

CULTURALLY SAFE

LEADERSHIP

VERONICA PARDO
& ASSOCIATES

About the Culturally Safe Leadership Program

Context

Australia is a multicultural, pluralistic society. Almost 50% of Australians are either born overseas or have one parent born overseas. However, when we look across the employment landscape, we see an unequal distribution of opportunities. This inequity has only been exacerbated by the health, economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Diversity and inclusion initiatives have been implemented across government and non-government organisations for the past 30 years, with the aim of improving the participation of diverse people in employment. These initiatives respond to the ample research demonstrating the benefits of a diverse workforce, including social, cultural and economic advantages.

Despite this, we are yet to see significant gains from these programs, particularly in the area of leadership. When we look across public life, in media and the arts, we see progress in gender diversity, but these do not extend to cultural and linguistic diversity. Boards and senior executives remain predominantly white.

Over the past five years, we have seen some encouraging signs around representation. Global leaders in industry and commerce point to overt recruitment of diverse managers as a source of innovation and challenge. Increasingly, in the cultural sphere, there is recognition of the right to see one's own image and story represented, as a critical marker of our pluralistic identity as Australians. This terrain is not smooth sailing, however. Participation, inclusion and representation are only one part of the solution.

As we broaden our workforce, particularly in leadership domains, the question of how we create safe and welcoming environments for diverse people remains unanswered. In the main, organisations expect diverse people to fall into line with existing work cultures, systems and structures. This is problematic from two perspectives, a) it fails to recognise the inherent inequalities within these systems that create barriers to participation and inclusion, and b) it does not afford us the opportunity to benefit from the diverse lived experiences and perspectives that this workforce brings.

Traditionally, organisations seeking to be proactive in this space, engaged in a range of diversity and inclusion initiatives focused on gaining cultural competencies for working in diverse contexts and with diverse people. New approaches to this work suggest that the critical missing piece is the focus on cultural safety. Cultural safety is not only about how we create safe and nurturing spaces for intercultural engagement in the workplace, but also a lens through which we may interrogate the systems and structures that produce and replicate inequity. As such, cultural safety is considered an anti-racism approach.

Why do we need this program?

This program responds to critical, contemporary questions that leaders concerned with equity and justice are asking about their own practice, their capacity to lead diverse teams safely and effectively and their interest in moving to an anti-racist approach in their leadership work.

The design of the program has been informed by our lived and professional experiences, a review of the literature on cultural equity and our own research and implementation of cultural safety protocols in organisations, programs and projects.

Stakeholder Engagement Framework

Our stakeholder engagement framework is founded on respectful relationships, an awareness of how power and privilege can shape interactions, and a capacity to have difficult conversations with care and generosity to all participants. As women of colour, we practice non-violence in our facilitation, with cultural safety and psychological safety methodologies at the heart of our work. We have experience and skills working in various cultural contexts, including cultural and linguistic diversity, disability, gender and sexual diversity. Our work reflects nuanced, intersectional, intercultural and intergenerational understandings of equity and justice, enabling all participants to be heard and contribute to a collective vision for change.

Guiding Program Principles

1. **Self-determination** – Our team comprises all people of colour, with lived and professional experiences in diversity and equity. Through our processes, we seek to amplify the views and perspectives of people with lived experience of marginalisation, including First Nations people, people of colour, people with disability, LGBTQIA+ people. We are particularly attuned to working in intersectional ways that acknowledge people’s dynamic identities, and importantly, the impacts of intersections with class and socio-economic factors.
2. **Cultural Safety** – Our team is highly experienced in the practice of Cultural Safety. Our Cultural Safety practice is based on its deep roots in community activism. We have designed our own Cultural Safety policies and practices, informed by international scholarship on this topic. We are committed to the reclamation of non-violent community development practices by diverse communities.
3. **A Seat for Everyone at the Table** – We believe that cultural equity is the work of all team members, including those with lived experience and their allies. We recognise the disproportionate labour that falls to those who have been racialised to tackle the systems of their own oppression, and yet they are often excluded from decision making processes. To combat this unequal labour, we cultivate a sense of collective effort, where every person has an important role to play in the journey of change.

Program Content

The Culturally Safe Leaders Program has two elements. They can be taken together or separately, depending on the client's needs.

1. Facilitated Group Training
2. One-on-One Coaching

The content of the facilitated group training includes:

- Unpacking cultural safety; its origins and applications
- Locating cultural safety in a local and global context
- Deep dive into how power and privilege shape our interactions
- Moving from inclusive leadership to anti-racism leadership practice
- Centring cultural safety within social justice frameworks
- Building culturally safe teams
- Becoming a culturally safe leader
- Leading challenging conversations safely
- Being an effective ally

The one-on-one coaching allows us to work through the content of the workshops in individualised ways that respond to the participants' experiences. In the coaching sessions, we identify relevant scenarios and explore a range of approaches.

Program Outcomes

1. Increased capacity of organisations to have safe, effective and transformational conversations about equity, justice and anti-racism practices;
2. Enhanced ability of teams to call out challenging or difficult issues, in constructive ways, that can be met with openness, non-defensive listening and a capacity to move matters forward;
3. Strengthened capacity to understand the systemic and structural nature of inequity and to plan for sustained, measurable and impactful change; and
4. Improved engagement with frameworks that build better racial literacy, redesigning the ways we engage with an organisational culture of shared responsibility, accountability and culture building.

Program Structure

The program has the following structure:

Workshop 1 (2 hours)

Individual Coaching Sessions

Workshop 2 (2 hours)

Individual Coaching sessions

Workshop 3 (2 hours)

Individual Coaching sessions

Workshop 4 (2 hours)

Ideally, numbers for the program are within 10-15. The average number of coaching sessions per participant is three.

Workshops - these are interactive spaces where we present and consider a range of frameworks and concepts that provide insights into the experiences of diverse people in the workforce. We share equity, justice and anti-racism approaches that engender cultural safety, enabling participants to bring their own experiences into dialogue with organisational practices. Workshops foster common understanding across teams necessary for successful future planning and execution of diversity, equity and justice plans.

Individual coaching – these are practical, facilitated conversations that respond to individual experiences in the workplace, offering opportunities for debriefing, reframing and planning for further professional development. Coaching sessions offer participants opportunities to examine particular areas more closely and develop confidence in negotiating these spaces, as managers or members of diverse teams.

About Our Team

Veronica Pardo is a woman of colour and migrant from Uruguay who has been leading the work on cultural equity in Australia for more than 15 years, heading peak organisations such as Arts Access Victoria and Multicultural Arts Victoria, as champions of change in the arts towards greater equity and justice. She is a highly regarded leader, sought after by institutions to guide the development of interventions aimed at changing organisational culture, structure and practice. She is an experienced workshop facilitator who brings both lived and professional experience of diversity to the creation of culturally safe learning and reflection spaces. Her understanding of organisational needs and priorities ensures that this work is both aspirational and practical, leading to meaningful and implementable plans for change. Veronica has trained over 150 cultural organisations focusing on issues such as racial equity and justice, cultural safety, diversity and inclusion. She is on the Board of VicHealth and Chair of Next Wave.

Dr Priya Srinivasan is a Tamil-Australian cultural leader whose multidisciplinary practice combines dance and performance ethnography, equity and racial justice frameworks in a deeply embedded community-engaged practice to act as a catalyst for social, cultural and political change. She has worked across the globe to challenge Western hegemonic beliefs and practices, directing interventions in the arts through large-scale and intimate projects within festivals such as Australia Festival (India), AsiaTOPA (Australia), Jaipur Literary Festival (India), India Dans Festival Korzo (Netherlands) and leading cultural institutions. She has a PhD from Northwestern University and is the author of the award-winning book “Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labour.” She is the co-Artistic Director of Sangam: Performing Arts Platform and Festival of Diaspora which she founded in 2019 as a corrective to the lack of opportunities for artists of colour in Melbourne, enabling classical, contemporary, popular and experimental works on one platform. She has directed and co-curated over 200 artists of colour on this platform enabling engagement with venues such as Dancehouse, Abbotsford Convent, Bunjil Place and Drum Theatre to re-map the landscape towards equity and justice.

Dr Pilar Kasat is a Chilean-Australian living in the ancient country of the Whadjuk Noongar people (Perth, Western Australia). Pilar is a senior cultural executive, advocate, community cultural development practitioner and academic. She has led artistic and operational excellence with a track record of creative engagement and intercultural dialogue with First Nations and people of colour within a social justice framework. A Fellow of Leadership WA, a Master of Sustainability and Social Change and a PhD, Pilar also leads in the not-for profit sector. She is the chairwoman of Art on the Move, and Women of Colour Australia, previously the deputy chair of Diversity Arts Australia, and served on the board of the Chamber of Arts and Culture WA for six years. She holds a post-doctoral research fellow with Curtin University and has presented at national and international conferences; her work on the role of the arts to drive social change has been published in international academic journals and national industry magazines.

For further information on the Culturally Safe Leadership Program

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