

## Media Release

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## New Australian research reveals how 'the bamboo ceiling' is blocking the rise of Asian talent

News grabs are available from <https://mediagame-1.wistia.com/projects/nii8wvjhp5> with

**Lisa Annese, CEO, Diversity Council Australia**

**Alec Bashinsky, CHRO – Partner People & Performance, Deloitte**

**Dai Le, Founder and Executive Director, Diverse Australasian Women's Network**

People from Asian backgrounds are well represented in entry level and mid-level jobs in Australian business, yet they are significantly under-represented in leadership roles, representing an enormous waste of talent, according to Diversity Council Australia's latest research.

While 9.3% of the Australian labour force is Asian born, only 4.9% make it to senior executive level. In ASX 200 companies, only 1.9% of executives have Asian cultural origins, compared to 9.6% of the Australian community. DCA's new research, *Cracking the Cultural Ceiling: Future Proofing Your Business in the Asian Century*, has uncovered valuable information about 'the bamboo ceiling' and why so few Asian leaders are reaching the top. Key findings include:

1. **Asian talent is ambitious, motivated and capable:** 84% plan to advance to a very senior role, 91% say challenging work is very important in their next career move, and 97% have Asia capabilities.
2. **Asian talent is under leveraged, undervalued and likely to leave:** Only 17% strongly agree that their organisation uses their Asia capabilities very well, one in five are very satisfied with career progress and opportunities, and 22% strongly agree that they have worked in organisations that value cultural diversity. 30% say they are likely to leave their employer in the next year.
3. **Key barriers are locking out Asian talent in Australian organisations:**
  - 1) *Cultural bias and stereotyping:* Only 18% of Asian talent feel their workplaces are free of cultural diversity biases and stereotypes. Many regularly experience bias and stereotyping, including about their cultural identity, leadership capability, English proficiency, and age. Women from Asian backgrounds experience a 'double disadvantage'.
  - 2) *Westernised leadership models:* 61% feel pressure to conform to existing leadership styles that are inherently 'Anglo', e.g. over-valuing self-promotion and assertive direct communication, while undervaluing and misinterpreting quiet reserve, deference and respect for seniority.
  - 3) *Lack of relationship capital:* Only one in four has access to mentors or professional networks and even less has access to sponsors; similarly low levels feel included in workplace social activities.
  - 4) *The case for culture not understood:* Only 15% strongly agree their organisation leverages its workforce cultural diversity to better service clients. Organisations often fail to fully grasp the strategic value of Asian markets, capabilities and talent for Australian organisations operating in the Asian Century.

Lisa Annese, DCA's CEO said 'the bamboo ceiling' urgently needs to be addressed.

"It is inconceivable that in a country where nearly 10% of the population is born in Asia or identify as having an Asian background that they should have such a low rate of representation in Australian corporate leadership. DCA's new research represents a ground-breaking step in identifying the blockages and addressing them so that organisations can stop wasting talent and truly harness this cultural capital," said Lisa.

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Asian markets, both in Australia and in the region, have enormous significance for Australia's economy, said Lisa.

"Australia's two-way trade in goods and services totalled more than A\$600 billion or 41% of GDP in 2012 and eight out of ten of Australia's ten largest trading partners are in Asia. Closer to home, Australia's 'multicultural market' has an estimated purchasing power of over A\$75 billion per year, with a higher than average disposal income. Clearly it is in all our interests to adopt a culturally responsive approach to business strategy and therefore talent management – indeed the benefits of doing so for corporate performance, innovation and access to new markets are well established," added Lisa.

Giam Swiegers, CEO of Deloitte who is a major sponsor of the research, said representation of Asian talent in senior leadership is a strategic business issue.

"The challenge to us, as Australian employers, remains our ability to view the talent agenda through a wide ranging lens, not only maximising the multicultural talent pool but actively addressing the bias, assumptions and stereotypes associated with the well know term 'bamboo ceiling'. Like many other organisations we are on a journey. By understanding, appreciating, and leveraging the cultural diversity Australia has to offer we will collectively advance local and global business opportunities for Australian businesses in the Asian Century," said Giam.

#### **About the research:**

*Cracking the Cultural Ceiling* is a partnership research initiative between Platinum Sponsor, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, and Gold Sponsors, Commonwealth Bank Australia and IBM Australia, along with Silver Sponsors, King & Wood Mallesons, Performance Education, and The Next Step.

DCA reviewed international and national research to shed light on the barriers to greater leadership representation by Asian leaders and emerging leaders and any facilitators of success. The findings were drawn on to develop an on-line survey and Think Tanks.

We surveyed over 300 leaders and emerging leaders from Asian cultural backgrounds who are working at more than 100 Australian organisations, to collect their insights into perceived barriers and enablers of their careers. Survey participants came from a range of industries including professional, scientific and technical services; financial and insurance services; information media and telecommunications; education and training; health care and social assistance; public administration and safety; electricity, gas, water and waste services; transport, postal and warehousing; mining; construction; manufacturing; agriculture, forestry and fishing; arts and recreation services; rental, hiring and real estate services; and retail trade. We also conducted four Think Tanks with 40 Asian leaders and emerging leaders, and with 18 (largely non-Asian) business leaders and human resource management/diversity practitioners, to test our survey findings and the framework for action generated from the on-line survey.

For the purposes of this research, 'Asia' includes East Asia, South East Asia and South Asia and 'Asian talent' refers broadly to leaders and emerging leaders from Asian cultural backgrounds.

*An interactive executive summary can be found at <http://dca.org.au/cracking-cultural-ceiling/>.*

The research report will be embargoed until 4.00am AEST Monday 11 August 2014 but interested media can obtain an advance copy. Lisa Annese, DCA's CEO, Alec Bashinsky, CHRO – Partner People & Performance, Deloitte and Dai Le, Founder and Executive Director, Diverse Australasian Women's Network are available for interview.

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