographic and cultural representations, including multiplexity of thinking, connections, and roles at all organisational levels, with diverse perspectives actively sourced, canvassed, and incorporated into organisational efforts. Customised employee programs recognise and value individual uniqueness and personal needs/preferences, provide opportunities to develop and use skills, be difference-makers, and delegate decision-making to contribute to positive work experiences (Li et al., 2019; Suseno et al., 2020; Winter & Jackson, 2014).

This inclusion extension builds on early initiatives to create a sense of belonging and value uniqueness and centres on the empowerment of employees, a relational construct where people with power share power, resources, information, and reward and create an environment supporting genuine participation (Shore et al., 2018). In emphasising empowerment as a means of increased belonging, alternative processes become necessary that actively promote and support openness, speaking-up, genuine participation in problem-solving and solution creation, and exposure to opportunity. Underpinning this is a trust-based connectivity culture that facilitates teaming, collaboration, experimentation (KPMG International, 2021), and self-organisation (Conrad, 2008). In re-patterning the expectations and interactions to move collectively towards both individual and shared goal attainment, leaders and followers engage in (re)generative conversations that build trust and nurture and sustain the relationships needed for shared ways of working (Hutchins & Storm, 2019). Leadership promoting, modelling, and facilitating inclusion-centric D&I approaches at all levels is necessarily multi-dimensional involving relational (also called inclusive, integrative, collaborative, and authentic) and distributed styles (Bolden, 2011; Gotsis & Grimani, 2016; Shore et al., 2018). Inclusive leadership is a critical capability to leverage diverse thinking in a workforce with increasingly diverse markets, customers, and talent. As indicated earlier in this paper, organisational responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the criticality of leadership approaches with inclusion at the core (Lundy et al., 2021), thereby adding impetus for organisations to strive for transformative D&I.

Broader frameworks inform these new processes, for example, agile management, human-centred design thinking, and behavioural economics revolutionising problem-solving,

decision-making, and flexible workforce approaches (Claus, 2019). HR personnel access analytics, big data, and social media and use shared values approaches to recruit new candidates. At the same time, AI, augmented reality, and cognitive computing are relied upon to reduce human error and bias while affording less invasive data collection processes to craft individual responses. The evolution of these technologies may free employees to focus on higher impact initiatives that deliver more targeted and personalised services and work satisfaction (Daub et al., 2020). Such sophisticated technologies raise new regulatory and moral and ethical implications to ensure that D&I advances include and benefit all people and protect privacy (Bednar & Welch, 2020).

Transformative approaches are not something for the future; there are already instructive public sector examples in action, such as the Belgian Social Security Service, where advanced inclusion is evident by employee self-management (Corporate Rebels, n.d.). Being fit for the future means different things for each organisation. But how does an organisation know its current D&I capacity, consider where it should be to deal with future contexts adequately, and plan for what is needed to shift to 'next' practice D&I with its stronger emphasis on inclusion? A CMM can assist in developing this roadmap.

3 | DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION DESIGN: CAPABILITY MATURITY MODELS

Like many countries, Australia has amassed various pieces of legislation, policies, procedures, and practices related to D&I. Each level of maturity adds new systems of practices while retaining crucial elements such as legislation and can revert to previous levels if the context or activities require it. It is also possible for an organisation (or work groups within an organisation) to be at different maturity levels for various dimensions. Because organisations' context (history, culture, capability) and strategic intent are unique, careful selection of the appropriate approach is required and, when appropriate, so too are deliberately planned moves from level to level. Therefore, formulating fit-for-purpose D&I strategy and initiatives requires differentiation between approaches, identifying intersection points and capability gaps.

CMMs help organisations to (1) understand the potential and uniqueness of different approaches and (2) self-assess the maturity (strengths and weaknesses) of their workplace structure and practices against current and future objectives. CMMs have both descriptive (what is) and prescriptive (what ought to be) functions (Schmidtchen & Cotton, 2014). Through this analysis, organisations can make better-informed decisions about their D&I directions, analyse gaps and barriers, and prioritise steps for improvements, especially against more ambitious D&I objectives.

The D&I CMM set out in Figure 1 is structured at four levels, illustrating the evolution of D&I while distilling core operating elements for each and emphasising the inclusion practices that account for diverse and more involved employee profiles.

The first level, *Compliance*, represents the most basic level of D&I maturity. It concerns itself primarily with legal compliance, limiting the conceptualisation of diversity to visible dimensions. Inclusion, if considered, is a secondary concern, leaders have limited involvement or commitment to driving D&I forward, and actions are reactive and compunctious.

The business focus of the *Managerial* level expands the definition of diversity to include visible and non-visible dimensions. The approach is to leverage the benefits of diversity for organisational competitive advantage, with dedicated programs to facilitate the exchange of payment for work.

		Drivers and focus	Responsibility/leadership	Inclusion and diversity measurement	Mechanisms and defining features	
Inclusion	Transformative	Inclusion embedded in corporate DNA, diversity a given. Organisational adoption of continuous 'next practice' future focus. Holistic and inclusive value creation. Multi-generational socially minded workforce.	Mutual responsibility/accountability Leadership relational: Re-generative, authentic and inclusive/distributive (change agents modelling inclusion)	Inclusion emphasis Empowered workforce. Demographic and cognitive diversity (multivariant). **Measures:** Advanced analytics (augmented AI, AR, cognitive computing).	Alignment of personal, organisational and social values (individual/collective intentionality). Flexibility mainstreamed. High performing/diverse thinking teams. Hyper-connected systems. Trust-based connectivity culture. Agile management, human centred design thinking.	Collaboration, cocreation and experimentation. Bespoke inclusion programs recognising and valuing individual uniqueness (drawn from big data, social media etc.) and creating a deep sense of "belonging" Transparency, openness – decision-making/hold organisation to account. New moral/ethical obligations.
	Integrative	Inclusion matters, diversity embedded Strategy, mission, policies D&I ingrained in business strategy and integrated into systems and all organisational components.	Top down (primary), with increased bottom-up responsibility. Transformational/integrative, distributive leadership. Strategic HR driven.	Diversity/differences embraced as core organisational element. Inclusion is conscious use of engagement, intrinsic benefits focus on intrinsic engagement (shared purpose). Multi-dimensionality and intersectionality focus. **Measures:** quantitative and qualitative (maturing analytics, online surveys) Worker profiles, satisfaction levels. Employee experiences, inclusion metrics, culture audits.	Shared purpose/benefits negotiated. Systemic barriers addressed. D&I culture embedded and monitored. Multiple role models. Employee and stakeholder preferences listened to and acted on. Increasing dialogue about enhancing a sense of belonging and recognising uniqueness	Flexible conditions. Evidence-based programs. D&I advocacy. Partnerships with stakeholders. Input into work design. Meaningful work.
Diversity	Managerial	Diversity for gain Mission, strategy, policies Aligning organisation/worker needs/goals, competitive advantage (productivity)	Strategic/HR Transactional Leadership. Vision from senior leaders. Middle managers assume some responsibility	Unique diversity dimensions harnessed for productivity (visible and invisible dimensions). Inclusion espoused (structural). **Measures:** Quantitative and qualitative. Demographic numbers and targets. Beginning analytics/online.	Business case articulated. Focus primarily on observable diversity dimensions. Ad hoc stand-alone initiatives ERG, ally.	Inclusion espoused, beginning efforts. Targeted recruitment, T&D, career development focussed on helping employees to apply skills.
	Compliance	Diversity as required Legal framework guiding policies, procedures. Compliance with legislation, mandated, anti-discrimination.	Legal/HR, delegated autocratic limited involvement in driving D&I forward.	Narrow visible definition of diversity. Largely homogenous workforce. Inclusion silent. **Measures:** Quantitative tick boxes 'counts', reporting mandated/limited	Interventions on opportunity equality. Passive exclusions and individual backlash. Reactive compliance actions. Limited training.	

FIGURE 1 Diversity and inclusion capability maturity model

Leaders assume a higher level of responsibility for promoting diversity, with the nascent notion of inclusion largely espoused, not enacted.

Integrative D&I approaches strategically thread diversity multi-dimensionality into organisational systems to promote more robust interaction between people and processes. Inclusion becomes necessary to facilitate optimal engagement of workers with organisational goals. Leaders have an increased role in driving change to build and support a diverse workforce and an increasingly inclusive work environment.

Transformative D&I is the 'next practice' approach that maximises individual and collective sense of belonging, uniqueness, intentionality, and value. This approach is characterised by multi-variant (demographic and cognitive) diversity and genuinely enacts inclusive principles and processes for which everyone in the organisation is held accountable. Leadership is dispersed and inherently inclusive and relational, with leaders at all levels embracing the opportunity to create environments where individuals feel valued for their uniqueness and supporting belonging, collaboration, co-creation, and experimentation.

Each level of the D&I CMM offers greater potential for creating inclusive practices and producing valued outcomes.

Several publicly available D&I CMMs exist (Australian HR Institute, n.d.; Bourke & Dillon, 2018). Few, however, consider inclusion in detail, address 'next' practice D&I, or provide practical implementation guidance, especially relative to the public sector. Professional judgement, informed by widespread collaboration and rich data, is critical in making informed use of the D&I CMM to identify capability gaps and select practical, complementary actions for change. Such action commences with consideration of contextual and organisational factors such as size, culture, and service objectives and self-assessment against the levels of the CMM. Having established the organisation's current D&I level and its goal, the next task is to identify what improvements, actions, and capabilities are required to make this transition.

Ultimately, therefore, cultural change is contingent on the reassessment of existing value systems, mindsets, and practices to follow new paths, for example a path that pro-actively and genuinely advocates inclusion and belonging. The reflective actions in deploying the D&I CMM can open dialogue between workers, leaders, and stakeholders, enabling honest conversations about the organisation's readiness to make necessary adjustments in effort and resources (thus minimising the risk of directing investments in the wrong directions). It can also challenge 'old' thinking to enhance current practices and prepare organisations and workers to become diversity and especially inclusion champions.

4 | CONCLUSION

D&I is at the heart of effective public sector performance, making its design and implementation crucial for improving performance and meeting workforce and societal expectations. The array of approaches, including next practice, can confound D&I design and implementation. Moreover, although espoused, inclusion remains poorly conceived: often an exception rather than a core emphasis. The D&I CMM tool outlined herein guides the assessment of organisational capabilities against 'best' and 'next' D&I practice requirements, leading to a more targeted set of goals and actions with a greater chance of achieving the desired results. Once trialled in relation to D&I, 'next' practice approaches could have broader application in other government and non-government contexts.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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