



Thriving through diversity in a crisis

How workplace diversity and
inclusion can reduce inequality
and strengthen businesses



Oliver Camplin-Warner
CEO – International
Telstra

In the six months since the World Health Organisation officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, we have seen how the coronavirus has exacerbated inequality, with certain segments of society impacted more than others. [McKinsey's analysis](#) shows that, overall, women's jobs and livelihoods are more vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic. Women's jobs are 1.8 times more at risk compared with men's jobs, with women making up 39 percent of global employment and yet accounting for 54 percent of overall job losses.

Women are more vulnerable due to existing gender inequalities manifested in unpaid care, female leadership representation, as well as access to resources such as education, credit from financial institutions and mobile banking in many parts of the world. However, addressing equality issues extends past gender alone – it requires a commitment to a diverse and inclusive workplace. This has to address areas including, but not limited to, racial equality, ageism, ableism, cultural and religious diversity and sexual orientation.

Furthermore, organisations must be ready to face an even greater challenge – that of addressing long-standing biases embedded into the culture of businesses, where change represents a threat to the status quo. How we engage and motivate the people in our organisations is a big piece of the puzzle we have to solve.

Why should organisations care about inclusion and diversity at all? [Research](#) shows organisations that emphasise these qualities can reap a host of benefits to make them more competitive. These include the ability to better attract and retain talent, improve the quality of decision-making, increase customer insight and innovation, drive employee motivation and satisfaction, and – not least – improve their global image.



Supporting diversity and inclusion at the workplace

As a business, Telstra employs tens of thousands of people in Australia and around the world, and services millions of customers every day. For us to do so responsibly – and successfully – our business practices have to embrace the diversity of the very same people we employ and serve.

We therefore work hard at incorporating diversity and inclusion strategies into all areas of our operations. Our Diversity and Inclusion Council, which includes executive members from every business function, meets twice every quarter. The Council's role is to discuss our progress toward our diversity objectives, including employment for people with a disability, LGBTQI+ inclusion, gender equality and ensuring our employees understand and reflect the people we serve as customers.

Telstra has recently become one of only a dozen Australian organisations to be recognised by the Australian Network on Disability (AND) as a Disability Confident Recruiter (DCR). This recognises us as an accessible workplace of choice for the one in five Australians who live with a disability. Being certified as a DCR means we've worked to remove barriers to the recruitment process and build new workplace adjustments to cater for those with an accessibility requirement, while becoming an employer of choice within the disabled community to attract more talented individuals to our ranks. Besides sponsoring the AND Annual Conference, we also participated in its Stepping Into Internship program which matched four disabled university students with roles in our business.

LGBTQI+ inclusion is also very important to us. Last year, we joined the Intertech alliance, a professional network that advocates for LGBTQI+ inclusion, and hosted the launch of an inter-organisational mentoring program. We are active members of Pride in Diversity, Australia's national employer support program for LGBTQI+ workplace inclusion. Telstra Spectrum, our organisation's LGBTQI+ support network, continues to thrive in its twelfth year.

A key learning from COVID-19 is that building diversity goes hand-in-hand with business resilience. As the world adapted to a mass flexible working model, it became apparent that working from home is not only important for organisations to attract and retain diverse talent, it is actually one of the most important risk management and business continuity strategies we can adopt.

Our employee engagement scores soared from an already high baseline as our people responded to the implicit trust we placed in them to do their jobs from wherever they were, whatever their personal situation demanded. The success of remote working relies not only on technology to implement it, but also a culture where presenteeism doesn't exist.

One of the most important things we have done to promote diversity at Telstra was to change our approach to flexible working through initiatives such as [All Roles Flex](#). Diversity adds enormous value to our organisation, and most roles in our company can be done flexibly if we equip our people with the tools and connectivity they needed to make working away from the office a seamless experience. At Telstra, we don't just sell our technology, we use it.

This approach has allowed people to choose when and if they come into the office, what works best for them in avoiding peak periods, being able to do school pick-ups and drop-offs, and care for family members as the average age of populations increases. This is particularly important for the participation of women in the workforce. It also meant that our workforce was prepared to adapt to new ways of working, when COVID-19 disrupted the global workforce.

Promoting gender equality

Many changes wrought by the pandemic will be permanent, for example in the way we work. Gartner estimated that more than 90 per cent of businesses enforced working from home in response to the coronavirus lockdown. While it's unlikely that level of remote working will endure, more organisations will understand it's possible and even more productive.

When it comes to senior positions for women, we see this tail off as employees take a break for family life. In many cases when they return to work, they can be years behind in terms of opportunity for progression. Companies should implement strong retention policies centred around keeping in touch with employees during career breaks, and having them take on more senior positions with flexible working policies upon return from parental leave. Access to these working arrangements leads to greater representation of women within senior positions and drives opportunities for promotions.



At Telstra, we are focused on creating an equal workplace. We are a founding member of Male Champions of Change, a group of Australia's most influential and diverse male senior executives dedicated to elevating women's leadership representation on the national business agenda.

A key driver for our T22 vision for Telstra's transformation to a more agile organisation was the retention of as many women as possible. This year we've seen a small increase in female representation, achieving our objective for women to make up 32 per cent of our overall workforce.

Gender pay equity continues to be of key importance at Telstra, as we develop and implement policies and initiatives to drive greater equity across the organisation. At an executive level, our gender pay parity is 100 per cent. We acknowledge more needs to be done at other levels, and are continuously looking to identify, target and reduce any gender pay gaps that exist within the organisation, including compensation ratios within bands. Parity isn't just about equal earning rights – the broader picture we recognise at Telstra is winning the fight against female poverty as women get older. Less pay during working life means less money into pensions – women live longer than men and so the challenge is magnified even more.

Inclusivity for all workers

While COVID-19 has severely disrupted our economy and our society, it has also created an unprecedented opportunity for far-reaching reform.

In reflecting on the world-changing events of 2020, I hope we learn that promoting diversity and inclusion at the workplace isn't just the right thing to do – it's also good for business. By being forced into new working environments through COVID-19, many of us now understand that business practices can adapt to change rapidly, with the right support and mindset.

It's up to us to seize the moment and step up to champion inclusion and diversity practices. This starts with initiatives that span all sectors, from flexible working arrangements to educational outreach. Whether in business, government or society, diversity can be the glue that holds us together through this global crisis, strengthening our collective resilience against future challenges.



About Telstra

Telstra is a leading telecommunications and technology company with a proudly Australian heritage and a longstanding, growing international business.

Today, we operate in over 20 countries outside of Australia, providing services to thousands of business, government, carrier and OTT customers. Telstra Enterprise is a division of Telstra that provides data and IP networks and network application services, such as managed networks, unified communications, cloud, industry solutions and integrated services.

Telstra Purple, our new professional and managed services business in Australia, Asia and the UK, brings together people and innovative solutions to define and deliver a clear vision of our customers' transformation journey, network foundation, and the protection they need to thrive.

Telstra's global network includes more than 26 cable systems spanning over 400,000 kilometres, with access to multiple cable landing stations and more than 2,000 points of presence around the world. Our subsea cable network is the largest in Asia Pacific, with access to the most lit capacity not just in Asia, but also from the region to Australia, USA and Europe.

For more information visit www.telstra.com.

