It was Lily’s first day at work as a full-time employee of the Global Banking Corporation (GBC), one of the largest banks operating in Australia. Her Welcome Kit sent to her by the Human Resources (HR) Department indicated that newly hired employees were required to attend the Employee Orientation at the Sydney headquarters office.

“Hi, Lily!” Lily turned around and saw David Walters, GBC’s Human Resource Manager, waving at her.

Lily met David at the second round of interviews when she was applying for her job as an account executive at the Loans Department. She was happy to see a familiar face that morning. The greeting calmed her nerves a bit.

“Hello, David. I am excited to be here,” Lily said.

“We are glad that you can make it. I assume that your staff ID works?”

“It did. I used it to access the lifts this morning. Thank you for mailing it to me with the rest of GBC’s Welcome Kit.”

“My pleasure. Anyway, help yourself with some morning tea. Feel free to sit anywhere inside the Mangrove Function room. The program will start in about 15 minutes.”

This chapter is based on in-class workshop activity on organizational diversity for the subject “54045 Organisational Communication” at the University of Technology, Sydney, Australia.
“Sure. Thanks, David.”

Lily went to the refreshments bar and got herself a cup of coffee. She looked around to take it all in. GBC was Lily’s second major employer after graduating from the university. Lily recalled that in her previous workplace, she was very nervous on her first day at work. Her supervisor gave her a list of tasks that needed to be accomplished during the next financial quarter. Lily recalled feeling overwhelmed. There were no orientation programs either. However, her supervisor was kind to introduce her to a few colleagues near her work station. “But I had to learn about things on my own since Day One,” Lily thought to herself.

After finishing her coffee, Lily walked toward the function room. On her way there, she saw small booths lined up by the entrance. There were several persons idly chatting near the booths.

Upon seeing Lily, one of them approached her and greeted, “Hello, welcome to Employee Orientation Day! I’m Alice, an account executive here at Global Bank.”

“Hi, Alice. I’m Lily.”

“You must have read about GBC’s Employee Action Groups in your Welcome Kit. I am a member of one of them. My colleagues and I set up these pop-up booths to give some information to GBC’s new staff like you.”

“Yes, the groups sound very interesting! I believe the CEO will talk about it as well later at the program?”

“He will indeed! We love this bank initiative for employees. Let me know if you have questions about the groups at some point. I would be happy to help.”

“Got it, thanks.”

“Okay, I think the program is about to start. I will see you inside, Lily.”

“Will do, thank you.”

Lily went inside the function room and sat in one of the middle-row seats. She immediately noticed that GBC has a culturally diverse workforce. She saw employees from at least three different ethnic backgrounds just with a quick glance at people who were seated next to her.

Lily mustered her courage and introduced herself to a few of them. “Hi, I’m Lily. How are you?”

“Hello, I’m Zihen Chu,” said the girl from an Asian background.

“Are you also a new employee?” Lily asked.

“Yes, I am with Corporate Affairs. You?”

“I am with the Finance Group, Loans Department.”

“Hi, I am Olima,” said another employee with a distinct Polynesian accent.

“Pleasure to meet you both.”

“Which department are you with, Olima?” Zihen asked.

“I’m with HR. I take it we are all newbies today!” Olima remarked.

“Yes, we are. Are you both excited?” Lily asked.

“I am. I just graduated from college. This is my first job so I am not really sure what to do,” Zihen replied.
“You will be okay. This is my third full-time job. My previous colleagues said that GBC takes care of its employees. So, let’s see,” Olima said smiling.

“That’s right, we’ll see,” Lily said thoughtfully. “I am beginning to love the vibe here,” she said to herself.

The program started. The company’s current Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Managing Director (MD) Brian Harper delivered the Welcome Address. Lily was thrilled to know that she is now a part of an organization with 40,000 employees spread across branches in Australia, which offers a range of financial services to its clients.

What piqued Lily’s interest the most was when Brian introduced GBC’s Inclusion and Diversity initiative. Brian explained details of the program in his speech. “In this changing communication landscape, we recognize that an engaged, happy workforce is core to the success of a company. We also acknowledge that the bank is attracting employees from various cultural backgrounds. We think this is our key, competitive asset as a company—our diverse workforce. We define diversity as differences of thought or perspectives in the organization. To us, diversity breeds creativity. Creativity leads to innovation. We put a premium on innovation because this gives us an edge in our ever-competitive and complex business environment.

“Attracting creative, talented employees is one thing. Making them stay is another. So, we decided to identify what will make them do just that—stay with us. In 2010, Global Bank conducted an employee engagement survey that served as a basis for our strategy in encouraging a diverse and inclusive workplace. A key insight from the survey was inclusion. The report we submitted to the Diversity Council Australia entitled ‘Taking Action’ explains that inclusion is the extent to which employees feel included and valued. We learned that when employees have a strong sense of belonging at work: (a) better ideas are created, (b) employees feel valued, and (c) employees are inspired to initiate activities tailored to their needs.

“We were thrilled to learn from the survey that our employees have strong advocacies that they hold dear. Supporting our employees’ advocacies means supporting other things important to them apart from work. This was our guiding principle when we developed our ‘Champions for Inclusion’ program that encouraged employees to form nine advocacy streams. We called the streams our ‘Employee Action Groups’ or EAGs.”

Lily looked at the EAG brochure included in her Welcome Kit. She remembered the pop-up booths outside the program venue. “This is so interesting,” Lily muttered to herself as she had another quick read of information about the groups (see Table 2.1).

At that point, Brian invited questions from the audience. Joining him on a panel were Alice Thun Nguyen and Antonio Bartoli. Alice was the one whom Lily met at the EAG booths. Antonio was a senior executive in the bank who worked closely with EAGs.
Table 2.1. Employee Action Groups (EAGs) of Westpac Banking Corporation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EAG</th>
<th>Vision, Mission and Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABLE: Assisting Better Lives</td>
<td>Advocates for customers and employees with disability or accessibility requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for Everyone (Accessibility)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Family Violence (AFV)</td>
<td>Provides training, support, and tools to equip and empower individuals and families experiencing violence in the home to move toward a life free of violence, now and for future generations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Leadership</td>
<td>Actively engages, mentors, and sponsors members to develop future leaders and improve Asian cultural awareness across GBC Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers &amp; Sisters (Indigenous Australians)</td>
<td>Provides a network for Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees who share a common vision for a workplace where Indigenous Australians and culture are understood, respected, and celebrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLEX (Workplace flexibility)</td>
<td>Supports employees, leaders, and teams to think differently about how, when, and where work is conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLOBAL (LGBTI)</td>
<td>Helps build a safe and respectful work environment for all LGBTI employees; one that values diversity, creating a culture of equality and inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prime of Life (employees over age 50)</td>
<td>Influences how GBC supports and develops mature employees, offering a range of information and contacts who can help with interests specific to this age group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOW (Women of Westpac)</td>
<td>Empowers women of GBC to make confident career choices through education, information, and networking opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Women in leadership)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth (employees under age 30)</td>
<td>Group to help them reach their full potential and, in turn, develop as future leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


One member of the audience opened the session. “Thank you, Brian, for welcoming us. To Alice or Antonio, could you tell us about the EAG initiative from a member’s perspective?”
Alice answered, “Sure. Employee Action Groups give us employees a chance to work together with like-minded colleagues to promote our respective advocacies to senior management. It is a platform for us to bring into discussion some of our concerns, issues, or challenges. Of course, this is in relation to our work. Members sort of act as volunteers who advocate for business needs important to their respective groups.

“Each EAG is given a small operating budget every year to support our initiatives. We think of different activities that are fun and engaging for our members. For example, I am a member of FLEX, the group that puts forward suggestions about flexible working arrangements for employees. As a mother of two very young children with no other support system here aside from my partner, it is challenging for me to be in the office from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day, 5 days a week due to our kids’ drop-off and pick-up schedules. FLEX is advocating for some staff to be allowed to work from home maybe once a week or 2 days per fortnight. This, of course, needs to be carefully planned with your team or department manager. But at least employees like me feel that senior management knows. It helps when we are able to tell management about this,” Alice explained.

“Could you give us more examples of activities initiated by other EAGs?” asked another employee.

Alice replied, “A few will be creating opportunities for networking events. The Youth EAG is big on this. Other groups focus on creating platforms for continued education or training. Some EAGs identified ways to embed inclusion practices into the bank’s daily operations. ABLE, for example, has consulted with GBC’s Group Property Division about integrating intuitive accessibility designs into employee work stations in some of our Melbourne and Sydney offices. Without ABLE’s initiative on this, senior management may not fully understand how to support employees with special needs.”

Lily raised her hand. “Does a group directly report to the CEO of the company?”

“Yes,” Brian answered. “At the start of every financial year, EAGs submit their strategic plans for the year to ensure that their proposed initiatives are in line with the bank’s Inclusion and Diversity Policy. I read their plans and consult the Board about which ones to prioritize for that year.

“I have to say, though, that priority setting is challenging for us. In as much as we want to support all EAG activities, our resources are also limited. The Board decides which concern needs to be addressed first, and how many resources to allocate.

“Alice’s point on flexible working arrangements, for example, is continuously being discussed. Umm, we are proud that we have taken baby steps on this. Some employees are able to make a case to their team leaders about working from home. However, given our 40,000 strong employee base, we want to be careful on our policy about this. We want to make sure that alternative arrangements will not disrupt
our daily operations. In short, employees and their teams should be able to hit their KPIs regardless if they work in the office or at home," Brian said.

“What about outcomes expected from EAGs?” asked another member of the audience.

Antonio answered the question. “Outcomes of all EAGs are presented directly to our Chief Executive Officer on a quarterly basis. It is a means to assure senior management that groups are achieving their objectives. Each EAG is assigned a senior executive who serves as the mentor of the group. This is my current role for the group called ‘Brothers and Sisters.’ My job is to make sure that members are able to articulate objectives of their proposed activities in their strategic plans. I also read their year-end report to check if it specifies whether targets are met. The bank would also like to know if they still remained efficient in their jobs while working on their EAG activities.”

“We have to remember, though, that each EAG is only given a small amount of money for their activities,” Brian exclaimed. “GBC is not expecting too much from what is given to them as long as employees use these groups as an avenue for collaboration. The bank wants them to have fun working on their advocacies! I think that is the main point.”

Olami joined the discussion. “Alice, is membership in a group really fun?”

“Absolutely!” Alice replied. “Having a direct line of communication with the CEO is crucial to us. Having said this, however, I have to admit that building consensus among members does not come easy all the time. Just like in any other group, there are personality differences. Diverse ideas abound. But on days when we get all excited about what we want to tell senior management, we go back to the vision of the group. EAGs were created to encourage employee engagement. So discussions, deliberations, and negotiations on what should be prioritized by the group are welcomed. Without these exchanges, engagement does not happen in the first place! The social aspect encouraged by EAG membership is unparalleled. We get to meet people of similar interests, and to work on small projects to promote those interests. This is quite inspiring.

“Also, I also have to add to the point raised both by Brian and Antonio on job efficiency. Sometimes it is challenging to be active in the group amidst our workload. EAG activities are additional tasks in our To-Do lists at work. We remind ourselves that our advocacies should not distract us from our day jobs, so to speak. We are bank employees first, EAG members next,” Alice explains.

Brian said, “If you are going to ask me as the company’s CEO the question ‘does the program work?’ I’d say yes, it does. To date, there are 6,300 GBC employees who are members of our nine action groups. This demonstrates that we have 6,300 employees who want to do more at work apart from their usual job descriptions. A very good sign of an engaged employee base. Moreover, our industry peers have recognized our effort in promoting organisational inclusion and diversity. We have set benchmarks for this area. Your Welcome Kit lists awards that the company won in relation to this.”
Lily quickly checked the list and saw the following awards:

- 2015 Australian Human Resources Institute’s (AHRI) “Most Inclusive Workplace” Award
- ABLE won the AHRI 2014 Disability Employment Award and 2013 National Disability Award for Excellence in Employment Outcomes
- GLOBAL won the Best LGBTI Network Award
- CEO (BT Financial Group) was recognized as Executive Sponsor of the Year at the 2015 Australian Workplace Equality Index Awards
- 2014 Best Employer International for 50+ Employees

Lily thought the EAGs were fascinating! She has yet to hear stories from her friends’ work experiences that are similar to this.

Toward the end of the program, Brian read the statement that he wrote in the “Taking Action” report, “My starting point when talking about diversity is to say, ‘This is a business issue.’ It might be a happy coincidence that there are social justice outcomes as well, but actually you can be totally commercial about this and say that a more diverse and inclusive workforce means we can get better quality people working for us. It means we make more thoughtful and insightful decisions and therefore do better over time. Thank you. Welcome again to GBC.”

Lily found the whole Orientation Day program informative and inspiring. It made her feel that she will be valued as an employee at GBC.

Olami queried, “Will you join an action group eventually?”

Lily answered, “I might. I am really inclined to meet other people from other divisions or departments. I think this is important for me as I settle into the workplace. In my previous work, I did not socialize enough with colleagues. For one, the culture of the place did not emphasize socialization the way GBC seems to be espousing.”

Zihen cheerfully added, “We might see each other in one of the groups then; we’ll never know!”

The three of them exchanged contact numbers. After that, they bid each other good-bye. On her way out of the venue after the program, Lily posted on Twitter: *Happy to be celebrated here in my new workplace. #newbeginnings #proudnewbie*

She could not wait for Monday, her first official day at work.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What skillsets are necessary for employees to thrive in a multicultural or diverse workplace?
2. What challenges do communication divergences in the workplace create?
3. What is the connection between promoting organizational diversity and organizational effectiveness? What is the disconnect?
4. Discuss the relationship between socialization processes and organizational diversity.
5. From a newcomer socialization perspective, discuss why an orientation program benefits new employees.
6. In what ways does joining small groups or teams in the workplace become an information-seeking strategy for employees?

**SUGGESTED READINGS**


