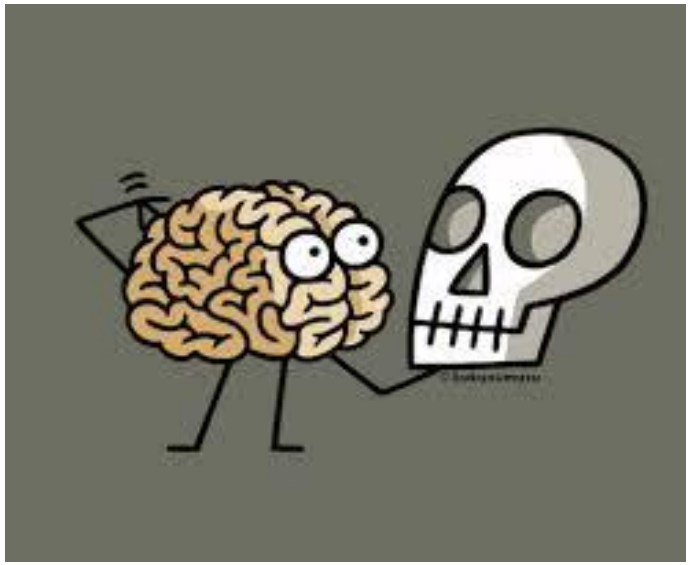
The Benefits of Diversity for Organisational Health and Prosperity

Jo Hamilton

20th October 2026



HumanFactors [SA]
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Learning Outcomes and Outline

- Some diversity neuroscience
- Benefits of Diversity
- Challenges of Diversity
- Strategies to Maximise Diversity

A Premise

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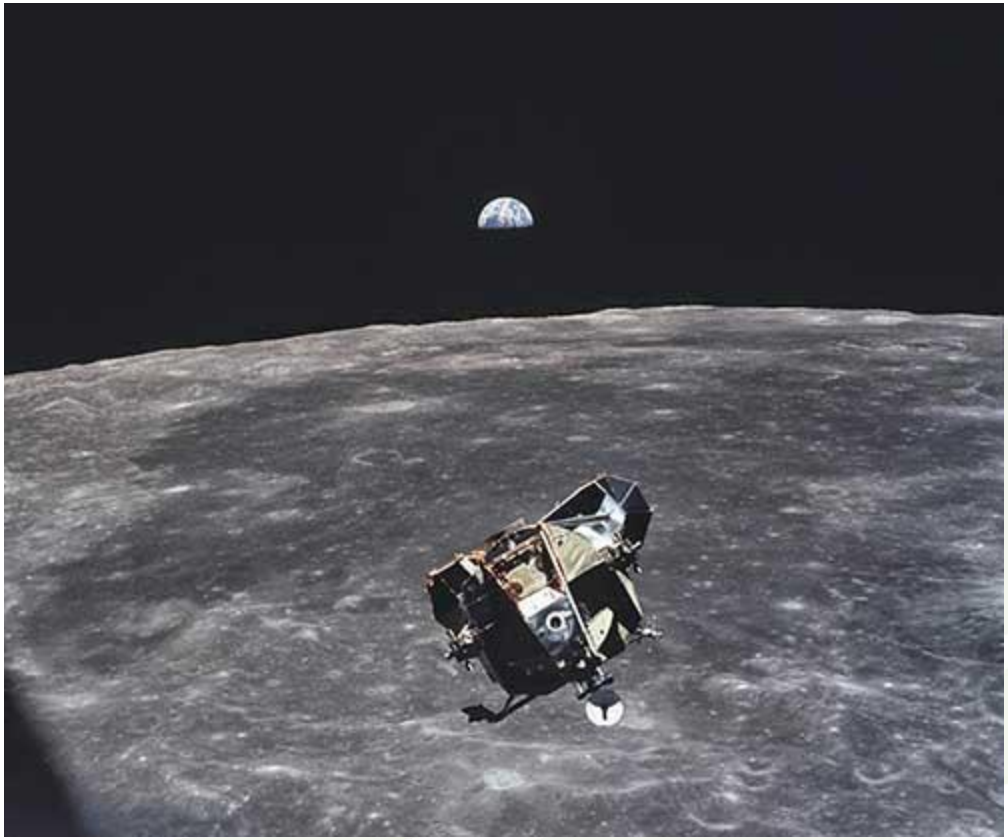


The Psychology of Diversity

- Dismantling DEI will not make society more “merit based”
- Inherent biases are a fundamental aspect of the human brain

Some Neuroscience

How the brain works

- We think in categories
- We can't consciously multitask
- We are wired to connect and disconnect
- We seek to confirm and conform

The Brain

The human brain may be can be divided into

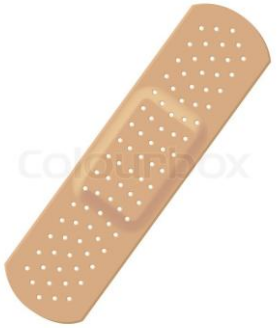
- Executive Functioning = System 2: Conscious, controlled, “rational”, deliberate
- Automatic / Salience System = System 1: Gut feelings, visceral reactions, emotions and intuitions, unconscious associations – not concerned with accuracy or fairness

The Brain

- We don’t see reality, we see patterns
- Apophenia / Pareidolai - the tendency to perceive meaningful connections between unrelated things
- We interpret the world by what we have been exposed to

Implicit Associations

- Implicit Associations Test
- AI bias
- We think in heuristics for problem solving and decision making



Biases and Stereotypes

- Preconceived notions about something or someone.
- Occur instantly, unconsciously and effortlessly and often without self knowledge.
- People don't treat you differently because they constantly think about it, they treat you differently because they don't make an effort to not think about it.

no ….., no…… no beardos, no weirdos, no wimps, no radicals.
Pete Hegseth

Female Pilots

Male Pilots

Reference Man: Created in mid – 1970's white male, 25 to 35 years old, weighing around 70 kilograms and about 170 centimetres tall.

Read the Colour (not the word)

Read the Colour (not the word)

Stroop Effect

YELLOW BLUE ORANGE

BLACK RED GREEN

PURPLE YELLOW RED

ORANGE GREEN BLUE

BLUE RED PURPLE

YELLOW RED GREEN

Wired to Connect and Disconnect

When you're smiling the whole world smiles with you

When you're yawning the world comes yawning too

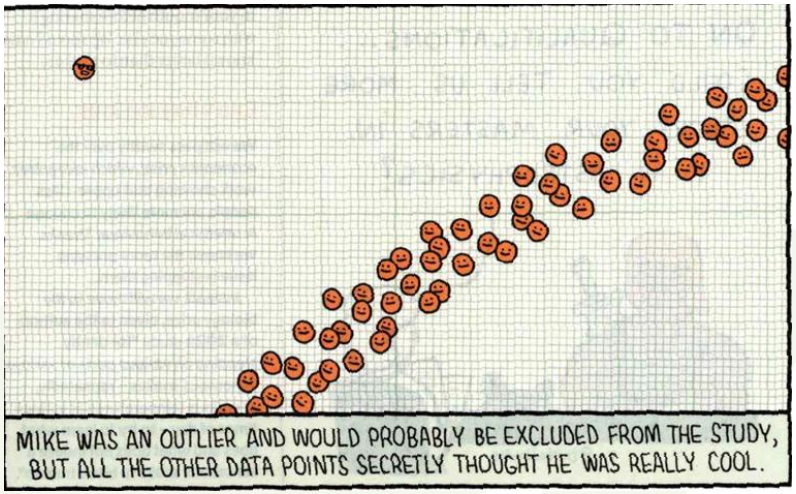
And yet…

When the world seems uncertain, we are more likely to be attracted to people who are just like us and more rejecting of difference

Irving Janis.

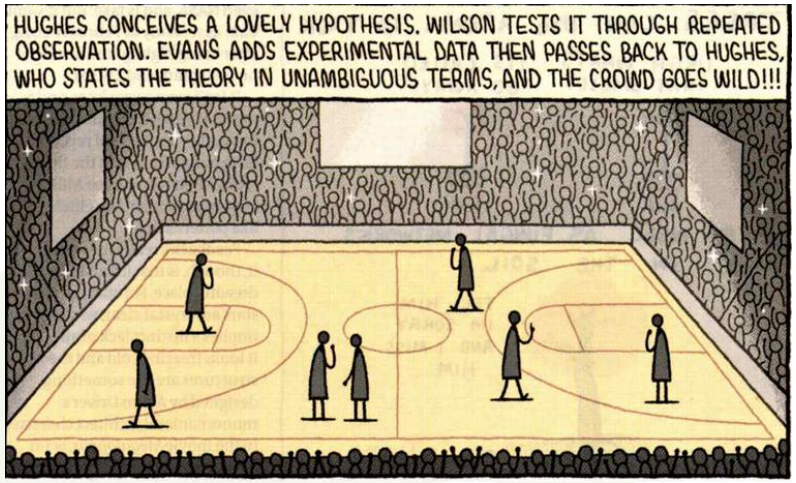
Implications

- Stereotypes get in the way
- Can move from empathy to "they are not like us"
- In groups versus out groups
- "People like me" – Similarity Attraction
- Paradox – the brain loves predictability and routine to avoid overload but will grow and learn under unpredictability



We Seek to Confirm and Conform

- Prioritise harmony and unity = suppression of doubt, ignorance of warning signs and dissent.
- Disagreement = disloyal.
- Silence = consensus
- Confidence rises as judgement deteriorates under social pressure
- Wisdom requires capacity to tolerate disagreement and uncertainty
- Diversity is a threat



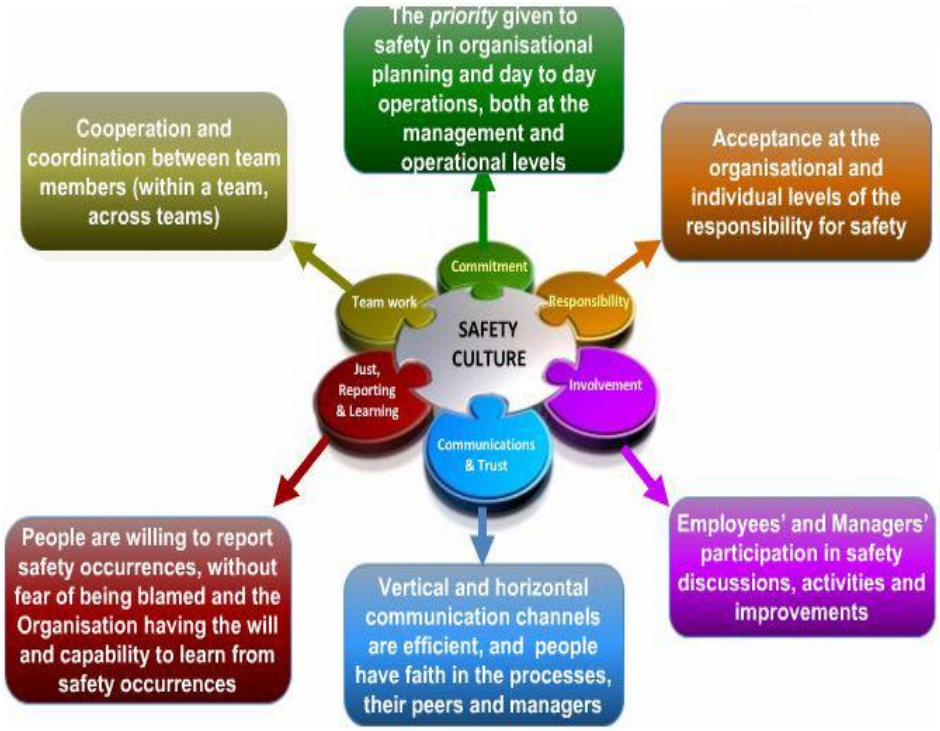
Definition of Diversity

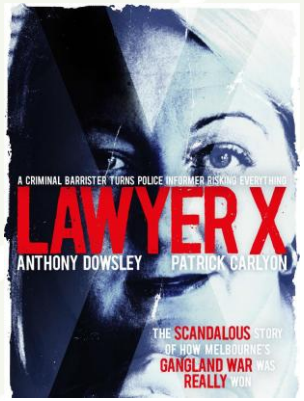
Differences among individuals in a group or unit on an attribute or set of attributes.

- Surface level diversity: Identity diversity
  - Things that are visible.
  - Ethnicity, gender, age and physical abilities.
- Deep level diversity: Cognitive diversity
  - Not visible to the eye
  - Values, attitudes, beliefs and knowledge.
- Are often related

Benefits of Diversity

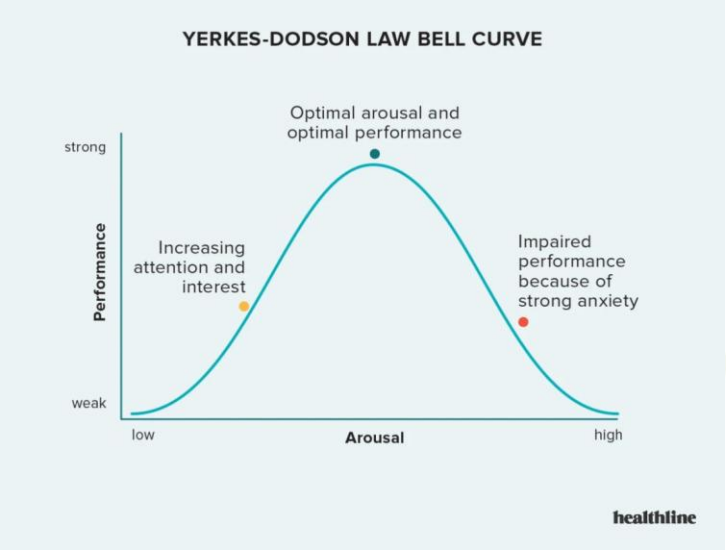
- Counteract Normalisation of Deviance / Noble Cause Corruption / Localised Rationality





Benefits of Diversity

- Collections of people with diverse perspectives and heuristics outperform collections of people who rely on homogeneous perspectives and heuristics
- Random collections of intelligent problem solvers can outperform collections of the best individual problem solvers
- Can inspire creativity and drive innovation
- Can attract and retain the “best talent”



However

- Tipping point – need a certain number to sway culture

The Importance of Friction

Challenges of Diversity

- Ensuring that everyone is heard
- Integration is difficult in face of prejudice
- Misinterpretation
- Navigating employment laws
- Differences in professional etiquette
- Curiosity versus safety

Richard Hill

Strategies to Maximise Diversity

Attraction, Selection and Attrition process

- Attraction – who is likely to apply for a job in your organisation
  - Low diversity leads to low diversity
- Selection - who is likely to get a job offer from your organisation
  - Job fit and organisation fit
- Attrition - who is likely to quit or be fired from your organisation
  - Fairness and the Psychological Contract

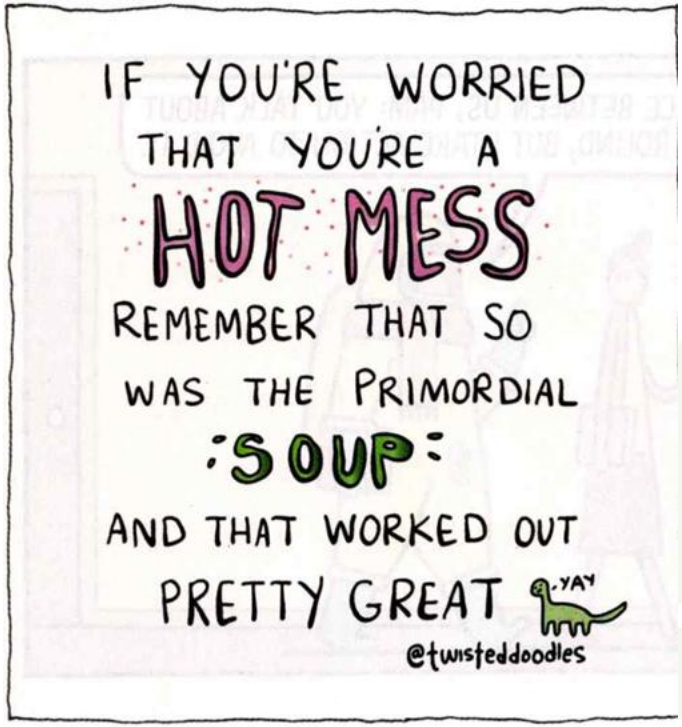
Strategies to Maximise Diversity

- Create a group norm of kindness, politeness and understanding
- PC = Professional Correctness.
- It's good for individuals
- It's good for business
- It's good for society

To Infinity and Beyond

Final Word

Before you judge someone, you should walk a mile in their shoes. That way, when you judge them, you're a mile away and you have their shoes.



Questions / Thoughts

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Diversity

Often the younger aircrew knew something that the older aircrew didn't
Often the less experienced aircrew knew something the more experienced aircrew didn't
Often the groundcrew knew something that the aircrew didn't
Often the backend crew knew something that the frontend didn't
Often the one who knew the answer wasn't asked
Often the one who knew the answer didn't speak up
Often the one knew the answer did speak up and wasn't listened to
Often the one who knew the answer did speak up and was listened to and was subsequently ignored
People assume that qualifications and background equal knowledge and judgement
People assume that knowledge is area and person specific
Make no assumptions about what people can contribute
Remain blind to age, experience, gender, sexuality, culture, qualifications and area of expertise
Never forget that ego, pride and prejudice can kill