

Revolutionising Aboriginal Employment Strategies: A Blueprint for Organisational Success...

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**The term 'Aboriginal' is intended inclusively, to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. I recognise that people of Torres Strait Islander origin may not be of Aboriginal descent. I respectfully acknowledge Torres Strait Islanders as Australia's First Peoples. I acknowledge their separate culture, belief systems and identities.*

ARTICLE PREFACE

I would like to preface this article by stating it is specifically in relation to Aboriginal recruitment. If actioned appropriately Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people occupy and thrive in **all areas** and **all levels** of employment.

RECOMMENDED PRIOR READING (Articles sent on request)

- Targeted or identifying a role for Aboriginal Recruitment?
- Empowering Aboriginal Governance
- Addressing Cultural Load on Aboriginal Staff

Preparing & Evolving for Aboriginal Recruitment – A Call to Action for Organisational Leaders

Ideally...

Your leadership team has approved the incoming Aboriginal Recruitment Strategy. The launch has been completed, the marketing and

implementation plan is live and ongoing – the organisation is aware of 'the why'. You had a previous, and now obsolete Aboriginal recruitment strategy, it was evaluated, findings were assessed, the experiences of your workforce have been heard and your organisation is eager to embark on this new, meaningful workforce strategy journey.

For organisations embarking on their inaugural Aboriginal employment strategy, the principles outlined in this article are just as pertinent as they are for seasoned practitioners. Utilising benchmark assessments that engage all employees serves as your starting point. This is why I am deeply committed to empowering organisations through my company, Empower Detail and our [3-step process](#).

In this article, I will adopt the term "Aboriginal Employment Strategy" as the naming convention. While other titles may include variations like "Aboriginal Recruitment Strategy," "Aboriginal Strategic Plan," or "Aboriginal Workforce Strategy," I will primarily refer to them under the umbrella of the "Aboriginal Employment Strategy." It's worth noting that these employment strategies often intertwine with Aboriginal engagement strategies and other associated initiatives.

Throughout my career, I've had the privilege of spearheading the co-design, development, launch, implementation, and assessment of five distinct Aboriginal Employment Strategies, each tailored to its specific context and setting. Typically, such strategies endure for 3 to 5 years, depending on organisational maturity and the scope of involved initiatives. I've taken charge of executing and managing the objectives of these strategies, all while actively engaging in internal and external Steering Committees, Working Groups, forums, conferences, keynote addresses, and panels to provide my expertise.

In my experiences and observations, I affirm that numerous organisations implementing Aboriginal employment strategies possess genuine intentions. However, there's a notable deficiency in business readiness, the evolution of insights, and awareness, all of which are crucial for ensuring success.

"But Reece, isn't this why we have an Aboriginal recruitment strategy in the first place?" The answer is wholeheartedly, yes!

I will robustly discuss that it's time to evolve, emphasising that without change, we'll see the same outcomes persist. For the experienced and the newcomers leading these Aboriginal employment strategies, we must note benchmarking and evaluation evidence seriously. Every accountable voice, regardless of cultural background or position within the organisation, deserves serious consideration.

Like all my articles, I urge you to stay with me...

I am under no illusions; operational priorities are exactly that – the priority. Priorities must remain so that your organisation exists and shows customer benefit. Leadership changes, restructures, budget allocation and restraints place impact on what must be actioned, and when. In this vein I have heard and participated in many debates and discussions about why an organisation (or certain area within an organisation) can't participate in a particular initiative, reporting function or implement a certain objective within the perspective Aboriginal employment strategy.

In my observation, and as universally evidenced, successful Aboriginal recruitment strategies hinge on astute

leadership recognising that your workforce is as integral to your success as your customers. This understanding underscores the need for continuous prioritisation of the strategy, ensuring its ongoing success.

Evolution of Approach: *Embracing Reflection, Education & Accountability*

Is that truly a Key Performance Indicator (KPI)? And is the person/role labelled as the initiative owner truly fulfilling that role?

In both the United States and Canada, there has been notable progress and growth. From my research, Canada emerges as a global frontrunner in Indigenous recruitment strategies, resources, and methodologies, showcasing leadership both before and after implementation.

After examining literature and conducting desktop research on Canada and the United States, it is evident that their guiding principles are distinct. To establish fair and inclusive frameworks for Indigenous peoples in Canada and marginalised communities, specifically Black and/or Indigenous People of Colour (BIPOC), comprehensive impact assessments, benchmarking, and narrative strategies are imperative. It is crucial to recognise that the principles of equity in this realm are universally applicable:

- Address systems, not people,
- Create equitable solutions that benefit **all**,
- Ensure that solutions are grounded in and emerge from the experience of communities of Aboriginal descent, by engaging their leaders who are accountable to those communities,

- Commit to collecting race/ethnicity data and use it to track and target the greatest needs, and
- Set measurable, results-based equity goals with specific attention to racial impacts.

Like all strategies, there are initiative owners, this can be in the form of an individual or role owner, for example; (Director, Corporate Services) or a division within your organisation (Corporate Services) – it's a strategy for accountability.

Throughout my professional career I have done my utmost to be an advocate for 'lessons learnt' in this space. Once again, from benchmarking to strategy evaluation, the returns are universally the same in Australia: *'The last Aboriginal employment strategy was too ambitious, there were too many initiatives and not enough time, no accountability, too many leadership changes and no time to re-educate the incoming person/area'*.

To address this challenge, my teams and I have proposed an evolution encompassing reflection, tailored Aboriginal employment education, and heightened awareness of the purpose behind our Aboriginal recruitment strategy. We successfully advocated for the integration of Aboriginal cultural awareness and separately Aboriginal employment education as a fundamental component within organisational frameworks, making it obligatory for individuals engaged in Aboriginal affairs or committed to driving social impact. Emphasising the significance of understanding 'the why' behind such initiatives, we proposed incorporating this perspective into performance agreements, thereby embedding KPIs within contractual obligations. As articulated in the

[Immigrant Narrative Strategy by the Butterfly Lab](#), cultural transformation precedes societal shifts, and narratives wield significant influence over policy. Hence, we must adopt a strategic and meticulous approach to cultivate narrative power, recognising its equal importance alongside other forms of influence. In alignment with these principles, I advocated for mandatory Aboriginal employment training to be a standard requirement, reinforcing the imperative of fostering cultural sensitivity and competence within organisational settings.

A fundamental value - The WHY.

In engaging with our non-Aboriginal counterparts, we recognise the paramount importance of fostering awareness and addressing biases through a blend of professionalism and sensitivity. It's imperative to maintain transparency and honesty throughout.

Prior to conducting any Aboriginal cultural awareness training, I make it a priority to equip both my Aboriginal colleagues and leadership (from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal backgrounds) with what I deem as essential guidance, rooted in the ethos of resilience. It's a recognition that our successes may not always align with conventional metrics. Rather than viewing this as a preparation for failure, it's a strategic approach to acknowledge that within a workshop of, say, 30 participants, a smaller subset, around 4 to 8 individuals, may emerge as catalysts for meaningful change. These change champions play a pivotal role in advocating for our cause. Realistically, not everyone will be swayed, and I steadfastly hold onto this belief that "we must measure our wins differently".

Embracing fundamental principles of change management and an Aboriginal worldview within your organisations remit and context is crucial for the effectiveness of Aboriginal affairs initiatives.

Integrating Aboriginal Employment Strategies with Operational Priorities: *Enhancing Diversity, Talent Pipeline, and Community Relations*

In this article, I emphasised the critical importance of operational priority and business as usual (BAU) in the forefront of our employees' focus, as this is the essence of their recruitment - to fulfill their key accountabilities and responsibilities. However, for our Aboriginal employment strategy to truly thrive, we must shift our focus to prioritise Aboriginal recruitment. After all, if we established this strategy, shouldn't we prioritise it? So, how can we make this transition effectively?

Aligning Aboriginal employment strategies with operational priorities ensures that organisational goals and strategic initiatives are harmonised and mutually reinforcing. **It's crucial to recognise that each organisation faces unique challenges, underscoring the significance of pre-strategy benchmarking and evaluation** – it's why you must do this. Below are universal benefits to effectively undertake this process and integrate these strategies with operational priorities:

1. **Enhanced Diversity and Inclusion:** Incorporating Aboriginal employment strategies into operational priorities fosters a more diverse and inclusive workplace culture. This not only

aligns with broader diversity goals but also enriches organisational perspectives and fosters innovation.

2. **Improved Talent Pipeline:** Investing in Aboriginal employment initiatives helps to cultivate a skilled and diverse talent pipeline. By tapping into underrepresented talent (and talent pools (if available)), organisations can access a broader range of skills and perspectives, which can contribute to operational excellence and competitiveness.
3. **Strengthened Community Relations:** If actioned appropriately your Aboriginal employment strategy is the gateway to enhanced engagement with Aboriginal communities and organisations. This can be mutually beneficial, as organisations gain access to local knowledge and support, while Aboriginal communities benefit from employment opportunities and economic development initiatives.
4. **Risk Mitigation and Compliance:** Addressing Aboriginal employment as part of operational priorities helps mitigate legal and reputational risks associated with discrimination and lack of diversity. By proactively implementing inclusive practices and meeting regulatory requirements, organisations can safeguard against potential legal challenges and negative publicity.
5. **Positive Brand Image:** Demonstrating a commitment to Aboriginal employment can enhance the organisation's brand image and reputation. Consumers and stakeholders increasingly value diversity and social responsibility, and actively

promoting Aboriginal employment initiatives can differentiate the organisation as an employer of choice and a responsible corporate citizen.

In summary, benchmarking and post-strategy implementation evaluation are essential for assessing the effectiveness of Aboriginal employment strategies, while integrating these strategies with operational priorities ensures alignment, fosters diversity and inclusion, and enhances organisational performance and reputation.

Empower Detail can provide your organisation with a process for business readiness and design your Aboriginal employment strategy.

Contact us now, let's evolve and understand your primary audience, secondary audience, and opposition.

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You can learn more about Reece's work and experience via [LinkedIn](#).

Organisational Intent vs Outcomes – Empower Detail is here to provide explanation on definitions, key terms and concepts that will help make the article more accessible.

Many organisations undertaking Aboriginal recruitment have the right intent, although business readiness, and awareness are imperative to ensure success. To a reader who doesn't know about Aboriginal employment in Australia, the article may present some challenges in understanding certain terms and contexts.

The article assumes the reader has background knowledge about Aboriginal employment practices and the challenges faced by Aboriginal communities in Australia. Without this context, some parts of the article might be difficult to understand.

*Overall, while the article provides valuable insights into Aboriginal recruitment practices and challenges, it may require additional context and explanation for readers who are not familiar with Aboriginal employment issues in Australia. **Empower Detail is here to provide explanation on definitions, key terms and concepts that will help make the article more accessible – please feel free to engage with me!***