

Using Reconciliation Action Plans to lift Indigenous employment

As the presentations at the symposium demonstrated there is a large untapped labour resource in the Aboriginal population of the NT. They also comprise an important element of the population which sees the NT as its permanent home.

Long term improving educational outcomes is critical to ensuring Aboriginal people across the board can access employment opportunities. However in the immediate future it is possible to make significant improvements to participation by a determined effort as has been demonstrated by Argyle Diamond Mine in the East Kimberley and other miners such as Newmont as pointed out at the symposium by Christine Charles and BHPBilliton as demonstrated by its Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

Accessing RAPs is a good way of learning what is possible. All employers would find examples of positive actions by a diverse range of employers including government departments, banks, miners, Aboriginal organisations, and an airline, which have already resulted in good Indigenous employment outcomes as well as clear commitments to future employment growth.

Existing Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) can be accessed at the Reconciliation Australia (RA) website, www.reconciliation.org.au, and by following the prompts. They demonstrate how building employment can be built in to the planning and management of organisations.

RA can assist. The actions it asks organizations to take can loosely be grouped into three key areas, relationships, respect and opportunity.

Relationships means engaging with Indigenous professionals, community members and stakeholders in the development and implementation of RAPs. Most organizations have set up a RAP working group with key executive and Indigenous members.

Respect means ensuring staff are culturally aware and respectful and undertake basic cultural acknowledgement protocols. This usually involves training staff in cultural awareness.

Opportunity means setting real (and realistic) targets for employing more Indigenous staff and providing them with professional development and training opportunities.

Seeing what a wide range of employers and like organizations can do is the best way to consider whether a RAP will help your organization to lift its performance. If BHPBilliton, the ANZ Bank, many Commonwealth Departments and agencies including Centrelink and DEST, Royal Melbourne Women's Hospital, and Qantas, think it works for them it seems likely it will work for many others. A RAP can build into planning and implementation clear approaches to guide staff and accountability for lifting Indigenous employment.

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