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## INTRODUCTION

This report provides information regarding the implementation of benefits and procedures that constitute the eight dimensions of quality of employment in Australian workplaces. The information used was accessed from a variety of sources, including government reports and industry surveys.

The majority of workplaces in Australia are classified as small, employing fewer than 20 workers. Approximately 90% of organizations employ fewer than 20 workers, and 95% of the Australian labor force works in small businesses.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, businesses with 20–199 employees constitute 9% of all businesses, while only 1% of employers have 200 or more workers.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is important to remember that employment in Australia is particularly characterized by experiences in small firms.

Organizations that want to remain employers-of-choice must periodically assess how shifts in the business environment might impact the effectiveness of their talent-management strategies, policies, and programs. Globalization and changes in the age composition of the workforce are two important 21st-century trends that can have a significant impact on the need to customize and adjust core strategies and practices. Employers around the world are challenged by the need to establish talent management policies and practices that are globally strategic but also relevant to specific country contexts. Forward-thinking employers are considering:

- How might shifts in the economic structure and age composition of the workforces in different countries affect the next generation of human resource policies and practices?
- How might these policies and practices support the sustainability of great places to work?

### *What does “mind the gap” mean?*

Train stations across England play recorded messages to remind passengers that they should “mind the gap.” These words of caution urge train travelers to pay attention to the space between the door of the train car and the platform in the station for safe commutes and travels.

For this series of our research publications, we have adopted the phrase “mind the gap.” The Mind the Gap series aims to remind employers to pay attention to any gaps that might exist between employees’ priorities and needs and employers’ allocation of workplace-based resources. Our Mind the Gap papers also aim to help readers bridge such gaps in quality of employment in other country contexts.

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The Sloan Center on Aging & Work in Boston, in collaboration with the Middlesex University Business School in London, created the Mind the Gap series to provide employers with basic employment-related information country-by-country. There are two types of papers in the Mind the Gap series.

**Employee Series:** This series examines the perspectives that adults of different ages have about employment and the assessments that they make about their employment experiences. These papers focus on one central question: *Does age affect employees' preferences for an idealized job and their assessments of their employment experiences?*

**Employer Series:** This series examines the prevalence of human resource policies and programs at workplaces in a selected country. Because most talent-management strategies and programs are age-neutral, we compare the availability of selected human resource policies in practices in the targeted country with the availability of similar policies and practices in a small number of countries with approximate economic circumstances. These papers focus on one core question: *How does the availability of human resource policies and programs in the targeted country compare with other countries?*

Although papers in both series focus on a single country, when the information contained in two or more papers are considered in tandem, it is possible to consider whether employees' perceptions of their employment experiences vary from country to country.



## Quality of Employment: Dimensions of a “Good Job” and a “Good Place to Work”

Most people would agree that good jobs are a good thing. High-quality jobs offer benefits to employees and to the organizations where they work.

- **Benefits for Employees:** The quality of employment affects the health and well-being of employees. Research confirms that poor-quality jobs (such as those that require extreme work hours, are very demanding—particularly those where employees do not have access to the resources they need to meet those demands) are associated with negative outcomes, including high stress levels and physiological reactions such as cardio-vascular problems.<sup>3</sup>
- **Benefits for Employers:** Employers often connect the quality of employment they offer to employees with their employer-of-choice strategies. There is some evidence that the adoption of policies and practices that promote the quality of employment available to employees is related to positive outcomes for organizations, such as customer satisfaction and organizational performance.<sup>4</sup> Employer-of-choice strategies can result in enhanced employee engagement, which, in turn, can be linked to organizational outcomes, including financial measures. For example, higher employee engagement can reduce costs associated with unwanted turnover. One study found that 59% of highly engaged employees report that they intend to stay with their employers, compared with 24% of disengaged employees.<sup>5</sup> A number of studies have linked employee job satisfaction with positive performance indicators. Fortune reports positive relationships between being recognized as a “great place to work” and stock indices.<sup>6,7</sup>

The Global Institute focuses on eight important dimensions of the quality of employment:

- Fair, Attractive, and Competitive Compensation & Benefits
- Opportunities for Development, Learning & Advancement
- Wellness, Health & Safety Protections
- Opportunities for Meaningful Work
- Provisions for Employment Security & Predictabilities
- Workplace Flexibility
- Culture of Respect, Inclusion & Equity
- Promotion of Constructive Relationships at the Workplace

The following sections of this paper use the Quality of Employment framework as a structure to discuss the perspectives of employers about their employment situations.

# QUALITY EMPLOYMENT IN AUSTRALIA:

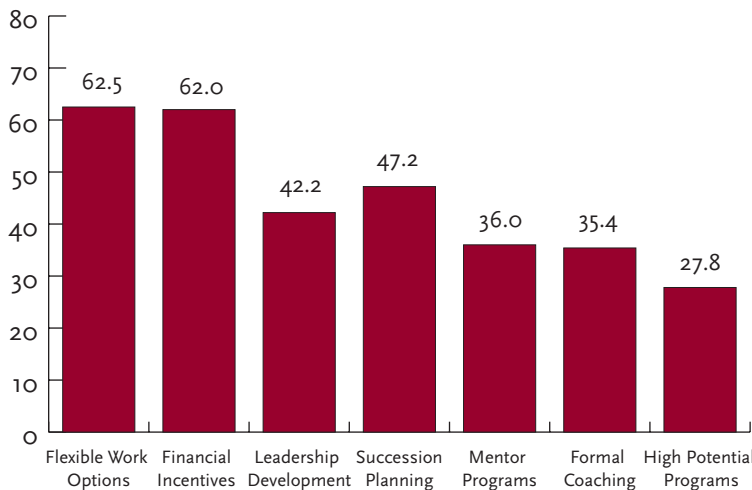
## I. Indicators of Fair, Attractive, and Competitive Compensation & Benefits

- ▶ *Compensation and benefits are distributed in a fair and equitable manner, meeting most of employees' basic economic needs.*

- A 2007 survey of 7,185 employers across small (fewer than 20 employees), medium (20–200 employees), and large (more than 200 employees) organizations, conducted by Hudson, an employer consultant, explored employers' initiatives to engage and retain their employees. The survey revealed that 96.5% of employers were implementing some form of engagement activities, with flexible work options and financial incentives the most commonly available (see Figure 1).<sup>8</sup> Virtually all engagement activities were utilized to a greater extent among larger organizations.



Figure 1: Engagement Activities



Source: Hudson, 2007

Larger organizations were more likely to provide engagement activities to employees, while flexible work options and financial incentives were the most common engagement activity offered across all organizations.

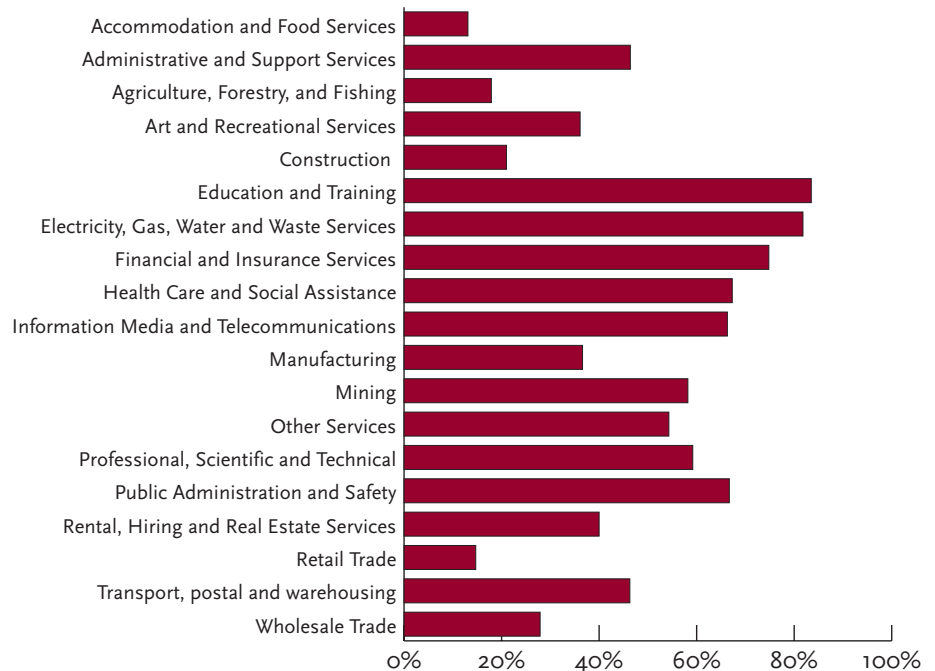
- Industries most likely to adopt financial engagement activities were resources and telecommunications, with more than 80% of organizations offering this incentive. Sectors least likely to offer this incentive were government healthcare, education, and government industries (all less than one-third of employers).<sup>8</sup>
- Almost 90% of government and government healthcare employers provided flexible work options.<sup>8</sup> Wholesale/distribution and manufacturing were least likely to offer this option (three-fifths of such employers).<sup>8</sup>
- Nearly 60% of the resources sector offered succession planning, making it the most likely industry to do so. Education and government healthcare industries were least likely, with approximately one-third of such employers making this available.<sup>8</sup>
- Financial services/insurance and professional services were the most common industries to provide high potential programs (almost 40%), compared to the education and government healthcare industries, in which less than one-fifth of employers provided such a program.<sup>8</sup>

- Almost half of the financial services/insurance and professional services employers offered formal coaching to their employees, whereas employers in the education, government healthcare, retail, transport, and wholesale/distribution industries were less likely to offer formal coaching (less than one-third of employers).<sup>8</sup>
- Employers in the professional services and resource industries were the most likely to provide mentoring programs and leadership development activities (over 60%), compared to the education, government healthcare, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), retail, and wholesale industries, where less than one-third offered mentoring programs and less than two-fifths offered leadership development activities to employees.<sup>8</sup>

It is notable that non-profit organizations were consistently least likely to provide any of these engagement activities, excluding flexible work options. This is most likely due to the fact that non-profit organizations are unable to afford such programs.

- A survey of 2,195 organizations by Equal Opportunities for Women in the Workplace, an Australian government agency that consults with employers regarding their equal opportunities initiatives, found that, in 2006–2007, 48.9% of organizations reported that they provided paid maternity or primary carer’s leave. Approximately one-third (31%) of organizations allow 5–6 weeks for this leave.<sup>9</sup> As shown in Figure 2, the industries most likely to provide paid maternity or primary carer’s leave were education and training (83.5%) and electricity, gas, water, and waste services (81.8%).<sup>9</sup> Of the 38.5% of organizations that offered paid paternity or secondary carer’s leave, most employees received a maximum of 10 days.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 2: Provision of Paid Maternity or Primary Caregiver’s Leave, by Industry



Education and training and electricity, gas, and waste services were the most common industries to provide employees with paid maternity or primary carer’s leave.

Source: Equal Opportunities for Women in the Workplace, 2008

## II. Indicators of Opportunities for Development, Learning & Advancement

- ▶ *Opportunities for the development of expanded skills and responsibilities are available.*

- In 2006, of the 7,614 employers responding to Hudson's Employment and HR Trends Survey, 50.9% stated that they provided career management programs to attract and retain staff.
- Industries most likely to provide career management programs were professional services (62.2% of employers) and financial services/insurance (58.3% of employers).<sup>10</sup> Non-profit (35.2%), construction/property/engineering (40.5%), and manufacturing (42.7%) employers were least likely to offer such programs.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, larger organizations were more likely to provide access to career management programs (59.8%).<sup>10</sup>
- 72.5% of surveyed employers believed that the career management programs were delivered effectively, with 72.4% believing the content was well understood by employees.<sup>10</sup>
- In addition, 71.1% of employers provided career management programs that considered lifestyle, diversity at different life stages, and work/life balance issues.<sup>10</sup>
- Industries most likely to establish programs that took employee diversity into account were retail (79.4%), professional services (78.1%), and financial services/insurance (75.3%).<sup>10</sup> Industries least likely to take this diversity into account were manufacturing (63.6%), telecommunications (63.3%), and construction/property/engineering (61.9%).<sup>10</sup> However, these figures still indicate a "considerable commitment to addressing the life stage, lifestyle, and work/life balance needs of employees."<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, smaller businesses (74.2%) were most likely to acknowledge the diversity of employee needs, compared with 71.9% of medium-sized organizations and 70.7% of large organizations.<sup>10</sup>
- Employers within the retail and healthcare industries were most likely to report positive impacts from implementing career management programs (86.9% and 83.2%, respectively), while manufacturing (63.9%) and government (63.8%) reported the lowest impact.<sup>10</sup>
- The State of the Service Report, a 2007-2008 government study that examined the human resource-management practices of Australian public service agencies, asked agencies how much they spent on training employees. Of the 90 small, medium, and large agencies surveyed, 54% spent \$500,000 or more annually on off-the-job learning and development.<sup>11</sup>





### III. Indicators of Wellness, Health & Safety Protections

► *Well-being is promoted through workplace policies, and social protections are offered in case of illness.*

- A study of more than 280 organizations that examined the work-life balance initiatives offered in Australian workplaces found that 71% implemented options that focus on the health and well-being of their employees.<sup>12</sup>
- The same study also found that 56% of organizations were currently focusing on reducing stress in the workplace.<sup>12</sup>
- The State of the Service Report found that 97% of Australian public service agencies raised awareness of health and safety issues, healthy lifestyle promotion, and other preventive mechanisms.

### IV. Indicators of Opportunities for Meaningful Work

► *Opportunities for meaningful and fulfilling work are available.*



- A 2005 survey of 50 companies that investigated corporate volunteering programs found that 40% allowed one day of work time to contribute to volunteering per year, 21% provided 2–3 days per year, 6.3% offered one week, and 2% authorized more than one week.<sup>13</sup>
- When asked the reasons for choosing to establish a volunteer program, 54% of companies stated it was part of their corporate social responsibility, while 52% stated that it allowed employees to make a contribution to the community.<sup>13</sup>

These findings suggest that there is considerable scope for Australian employers to do more to provide meaningful work opportunities to their employees, to not only attract potential workers but also to retain existing employees.

Figure 3: Incentives Offered



Source: Volunteering Australia, 2005

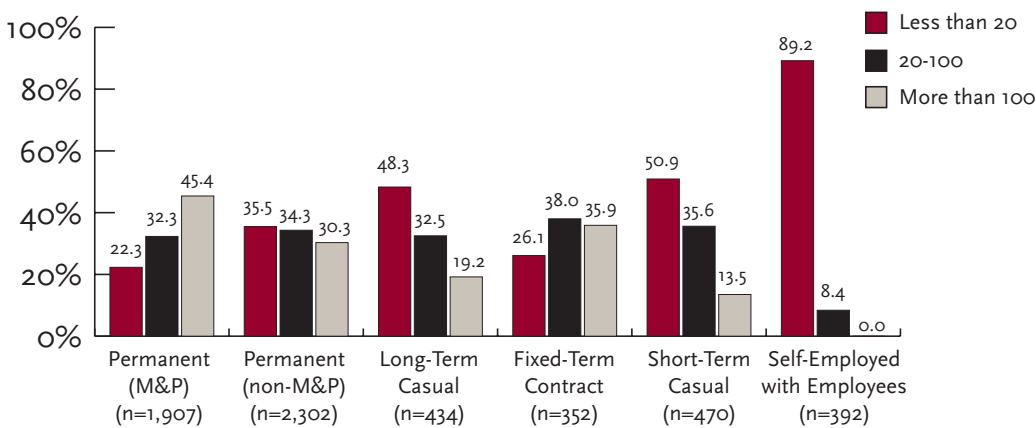
## V. Indicators of Provisions for Employment Security & Predictabilities

- ▶ *Terms of employment are communicated clearly, with an emphasis on smooth transitions through jobs and careers.*

- A 2008 survey by Australia at Work considered the forms of employment utilized by small, medium, and large workplaces. As Figure 4 shows, smaller workplaces were more likely to hire casual labor, possibly because these workers can be more easily dismissed and because benefits, such as paid sick leave or holiday leave, may be waived. Large workplaces had the opposite pattern and were more likely to hire employees on a permanent basis. “This is likely to be because they have structures in place to better handle problems of excess and under-performing staff.”<sup>14</sup>



Figure 4: Detailed Form of Employment by Workplace Size



Small workplaces were more likely to be reliant on casual employees, whereas larger companies were more likely to hire employees on a permanent basis.

Source: Australia at Work, 2008

- Australian employers are subject to stringent laws concerning the lawful termination of employees. Situations in which it is illegal to terminate employment include, but are not limited to:
  - Dismissal on the grounds of race, color, sex, sexual preference, age, physical or mental disability, marital status, family or caregiver’s responsibilities, pregnancy, religion, political opinion, national extraction, or social origin;
  - Trade union membership or participation in trade union activities outside working hours or, with the employer’s consent, during working hours;
  - Non-membership in a trade union; and
  - Temporary absence from work because of illness or injury.<sup>12</sup>
- Upon termination, employees are generally entitled to certain payouts, which depend on the terms of industrial agreements, awards, or notional agreements preserving a state award. Severance pay, such as the remainder of a worker’s annual leave or unclaimed sick days, applies to all employees, excluding those who were engaged for a specific period or specific task(s) and casual or seasonal employees.<sup>12</sup>



Table 1: Employee Termination Notice Period

Period of continuous service	Not more than 1 year
Not more than 1 year	1 week
More than 1 year, but not more than 3 years	2 weeks
More than 3 years, but not more than 5 years	3 weeks
More than 5 years	4 weeks

Source: Fair Work Online, 2009

An employer must provide appropriate notice before terminating a permanent employee. Table 1 sets out the required notice period, depending on the length of the worker’s service.

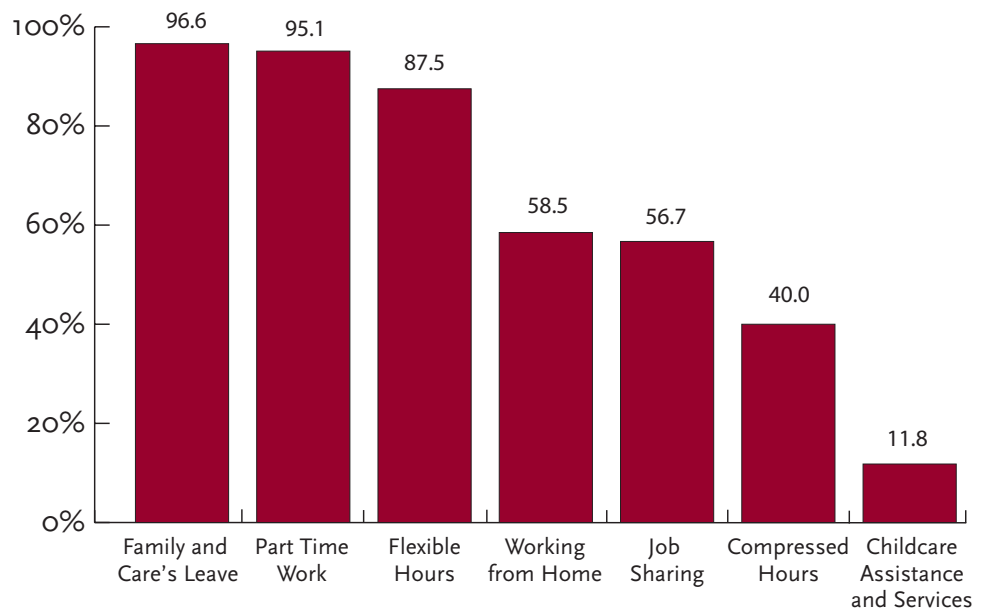
## VI. Indicators of Workplace Flexibility

- ▶ *Options, choice, and control over work conditions and hours are available.*

- An Equal Opportunities for Women in the Workplace survey that examined workplace flexibility arrangements in Australian organizations found that family and caregiver’s leave and part-time work were the most common workplace flexibility initiatives offered (see Figure 5).<sup>9</sup>



Figure 5: Workplace Flexibility Arrangements



Source: Equal Opportunities for Women in the Workplace, 2008

Table 2: Flexible Work Arrangements by Industry

Flexible work arrangement	Industry most likely to offer the arrangement	Industries most likely to offer the arrangement (%)	Industries least likely to offer the arrangement	Industries least likely to offer the arrangement (%)
Family and carer's leave	Electricity, gas, water, and waste services	100	Wholesale trade	92
	Financial and insurance services	100	Rental, hiring, and real estate services	92
	Public administration and safety	100	Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	93
			Accommodation and food services	93
Part time work	Financial and insurance services	100	Rental, hiring, and real estate services	88
	Health care and social assistance	100	Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	89
	Public administration and safety	100	Manufacturing	91
Flexible hours	Professional, scientific, and technical services	98	Public administration and safety	75
	Transport, postal, and warehousing	98	Education & training	76
Working from home	Professional, scientific, and technical services	86	Accommodation and food services	12
	Electricity, gas, water, and waste services	83	Retail trade	40
Job sharing	Rental, hiring, and real state services	75	Public administration and safety	33
	Financial and insurance services	68	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	42
Compressed hours	Electricity, gas, water, and waste services	57	Education and training	30
	Construction	53	Public administration and safety	33
Childcare assistance & services	Education and training	38	Construction	2
	Art and recreational services	31	Wholesale trade	4
			Rental, hiring, and real estate services	4

Table 2 compares the industries most and least likely to provide these working arrangements.

Source: Equal Opportunities for Women in the Workplace, 2008

- The report Work/Life Initiatives—The Way Ahead 2007 produced by Managing Work | Life Balance International, a consulting firm, stated that 75% of the organizations surveyed were focusing on increasing workplace flexibility.<sup>12</sup>
- A survey by MatthewsFolbigg Lawyers revealed similar outcomes, with 89.9% of employers reporting they had flexible working arrangements in place. The majority offered part-time work (23%), followed by caregiver’s leave (22%), flexible start and finish times (21%), working offsite (18%), and job sharing (16%). The majority of responses (36.7%) were from organizations with more than 500 employees.<sup>16</sup>

**VII. Indicators of Culture of Respect, Inclusion & Equity**

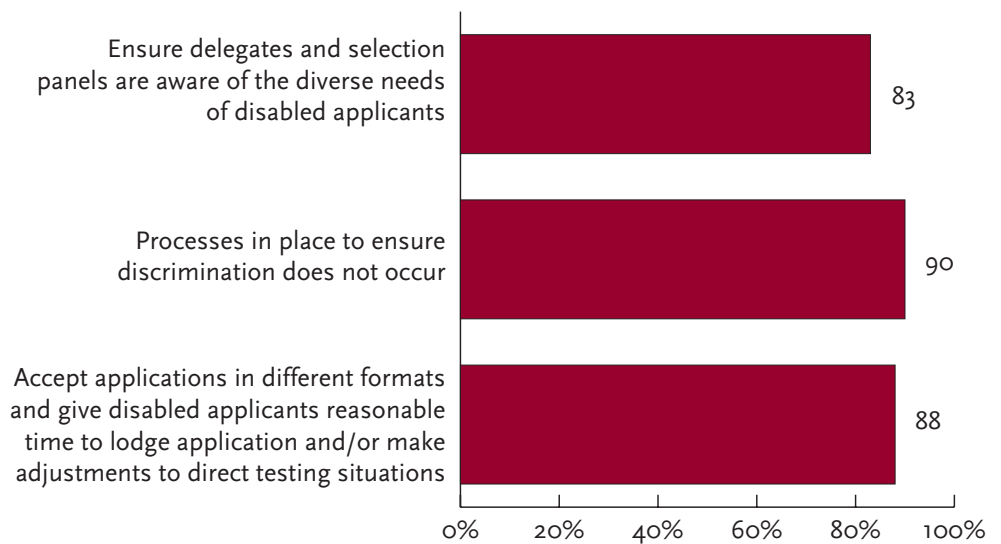
► *Diversity, inclusion, and employee personal growth are valued.*



- In the Way Ahead 2007 report, 32% of organizations reported that their organization had implemented programs to specifically attract and retain mature-aged workers.<sup>12</sup>
- In a survey of 3,180 executives, 41% of respondents “agreed” and 25.7% of respondents “strongly agreed” with the statement that their workplace encourages a culture where women and men feel equal.<sup>17</sup>
- The 2007–2008 State of the Service Report assessed the measures used by agencies to recruit and/or retain indigenous Australians. Providing study options was the most common strategy, with 53% of agencies doing so, followed by providing mentoring and/or coaching to indigenous employees, at 40%.

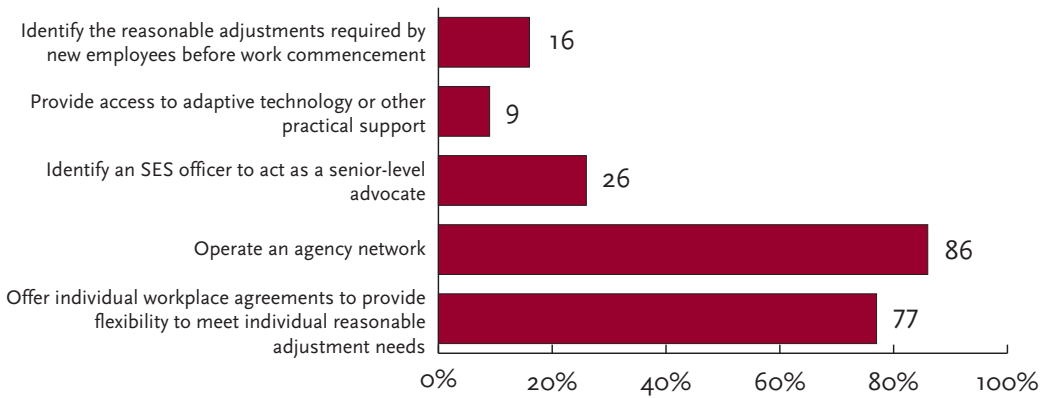
The State of the Service Report assessed the initiatives agencies employed to improve access to employment for individuals with a disability and found that 90% had established processes to ensure applicants with a disability were not directly or indirectly discriminated against.

Figure 6: Practices Implemented to Ensure Discrimination Does Not Occur



Source: Australian Public Service Commission, 2008

Figure 7: Workplace support offered to employees with disabilities



Source: Australian Public Service Commission, 2008

The State of the Service Report also considered the extent to which agencies offered workplace support to employees with a disability. The majority of agencies (86%) provided access to adaptive technology or other practical support, and 77% of respondents identified adjustments before the employee's start date.

### VIII. Indicators of Promotion of Constructive Relationships at the Workplace

- ▶ *Interactions with supervisors and coworkers are professional and respectful.*
- A survey of Australian organizations found that “80% had achieved culture change by encouraging supervisors to be supportive of employees and to find solutions to issues that work for both the organization and the employee.”<sup>12</sup>



## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:**

### **MINDING THE GAP**

This report considered the extent to which high-quality employment exists among Australian employers.

Research indicates that the majority of Australian employers (96.6%) are using some type of engagement activities, with flexible work options and financial incentives most common.<sup>8</sup> Regarding opportunities for employees to learn and develop, just over half of employers provide career management programs to their employees. If a permanent staff member becomes pregnant or falls ill, employers are required to provide “personal leave” (paid sick leave, paid carer’s leave, unpaid caregiver’s leave, or paid compassionate leave).

A minority of Australian organizations allow an employee to participate in a volunteer program during paid work hours. In the event of terminations, employers often have to provide severance pay and may be obliged to give up to four weeks’ notice to the employee.

Australian employers offer many flexible work options, with family and caregiver’s leave and part-time work most prevalent. The majority of Australian workplaces report that they encourage a culture where women and men feel equal and supervisors support employees by finding solutions that suit both the organization and the employee.

## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

Established in 2007 by the Sloan Center on Aging & Work, the Global Perspectives Institute is an international collaboration of scholars and employers committed to the expansion of the quality of employment available to the 21st-century multi-generational workforce in countries around the world.

The Global Perspectives Institute focuses on innovative and promising practices that might be adopted by employers and policy-makers.

The Institute's research, publications, and international forums contribute to:

- ▶ a deeper understanding of the employment experiences and career aspirations of employees of different ages who work in countries around the world;
- ▶ informed decision making by employers who want to be employers of choice in different countries; and
- ▶ innovative thinking about private-public partnerships that promote sustainable, high quality employment.

In addition to the Mind the Gap series, the Global Perspectives Institute publishes a Statistical Profile Series that highlights workforce demographic trends in different countries and a Global Policy Series that focuses on selected workforce policy in certain country contexts.

For more information on SCAW publications, please visit us online at:  
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The Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College promotes quality of employment as an imperative for the 21st-century multi-generational workforce. We integrate evidence from research with insights from workplace experiences to inform innovative organizational decision making. Collaborating with business leaders and scholars in a multi-disciplinary dialogue, the Center develops the next generation of knowledge and talent management.

The Sloan Center on Aging & Work is grateful for the continued support of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

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Philip Taylor is director of the Business, Work and Ageing Centre for Research at Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne, Australia. His research interests include individual orientations to work and retirement; employer attitudes and practices towards older workers; international developments in public policies aimed at combating age barriers in the labor market and at prolonging working life; and healthy aging.

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### *Mind the Gap Series:*

MTG01: United States, Employee  
MTG01: United States, Employer  
MTG02: Japan, Employee  
MTG02: Japan, Employer  
MTG03: South Korea, Employee  
MTG03: South Korea, Employer  
MTG04: United Kingdom, Employer  
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