

# **Who's in? Analysing the impact of inclusive communication policy and processes on organisations seeking to include diverse publics**

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

under the supervision of Associate Professor Christina Ho,  
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## Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Vicki Anne Bamford declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Communication, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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## Abstract

Who's in? Analysing the impact of inclusive communication policy and processes for organisations and their diverse publics

Many organisations acknowledge the need to include diverse publics, but most struggle to do so (Edwards, 2017, p.2, Thill, 2015, p.3). A case study approach investigated one organisation from each sector of not for profit, government, and for profit based on a reputation for including diverse publics. Each organisation's inclusive policies and processes were analysed and their publics experience of being included reported. Data were collected from 2017 to 2018 from staff and their customers with disability and from a Non-English Speaking Background (NESB), and industry reports and documentation were analysed from 2008 to 2019 mapping their historical position to include these publics.

This study found a mismatch between the diverse publics' norms of culture, to share meaning (Kim, 2001) and the organisations' norms of practice, to share communication processes to engage and it created a barrier to inclusion. Gaps in communication processes prevented effective feedback mechanisms to inform change; the prioritisation of business goals over mission statements supporting the values of inclusion; and the lack of relationships with advocacy groups able to intercede for NESB publics. Staff with lived experience of disability or as a NESB shared some of these publics' norms of culture but they were unable to use this understanding to influence the organisations' norms of practice to be included (Kalowski, 1996, Davis, 2013).

The study demonstrated that strategic communication processes could improve inclusion of diverse publics. Thus, a key conceptual contribution is the observation that embedding strategic communication processes to build on the ideological framework of communicative action (Habermas, 1981), to support an open exchange of ideas for diverse publics, leads to new knowledge because understanding and meaningful engagement is the aim.

Four significant implications for practice were identified: establishing feedback mechanisms on inclusion is important for understanding current needs and promoting future services; communicating with diverse publics requires specialist skills; programs of education for strategic communicators need an emphasis on establishing processes that bring together the norms of culture of diverse publics with the potentially constraining norms of practice of organisations; the changes required in organisations to ensure that diverse publics are included need to focus on access, requiring the implementation of culturally sensitive strategic communication processes.

This study's originality lies in its close study of mainstream organisations widely regarded as industry leading in relation to their inclusive approach to diverse publics. It revealed practices that covertly excluded diverse publics, and identified staff were unaware.