



The HFM team

KEEPING DIVERSITY FRONT OF MIND

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HFM Asset Management is a building efficiency company that provides engineering consulting services and products to reduce energy and water consumption, cost, risk and environmental impact. Headquartered in Western Australia since 2003, the company has grown from a staff of just one to more than 30. Founder and Managing Director Ian Knox discusses how he has gone about forming the diverse and dynamic team the company has today.

Has diversity always been a focus since you started to build HFM Asset Management?

Honestly, having such a diverse team wasn't something that I planned or set out to achieve from the beginning. As the team has grown, our diversity has been the result

of acting in accordance with our company's values of equality and inclusion.

When a position becomes available, our focus is always on finding the most suitable person for the job, regardless of age, nationality or skin colour. The company does not have specific quotas in any of these areas; however, we have exceeded typical expectations on several fronts – for example, 67 per cent of our electrical engineering team are women, and in our facilities management division, more than 50 per cent of our building managers are women.

We aim to emphasise the idea that everyone should be exposed to the same opportunities. Furthermore, just as it wouldn't be fair to reject a good candidate for being part of a minority, it wouldn't be fair to reject a good candidate for not being part of a minority.

What do you believe are the key benefits of having a diverse team?

In any team, each member has different strengths and weaknesses. Having a team that is made up of individuals from diverse backgrounds encourages innovation, and adds a new dimension to knowledge-sharing within our workplace. For that reason, we reinforce an environment of teamwork in which there is constant support and communication between our employees, allowing them to complement each other's talents and overcome each other's weaknesses.

We believe that we encourage staff to speak up, and the result is that we have a very confident team when speaking in open and closed forums.

Where possible, we endeavour to strategically assign projects to two or more

employees that we know to have relevant but different skill sets. We find that this balance allows us to ensure constant interaction between senior and junior staff members, encouraging knowledge transfer within the business and creating a superlative environment for mentoring.

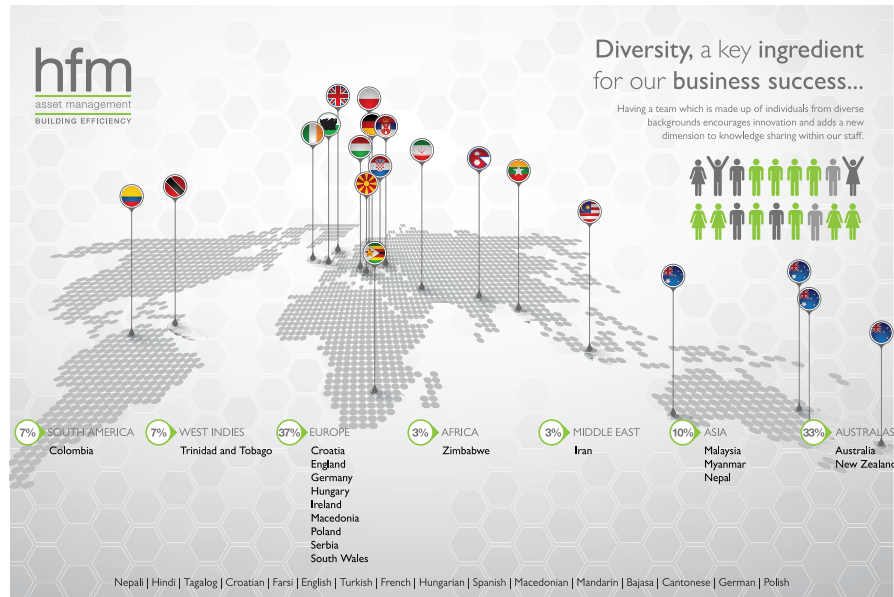
By having a team of employees who come from diverse backgrounds, cultures and belief systems, we are able to integrate multiple perspectives, thought processes and work styles. Being a solutions-based company, the diversity of our workforce provides us with a range of viewpoints; this in turn allows us to think laterally, and approach problem-solving with greater creativity and innovation.

A significant product of our diversity is that the company has effectively zero staff turnover.

Having seen the benefits that diversity has brought to the business, what initiatives are applied by HFM in order to foster a diverse workforce?

Our leadership team actively continues to invest in various initiatives within the business that support diversity. One example, which is perhaps the most important, is our management model: the inverted pyramid. This management model works to empower employees in their decision-making processes while allowing the leadership team to focus on understanding what employees require in order to accomplish their tasks and make sure the required resources are made available. Our employees and consultants are the true face of the business.

Another key initiative that is crucial to managing this process is our weekly team meetings. In these meetings, each employee is given the opportunity to express any thoughts, concerns and issues they might be experiencing with their allocated tasks, or even more generally in the workplace. By providing ongoing support and assistance where required, each team member can more effectively focus on achieving their ultimate goals and targets for a task, and in turn realise the desired outcomes for the customer.



HFM's diversity

We all know that there is more to creating a great working environment than giving people the tools required to complete their day-to-day tasks.

Can you provide some examples of 'extracurricular' activities within HFM where diversity plays an important role?

At HFM, we like to provide opportunities for our staff members to share their cultures with the rest of the staff. An example of this was an activity that took place last year. Because we knew that our server would be down for a couple of hours for software updates, we organised a multicultural lunch where each employee brought something to share that represented their culture. The lunch was a great success! Everyone enjoyed trying the different foods, learning about when they are usually offered and other details about meal times in different cultures. The food was a great excuse to get everyone interacting and sharing their backgrounds, cultures, hometowns and memories. Now, we continue to share various food from our diverse cultures over in-house lunches, with all staff members taking turns to provide and share their favourite dish.

Can you think of any unexpected ways in which diversity has benefited the business?

Our team's diversity allows us to easily access information that would otherwise take further research to find. In October this year, one of our engineering consultants, Beth Morris, was invited to speak at the Property Council of Australia Commercial Property Conference.

The presentation was called 'Electric cars transform cities'. While she was preparing her presentation, Beth's first source of information was her colleagues. They provided information about what they had observed and experienced both when driving our company car – a Holden Volt – as well as their experiences in their home countries or during their overseas travels, where car sharing and electric vehicles are much more prevalent than in Australia.

She continued her research online, and found some information relating to electrical vehicle programs abroad; however, the details were not available in English, but luckily we had a translator readily available – one of our staff members! 🙌