TAKING THE CULTURAL TEMPERATURE IN COMBAT BRIGADES

THEMATIC FINDINGS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION COLLABORATION FOR CULTURAL REFORM

Kate Jenkins and Emilie Priday
CHIEF OF ARMY FOREWORD

This is the standard we walk past

In a 2013 video message to our Army; my predecessor Lieutenant General David Morrison challenged us to examine our individual and group behaviours, and to consider whether our personal actions accorded with the values required for continued service in the Australian Army.

This three minute video caught the attention of many in our Army and the broader Australian community and the global community. It also issued a challenge: the standard you walk past is the standard you accept. This challenge remains true for the Army of 2017.

At my invitation, Kate Jenkins and Emilie Priday of the Australian Human Rights Commission visited some of our brigades, to take measure of our culture and to examine how far we have come, and how far we have to go. This is important work and I applaud Kate and Emilie for the thoroughness of their research and the scrutiny they bring to Army.

The process of cultural renewal is never immediate, nor is it painless. Calling out bias and prejudice tends to be the most confronting to those who seek to protect and perpetuate it.

I am very encouraged and gladdened by the progress the great majority of us have championed in recent years and I commend this ongoing effort. Thank you to those who are standing up for our people and our values! However, this article highlights that there remains a vocal group in our Army who view diversity as 'lowering our standards'. This group uses belittling, racist and sexist epithets as a normal and acceptable means of communication between peers and colleagues; in doing so promoting exclusion and isolation.

To the members of our Army who subscribe to this view and behaviour: you are lowering our standards.

We are best when we show the courage to do what 's right, the initiative to welcome new ideas and perspectives, the respect to treat each other with dignity, and the teamwork to harness the contribution of each one of us.
Encouraging diversity does not dilute our combat effectiveness, nor does it make us a less capable land force. The opposite is true. We are a stronger and better skilled team when we embrace difference and harness the talent and potential of all our people.

Shining a light on our organisational flaws is the most effective disinfectant for poor behaviour. I encourage members of our Army to read this article, and consider what you have witnessed, experienced, or perhaps displayed in your workplace. If you have seen or perpetuated the behaviour described in this article, *this* is the standard you have walked past.

I commend this discomforting article to you.

Angus J Campbell  
Lieutenant General  
Chief of the Army  
30 April 2017
Abstract

The Australian Army, and wider Australian Defence Force (ADF), started their cultural reform journey in 2011 with the Broderick Review. Since this time, the Army and ADF have worked with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) to transform our armed forces into a more diverse, inclusive and capable working environment. This article describes how the unique partnership between the Army and the AHRC was forged, and outlines the emerging themes across the combat brigades. These themes include acceptance of cultural reform initiatives, attitudes to, and experiences of diversity, the blurred line between banter and unacceptable behaviour and the inherent challenge of accessing flexible work arrangements.
Introduction

The Australian Army is an institution built on a proud history and rich traditions. It is also an institution facing the challenges of a changing world, where aspects of Army culture have evolved to keep pace with a more diverse Australian society. The ADF and Army have embarked on a transformational journey of cultural reform to meet these challenges. The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has been part of this journey, commencing with the Broderick Review in 2011, and continuing with a Collaboration for Cultural Reform from 2014.

The ADF and Army have made significant changes to develop a more diverse and inclusive culture at a leadership and policy level. Over six years, the AHRC has engaged with military leaders with the moral courage and vision to make the necessary changes ‘at the top’ to effect cultural change. However, influencing the culture and behaviour of an Army of more than 43,000 active permanent and reserve members,¹ is a complex task. Part of the AHRC’s work with the Army has been to assess the impact of cultural reform on the ground, taking the ‘cultural temperature’ at the combat brigade level. This provides insights about where cultural reform is gaining traction and areas where it meets resistance.

This article outlines the background of the ADF’s collaboration with the AHRC and illustrates some of key cultural reform themes emerging from the Army project. These include: consideration of the impact of cultural reform in combat brigades, attitudes to diversity, the lived experience of diversity, the line between banter and unacceptable behaviour and the challenges of achieving flexibility. This analysis is supplemented by additional suggestions for Army to increase inclusion.

Background to the Collaboration for Cultural Reform

The AHRC’s journey with the ADF began in 2011. Following the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) Skype scandal, former Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick led an independent review of the treatment of women at ADFA and across the ADF more generally. The Report on the Review into the Treatment of Women at ADFA² was tabled in the Australian Parliament in November 2011 and the Report into the Treatment of Women in the ADF³ was tabled in August 2012.

In making the case for change, the Review drew a strong connection between gender diversity and capability.⁴ The Report into the Treatment of Women in the
ADF made 21 recommendations calling for sweeping reforms to the recruitment and retention of women, their opportunities to rise to leadership positions, the prevention of sexual harassment, sexual abuse and rape, and improved responses to victims of abuse.

The Chief of the Defence Force (CDF) and the three Service Chiefs accepted all 21 recommendations. Audit reports, released in July 2013 and March 2014 showed significant progress.5

**Collaboration for Cultural Reform scope and methodology**

This was the first time, worldwide, that a national human rights institution and a military organisation worked in such close partnership. While it may not seem an obvious fit at first, there were clear reasons for this partnership, including the AHRC’s knowledge of the ADF context through consultations, research and high level engagement. It also brings independence and expertise in applying a human rights based approach to policy. Previous work by the AHRC has developed specialist knowledge about enabling diversity and practical strategies for workplaces.

Although the Review came at a time of immense scrutiny for the ADF, Defence leadership and staff from the AHRC developed strong, honest and very effective relationships. It is a testament to the strength of these relationships, and ADF’s commitment to change, that in 2014 the ADF asked the Commission keep working on these issues.

The Collaboration was established to assist consolidate cultural change across the three Services and to ensure the four-year project, *Pathway to Change*, was fully realised. The scope of the Collaboration’s work is broader than just gender. It encompasses issues relating to cultural diversity, sexual orientation, unacceptable behaviour, social media and alcohol and drug use.

The Collaboration works in close consultation with each of the services to develop projects with the greatest potential impact on cultural reform. The projects selected have involved single base visits to ‘take the cultural temperature’ and extended research projects.
Army Collaboration projects

Army nominated combat brigades as a primary area of investigation with the purpose of the project to gain an understanding of how cultural reform is tracking at the brigade level.6

During 2015 and 2016, the AHRC visited 7th, 1st and 3rd Brigades, as well as some supporting units,7 and consulted with over 700 Army members. The research sample included a range of ranks and employment groups.

The project combines qualitative and quantitative research methods. The quantitative information maps the incidence of member views and the qualitative data provides insight into the attitudes and experiences of members. Complementary data sets are analysed separately, then compared and triangulated to increase the validity of the findings.

Collection of the primary data occurs during the base visits. The questionnaire is administered with the same members participating in group or individual interviews with AHRC staff.

Analysis to synthesis

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded, along with the data from the open survey questions. A thematic content analysis is broadly framed by the project scope but also allows emergent issues to be captured. The questionnaire data is manually entered and a descriptive statistical analysis is carried out on the closed question data set.8 The findings from each analysis along with other data provided by Army9 are compared and cross-referenced to corroborate and finalise the thematic findings.

Strengths and limitations of the methodology

Strengths of the methodology include:

- **Participant trust and openness** – the data collection is ethically managed, explicitly confidential and conducted by a trusted external group. Separate group interviews are conducted with different ranks and often with female-only groups, to reduce any power dynamics that could inhibit discussion. This has elicited especially candid interviews and has generated particularly rich qualitative data.
• **Qualitative sample size** – the qualitative sample is unusually large in this design as the same members who complete the survey participate in the interviews. This generates a data set with exceptional breadth and depth.

Limitations of the methodology include:

• **Convenience sampling and size** – research participants can only be drawn from personnel that are available ‘on the day’. A modest sample size, compared to the overall Brigade size, presents a risk that the views captured may not accurately reflect those of the broader members.

• **Self-report data** – the questionnaire and interview data generates themes drawn from participant members’ views and experiences. This may be subject to bias and exaggeration. Potential bias is mitigated by the good qualitative sample size and the triangulation of available data sets to substantiate themes and increase the validity of the findings.

### Cultural reform in the combat brigades – thematic findings

The following discussion summarises the some of the key thematic findings across the brigades consulted. This is not an exhaustive consideration of all the issues raised during consultations but it does highlight those most directly connected to achieving cultural change. Quotes and survey responses from the consultations illustrate these themes.

#### Embedding cultural reform

At the highest levels of Defence, the capability imperative of cultural reform and diversity is clear. *Pathway to Change*¹⁰, the Defence White Paper¹¹, Defence Diversity and Inclusion Policy¹² and Army’s own *Our Contract With Australia*¹³, set strong expectations for a respectful and inclusive team environment for Australia’s serving men and women.

In some areas, Army is active in increasing diversity. Army has set an ambitious target to increase female participation to 25% and indigenous participation to 5%.¹⁴ Army is also committed to reducing domestic and family violence through a suite of measures including tailored awareness raising and bystander training. This sort of initiative places Army at the forefront of workplace responses to family and domestic violence.
The cultural tone set by Defence leaders is trickling down to many of the Army members consulted. Some Army members articulated a strong commitment to cultural reform and spoke positively about the changes they have observed over their Army careers.

_In twenty years I’d love to be a fly on the wall. I think we are moving in the right direction… we are definitely on the pathway to change._\(^{15}\)

_In think culturally we’re more accepting. There’s a lot of diversity, a lot of acceptance now than there probably was in previous years._\(^{16}\)

Others described cultural reform as ‘common sense’ or ‘business as usual’. This is also a positive development; cultural change is truly successful when it is no longer seen as something novel but instead, part of the fabric of every day life.

However, there remains a vocal group who are resistant to the cultural changes they are witnessing, particularly in the low to middle ranks. Some of these individuals perceive diversity measures as ‘lowering standards’. There is a perception that the cultural pendulum has swung too far towards ‘political correctness’.

_Everyone is being a little bit too diverse… It’s taking away from actually just being a soldier and contributing to the work environment._\(^{17}\)

_Females and minority grounds being pushed through courses because they are not the same – many of them are not to standard yet they get to the units and under-perform. Many safety issues follow because they can’t do the job._\(^{18}\)

_It’s a constant thing that the Army … are trying for political correctness… the pendulum used to be over here, very racist, very sexist. Now it’s gone back the other way where we’re too politically correct._\(^{19}\)

**Difference makes the difference**

A similar spectrum of views was shared about increasing diversity. There is some support for greater diversity in Army based on an understanding of the link to capability and the need to recruit more broadly to sustain Army.

Overwhelmingly members describe the opportunities in Army as open to people from all backgrounds. This is underpinned by an attitude that everyone is welcome, as
long as they meet the required standards and conform to the existing norms. Or, as one member put it, ‘if you want to join a club you have to act like the club’. These sorts of attitudes can assimilate difference rather than create an environment where diversity is valued and enriches the team dynamic.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in discussions about women taking on combat roles. There is high value put on a woman’s ability but also anxiety about changing the dynamics.

You can find a chick that loves that shit and she can do it… as long as we don't have to shift any of our way that we behave. [sic]

You get a bunch of young males together, all of a sudden they go from worrying about doing their job to “Fuck, she’s got some nice tits.” And now I am not concentrating on my job. [sic]

I completely disagree with females in infantry … Like rape factor. Chivalry factor is a big one. Then you'll have like fraternisation. You're in a hole for nine months, it's going to happen. Create resentments, team suddenly not so tight knit. [sic]

Cohesion and teamwork are the foundations of Army capability. Successful teams in Army are tightly bonded and share similar goals and values. Research is unequivocal: teams become more effective when they consist of diverse members, with different backgrounds and ways of solving problems.

Dealing with cultural reform fatigue and resistance

Army and the ADF have implemented a suite of interventions to address cultural reform. However, many members have described ‘cultural reform fatigue’, with the impact of training diminishing over time. Others present a more cynical view.

It’s a political agenda that’s being pushed upon us.

…in my opinion, nothing changes from year to year, it seems to be the same information.

You don’t have to be reminded every week that this week it’s unacceptable behaviour week, next week it’s green people’s week, the
week after that it’s national Muslim day. Who cares? Our job is not political.  

Members crave fresh presentation of material and engaging discussions, rather than ‘death by PowerPoint’.  

You literally have an officer who stands out and reads a sheet of paper and then pushes it aside.  

The last couple of weeks…they had Culture Day, Mental Health Day, SeMPRO, the White Ribbon coming up… do I get much out of it? No.  

The AHRC team visited the brigades during the ‘readying’ phase of Plan Beersheba. This is a high tempo period for units as they make the final preparations to move into the ‘ready’ phase in the following year. For supporting units, the workload was seen as consistently high, with little opportunity for respite. In this context, any other activities are a ‘burden’ and interfere with core business. 

Some members have argued for a ‘change management’ approach to cultural reform, where members are more involved in the decisions and reasons for changes. This approach would involve ongoing communication about the case for change, in ways that engage with members on a practical and personal level. 

Effective change management requires consideration of ‘human dynamics’. It can be confronting to see organizational norms shift, particularly when change represents a threat to individual standing. The greatest level of resistance to cultural change has come from white, heterosexual low to middle ranking men, who see their positions as under attack from diversity. 

It’s gone too far and it’s discriminatory towards the male populous of the ADF. [sic]  

Your average guy in the Army who’s white, straight, married, probably gets victimized more than anyone else.  

Why are all these things based around women? It sounds like women are starting to get more than me.
However, these same individuals also profess great commitment to Army. There are opportunities to both acknowledge their anxieties and validate their experiences by positively communicating the case for change and the measures that Army is taking to increase diversity.

**The lived experience of diversity**

Despite the ambitious targets in place, the demographics of Army are still overwhelmingly white and male. The most recent *Women in ADF* report shows that as of 30 June 2016, female participation in the Army was at 12.1%. Gender segregation and under-representation of women in leadership roles is an ongoing challenge for the Army and wider ADF. The majority of women in the Army occupy positions in the health, logistics, administration and support occupational groups.

Statistics on cultural identity are less reliable as it is not compulsory to disclose this information. Current estimates are that 1.8% identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and 5.9% identify as coming from a non-English speaking background.

**Experiences of women**

Many women describe a supportive and satisfying career in Army. However, others identify challenges, particularly when working in male dominated areas. Common experiences included feelings of isolation and at times ostracism from male team members.

*It’s a boys club…I guess you’ve got to accept it.*

*You don’t meet that many people who are like you, so it’s harder to make friends, and that’s probably I think the biggest thing with being a minority.*

*I have absolutely zero relationship with any of the boys at work.*

Some women discussed being ‘trail blazers’, with increased pressure to perform due to their visibility in male dominated environments. This meant additional scrutiny and pressure to perform at a higher level in order to prove their capability.

*Just to be recognised as semi-competent you have to [be] very competent and operate at two steps higher than everyone else just to be recognised as standard.*
I really enjoy my job and I really like working with the soldiers that I’m working with, but once my ROSO is complete, I will probably go find another workplace, just because [of] the additional pressures and scrutinies and constantly feeling like you are being watched and scrutinised… I don’t think that’s a rank thing, I think that’s gender specific.  

Some women reported that additional scrutiny and double standards also extended to their personal lives.

*In the Army, every girl will surely tell you, you can never be a grey man.*

[With a male] no-one talks about his business, no-one talks about his personal ups and downs or whatever, but a female...the liberties that people take with knowing your information and discussing your information it is definitely increased by the fact that you’re a woman... With the women it’s always free game to be talking about what her business is. [sic]

You sleep with one person and you’re a slut. All the guys can root as many females as they want and they are legends. We sleep with one person in Army and you are known as a Army slut. [sic]

Some women described backlash, including feeling that they need to justify any promotion or opportunity to male colleagues.

*Every single time anything is offered in terms of praise, promotion, opportunity there is always a rumour, it’s because she’s a girl. Doesn’t matter if…she’s the most qualified candidate it’s just an automatic attachment to absolutely any kind of comment: ‘oh a girl’s doing this, it’s because she’s a girl’ is tacked on the end every time with no thought…*

I work with all the workshop boys. Almost every lunch break they’re saying how women in Defence just get their way because they have boobs.

A consequence of this is that many women are reluctant to be in the spotlight. This presents challenges to find women for promotional activities that could increase female recruitment, or even participate in mentoring and networking activities. The importance of role models cannot be overstated. Put simply, you can’t be what you can’t see.
Women are very aware of the need for more gender diverse leadership. Some felt that male Army members need more exposure to female leaders to appreciate the benefits of diversity.

*We need female hierarchy. If we had more leadership in those roles, I think it will filter down. We also need men to see these role models. And to understand that we stand beside them, not out on the sidelines, ostracised… At the moment, as soon as a woman walks through the door… they’re making derogatory comments. But if they start to take orders and start to understand … what they bring, then I think they will start to understand that we’re all equal.* [sic]

Others noted a gap in the junior female leadership, particularly the corporal and sergeant level, which interfaces most with junior ranking non-commissioned women.

*We’ve got female OCs, and we’ve had female platoon commanders. But you need a female corporal sitting in the smoko bay, batting for you. Not a female warrant officer, or officer that you never see.* [sic]

Informal support and networking opportunities also resonate, particularly with junior ranking females.

*I feel since, just sitting here and getting to know these girls and the stories, I feel so much more invigorated. Not because of people’s suffering, but to feel that I’m not alone.*

*So you know, even just this small little forum, in this short little period of time, for me I’m feeling like I can relate with everyone here.* [sic]

Mentoring could also lead to professional development, particularly for junior women. One female officer noted that, while there is informal mentoring for officers, there is a support gap with junior ranking non-commissioned women. She suggested that a targeted mentoring program could match junior women with experienced female corporals because ‘corporals are the technical experts and they’re also the authority experts’. 
Experiences of LGBTI members

Based on the consultations, respect and acceptance of LGBTI members appears quite high.

I’m gay, so it’s fine no issues whatsoever. My chain of command, my peer group [are] fully accepting. [sic] 51

The last unit I was in, there was someone going through like a sex change thing, and realistically I think the reception was really quite good. There was a lot of people that just didn’t understand and didn’t get it, but they didn’t judge either. [sic] 52

We’ve got to work together and gender-wise, we’ve trained transgender soldiers. I’d have ten of them because they’re brilliant soldiers.

However, some members did note that gay men may struggle to fit in, particularly in the hyper-masculine areas of Army, such as infantry. There was also limited understanding of the issues for intersex and transgender members among some members.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and Indigenous members

The relatively small number of individuals consulted who identified as culturally and linguistically diverse or indigenous, described a similar range of experiences. Many were positive about the level of acceptance and camaraderie. Others noted feeling culturally isolated and argued for a higher level of cultural awareness.

You wander into the mess and there’s just whiteness. It just hits you in the face, it makes me sad to look around. 53

People often talk about indigenous people as if they don’t exist because they are so used to be among non-indigenous people. There is a general lack of understanding of indigenous issues. 54

The lack of cultural awareness was apparent in some of the negative attitudes to culturally and linguistically diverse and indigenous members.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, they just go ‘walkabout’ because it is part of their culture. 55
I’m concerned about the entry of spies and I don’t like the idea of changing our uniforms, traditions and national values to suit Muslims.\textsuperscript{56}

**Banter or abuse?**

The historical popular image of an Australian digger is the knockabout larrikin, ready to make a joke and bound by mateship. Banter is part of this culture. Having a ‘thick skin’ and ‘being able to take a joke’ are also essential to adapting and flourishing in this social environment.

During the consultation, members have provided examples of sexually and racially based language that is common in their workplaces. Some women relayed demeaning and sexually objectified language:

\textit{In defence you’re either a bitch or you’re a slut… If you’re friends with the guys you get called a slut and they all talk about you. If you’re a bitch then no one talks about you but they think you’re good at your job even though you might not be. Those are the two categories, that’s it. There’s no in between.}\textsuperscript{57}

I’ve seen other females being made fun of, sexual jokes behind their back. Very rude sexual nicknames for other females. [sic]\textsuperscript{58}

\textit{Tinder bitches is a term that is used every single day at our work. It’s a dating app. They’re talking about all the chicks they’ve gone on Tinder dates with, and been sleeping with on the weekends… And nine times out of 10 it’s a derogatory comment.}\textsuperscript{59}

Similarly, some reported the use of derogatory racially based language, such as ‘Abo’ and ‘nigger’.

There are varying levels of acceptance for these sorts of language. On one hand, some members acknowledge that this sort of language is out of step with community standards.

\textit{Improvement can be made with the ‘joking’ culture. It’s not ok to make racist or sexist jokes. They proliferate negative views. They should be addressed. [sic]}\textsuperscript{60}
On the other hand, often this sort of language is justified on the basis that it is just banter, and part of the team bonding process.

*It’s not a nasty environment. I’ve heard people yell out to their mates 300 metres down the track, “Oi, you black cunt.” And he’ll yell something back and it’s all in good fun.* [sic] 61

*We say some bad stuff but there is not one bit of intent behind it and that’s the mateship that is there. We’ve got every race in our unit and we say things that would not be acceptable.* [sic] 62

Others suggested that this sort of language is crucial to developing a battle ready mentality and toughening individuals up.

*You’ve got to be able to take a joke in the Army. You need to have a sense of humour. …for morale and so you don’t get down all the time…* thick skin for sure. [sic] 63

*We’re not training people to be hairdressers, we’re not training people to be philosophers, we’re training you to survive being shot at and in the heat of battle people are going to call you cunt. They don’t hate you, they’re not doing it to belittle you. He wants you to get fitter, faster, stronger so that when he is in that fire fight he can survive and he does come home.* [sic] 64

*Honesty people need to harden the fuck up. If you can’t deal with it get out. A fucking black soldier came up to me he said he was called a name and I said, obviously mate you need to harden up. This is the Army.* [sic] 65

A majority argued that there is no negative intent behind these descriptions and if they detect that an individual is offended, they will refrain from using this sort of language. Many felt that it is the responsibility of the individual hurt by negative language to make this known to stop the behaviour. In some cases, individuals do feel empowered to make this stand and there is support of bystander action if things go too far. But others describe the futility in voicing their opposition. Instead, they develop a tolerance for this sort of language.
You just get a thicker skin… after a while I’m not winning any battle here, there’s no point in trying to make these people see or stop saying what they say or see differently whatever. [sic] 66

Whether or not individuals meant offence with their language, some members from minority groups, did describe the damaging impact of this sort of language.

I come from a family who love who we are and when I hear some words, certain words, it hurts… It’s the name calling that hits me, things like coon, abo, black C-bomb, I hate it. And I hate people calling any other races names… It’s just wrong. 67

This example shows that this sort of language can have a more severe impact on those from minority groups that have had previous experiences of discrimination that inform their interpretation of these sorts of practices.

Given the Army core value of respect, it is worth considering the power of language and whether this sort of language is consistent with Army’s values and cultural reform intent given its ability to cause serious harm. 68 As discussed by Dr Elizabeth Thomson in her analysis of the use of language in the ADF:

What we say is how we construct the physical and social worlds in which we live… The Anglo-Australian male form of casual conversation dominates conversation in teams. Implicit within these formal and informal language practices are mechanisms that thwart diversity and greater social inclusion. 69

Dr Thomson goes on to argue that ‘cultural change needs language change in order to bring about lasting change’. 70

Beyond the impact on the individual, what does this sort of language communicate about Army to the broader society? And how does this impact on the likelihood of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or women to join the Army?

There are certainly opportunities for increased bystander intervention and clarification of where the line between banter and verbal abuse and casual racism
sits. And there seems to be insight and support from some Army members to address this challenge.

*Improvement can be made with the ‘joking’ culture. It’s not ok to make racist or sexist jokes. They proliferate negative views. They should be addressed.* [sic]^71

*People who are non-indigenous are mostly totally unaware of the covert racism that continues to exist in negative statements, generalised perceptions and racist jokes that are still common.^72*

**Unacceptable behaviour and reporting culture**

Incidents of unacceptable behaviour have been brought to the attention of the team during consultations through official data, information provided by Command teams and disclosures by individuals themselves during base visits. Some of these incidents were relatively minor while a small number were serious. In most instances, Command took strong leadership in relation to addressing unacceptable behaviour and responding appropriately and swiftly to complaints.

Most members describe a zero tolerance approach to unacceptable behaviour and confidence that appropriate action occurs if an incident is reported. For example, 80% of the members the AHRC surveys at 1st Brigade said they would report unacceptable behaviour if they experienced it.

Positive bystander behaviour appears to be an area of success for Army. Lieutenant General Morrison’s ‘the standard that you walk past, is the standard you accept’ resonated through a number of consultations. Army has also been strengthening bystander behaviour in other ways. For instance, bystander behaviour is a focus of recent training initiatives around family and domestic violence. Some members have reported feeling empowered to intervene, even outside the professional setting.

However, pockets of resistance to reporting still exist. A small number of members felt disinclined to report due to the stigma associated with reporting or fear of negative repercussions. There also appears to be a high threshold for reporting, as members are often reluctant to report less serious incidents. As noted above, behaviours such as racist or sexist jokes or sexually suggestive comments continue to be tolerated.
Achieving work/life balance

Life in the Brigades is busy. Most members paint a picture of high tempo, little respite and limited predictability and flexibility. Work/life balance is challenging at best. This has particularly severe consequences for women and men with caring responsibilities but also for morale more broadly.

Army recognises that flexibility is a key retention tool. This is certainly an area of improvement and there are numerous instances of both women and men accessing Flexible Working Arrangements (FWA). Some Command members have taken conscious steps to promote flexibility by role modelling flexible work practices and promoting FWA for both women and men.

However, barriers to flexibility remain in some cases. One member characterised the barriers as ‘not policy barrier, but people barriers’, noting the variable level of support at the local level. This observation applies not just to Army. Research by QUT on corporate environments reveals similar dynamics.73

Lack of flexible options has far-reaching consequences for families, and particularly mothers, as many take on the majority of care. Some describe feeling punished for trying to balance caring commitments with their career.

*Even though I’d done my time and I’d worked hard and I’d earned my maternity leave… I was pushed back and made to start from scratch again, just like a new IET marching in, even though I’d done 10 years’ service.*74

Some members felt that there was less knowledge of entitlements and acceptance of flexibility for the junior ranks. Flexibility is a powerful retention tool; it makes sense that Army use of it at all levels to ensure the pipeline of talent.

Conclusion

The AHRC is privileged to have had the opportunity to engage so openly with a wide range of Army members over the course of the Collaboration to date. The rich data gathered through consultations to ‘take the cultural temperature’ shows an organisation changing. There are ‘hot spots’ of resistance, around the acceptance of diversity and consequences of negative language but there are large parts of the Army that are cool, calm and collected about the cultural change agenda. The
challenge remains for Army to maintain its momentum and commitment into the future.

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6 A base visit was also undertaken at ALTC, however the primary focus of this article will be the combat brigade project.
7 5th Aviation Regiment, 10th Force Support Battalion, 7th Combat Service Support Battalion, 2nd General Health Battalion, 1st Combat Service Support Battalion, 1st Combat Signal Regiment.
8 Descriptive statistics is the term given to the analysis of data that helps describe, show or summarize data in a meaningful way such that, for example, patterns might emerge from the data.
9 YourSay Survey Reports, Unacceptable Behaviour Survey Research, Australian Defence Force Investigative (ADFIS) data, Defence Force Discipline Act (DFDA) data, Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Office (SeMPRO) data, Inspector General of the Australian Defence Force (IGADF) reports, Drug and Alcohol management plans and testing processes, AIMS (Army incident management system) data, COMTRACK data, Injury Statistics, Pathway to Change: Measures of success report, Equity Advisors and Chaplain data, Data management systems used, Diversity Programs, Education programs on respectful healthy relationship and sexual ethics, making a complaint, cultural diversity, Mentoring programs, Local culture or Pathway to Change initiatives, report/minutes from the Regional Gender and Diversity Council and whole of Army Gender and Diversity Council.


15 Interview 9.

16 Interview 10.

17 Focus Group 5.

18 Survey response.

19 Focus group 5(c).

20 Focus group 23.

21 Focus group 15.

22 Focus group 15.

23 Interview.


25 Focus Group 11.

26 Focus Group.

27 Focus group 18.

28 Interview 52.

29 Focus group.

30 Focus group 17.

31 Focus Group 21.

32 Focus Group 9.

33 Focus group 7.


37 Focus Group 4.

38 Focus Group 7(b).

39 Focus Group 48.

40 Interview 13.

41 Interview 3.

42 Interview 13(b).

43 Focus group 25.

44 Female Interview 13(b).

45 Focus Group 43.

46 Focus Group 43.

47 Focus Group 43.

48 Focus Group 43.

49 Focus Group 43.

50 Interview 13.

51 Interview 9.


71 Survey response.

72 Questionnaire Response.

73 Natalie Smith and McDonald Paula, 'Facilitating sustainable professional part-time work: A question of design?' (2015) 27 *Journal of Management & Organization*

74 Focus Group 8.