



Diversity as a Strategic Workforce Advantage in Australia's Defence Sector

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Olivia Agate reflects on how community, allyship and visibility are reshaping the future of defence through diversity

What once was a 'nice-to-have' has become a strategic imperative in terms of meeting workforce demands and creating a different way of thinking. The UK have recognised this and the majority of the Defence Industry have signed a commitment to having 30% female participation for 2030 (30 by 30). Recently, the Navy spoke at the ADM Women's Breakfast and also stated their commitment to have 28% by 2030.

Women's Defence Connection (WDC) was created 2 years ago in response to the need for a sense of community for women in the Victorian defence sector. What began as 6 women connecting over coffee quickly morphed into a community of up to 120 women connecting to share stories, empower one another and slowly start changing the face of Defence Industry for the better. A big question I tend to ask myself is, why? Why did Industry take to this initiative so quickly and are industry we hoping to gain?

What I have learnt from this journey is that diversity absolutely matters. Any one-dimensional team only has one view and that creates a huge risk to any task. We need an array of ideas and perspectives in order to make the most informed decisions. Diverse perspectives = stronger solutions.

Female participation is also known to bring better dynamics in terms of leadership and team dynamics. Gender diverse teams communicate better and foster better teamwork. And quite frankly, more female participation closes the gap to accessing a wider talent pool.



With the USA suddenly banishing their DEI initiatives, which is having a knock on effect to Australia, now is a really important time as an industry to lean further into diversity as a strategic advantage so that we have a competitive edge. I believe a lot of this comes down to lack of knowledge on how.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

If there is a woman out there that you think is bloody awesome. Firstly, tell her. We need to be empowering females in our workforce and that starts with just saying, "You did a great job here". If you hold a position of seniority within the organisation and there is something you could do to get this woman to where she needs to be, help her.

In England (where I am from) we have a saying '*Look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves*' which means, do the small things first and the bigger things will take effect.

Allyship. I am talking to the chaps now. We need you. This isn't a girls club that you're not invited to. We need you on board. Be curious. Ask questions. Remember, this is a strategic workforce advantage for everyone.

'You can't be what you can't see' – This mainly relates to women in leadership. If you're a woman and you want to grow, there are so many amazing initiatives/mentoring programs that can nurture you. Plus, I am sure there is a strong network in MEMKO that you can lean on too. The next generation of women are coming and they need someone to aspire to. You got this! And if you think you don't, come speak to WDC!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Olivia is the President of Women's Defence Connection (WDC), a growing community supporting women across Victoria's defence sector. She is also a passionate advocate for veteran employment and early career pathways, serving as Industry Engagement Lead at Navantia Australia.

Learn more about WDC: <https://www.wdcvic.com.au>