



WHITE PAPER

Creating Competitive Advantage Through Workforce Diversity

Seven Imperatives and Inventive
Ideas for Companies That Want
to Get It Right

Executive Summary

Across the human resources (HR) function and the executive suite, diversity and inclusion are clear priorities. Nearly 8 out of 10 of executives say diversity is increasingly important in helping them achieve business goals—and they’re demonstrating strong support for it. There are external social and legislative pressures driving this emphasis, but the bottom line is that diversity is good for business. CEB research found that in a more diverse and inclusive workforce, individual discretionary effort improves by 12%, intent to stay improves by 20%, and team collaboration and commitment improve by about 50%.

However, in spite of long-term investment and commitment to the concept of diversity, organizations haven’t made much progress, especially in the leadership ranks. This white paper describes seven imperatives for organizations that want to drive action—and results—from their value statements on diversity and inclusion.

First, we need to define locally relevant and globally consistent objectives and assess and reward progress—not just final outcomes. The second set of imperatives focuses on building a more diverse and inclusive workforce by influencing the influencers, testing for inclusive behaviors in the hiring process, and reinforcing inclusive behaviors during critical interactions.

Finally, organizations that want to create a more diverse leadership pipeline should reawaken and support the aspiration of diverse talent by improving their perception of the leadership value proposition. If qualified, diverse candidates are not getting due consideration for leadership roles, implement mechanisms or processes to neutralize biases in selecting for key talent management positions.

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How does working with a diverse team affect individual performance?

Are employees more engaged and productive at organizations where diversity is a priority?

Is workplace diversity a business advantage, and if so, how can businesses maximize the benefit?

Introduction

Across the human resources (HR) function—and across the executive suite—diversity and inclusion are clear priorities. Nearly 8 out of 10 of executives say diversity is increasingly important in helping them achieve their business goals—and they’re demonstrating strong support for it. In virtually every investor call and annual report, diversity and inclusion are cited as key success factors and ongoing priorities for the business.

There’s good reason for this emphasis. Governments around the world are passing legislation on workforce issues related to gender, race, disabilities, sexual preferences, aboriginal status, and more—and organizations have to comply. Furthermore, changing workforce demographics are a simple fact of life. In the United States alone, we’re anticipating a 30% increase in the representation of minorities in the workforce by 2030. By 2040, the concept of “minorities” could be passé. Companies also feel pressures from stakeholders and customers who view diversity as a fundamental corporate social responsibility.

The bottom line, though, is that diversity is good for business. CEB research found that in a more diverse and inclusive workforce, individual discretionary effort improves by 12% and intent to stay improves by 20%. Team collaboration and commitment improve by approximately 50%. In short, working in an organization environment where divergent perspectives are valued makes employees want to work harder, stay longer, and be stronger team players.

The numbers tell us that diversity and inclusion aren’t just theoretically important, morally important, and legally important. Diverse and inclusive workforces drive outcomes that are important to the business.

“It is diversity and inclusion that differentiates us as an organization and establishes our competitive advantage in the marketplace”

George Chavel
President and CEO
Sodexo

So it's no surprise that even during the economic downturn, organizations tended to maintain or even slightly increase their budgets for diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives, such as mentoring programs, training, affinity groups, diversity councils, and scorecards. Employees recognize these efforts; our research shows that 49% to 74% of employees are aware that their companies are working to promote diversity and inclusion in the workforce (it varies by country), but most don't see much effect from these efforts. That means organizations are making potentially massive investments to gain only marginal improvements. Few organizations have succeeded in creating highly diverse and inclusive workforces.

When we interviewed HR executives at 84 organizations across geographies and industries, they cited challenges that can best be summed up in five questions:

1. How do we equitably hold leaders accountable for improving diversity and inclusion, given the differing cultural, legislative, and market situations in which they operate?
2. How do we attract candidates to our organizations from the small and highly competitive pool of diverse talent?
3. How do we ensure new managers are most likely to foster an inclusive working environment? Is there any way to test for that in interviewing?
4. How do we change workplace behaviors to allow all employees to contribute to their fullest potential?
5. How do we increase the number of diverse employees in the leadership pipeline?

These were the questions that framed our research and led to the formation of seven guidelines for success. Diversity is a difficult area to identify a "best practice," because no one we spoke to on this topic believes they've reached the goal state. For most companies, achieving diversity and inclusion is a continuum of progress. Some are further along than others. From those leaders we gained insight that can serve as a roadmap for your journey and ongoing assessment.

Seven Imperatives for Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Workforce

Let's take a closer look at the seven guidelines that emerged from our research. Given the regulatory, social, moral, and business importance of diversity and inclusion, we'll call them not just guidelines but *imperatives*.

Pillars of Success	Imperatives for Success
Define relevant diversity and inclusion objectives.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Enable regional ownership of diversity and inclusion challenges.2. Assess and reward progress, not just outcomes.
Build a diverse and inclusive workforce.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Leverage trusted sources to expand the pool of diverse talent.4. Hire for inclusive behaviors.5. Reinforce inclusive behaviors during critical moments.
Create a diverse leadership pipeline.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Promote a leadership value proposition that attracts diverse high performers.7. Neutralize biases in talent management decisions.

1 Neutralize Biases in Talent Management Decisions

Despite organizational efforts to eliminate conscious or unconscious bias affecting talent management decisions, it's still a fact of life. We can focus on bringing in inclusive managers; we can build and reinforce inclusive behaviors, but that's not enough. To neutralize biases and eliminate the impact on key talent management decisions, the best organizations modify talent management processes to increase the objectivity and equity of talent decisions.

Organizations can never completely eliminate the conscious or unconscious biases that individual leaders bring to talent decisions. The best organizations adapt talent processes to neutralize bias by creating a participant-independent method for equitable talent decisions.

Case Example: Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA), Duke Energy, and CEMEX

BBVA, a Spanish bank with 107,000 employees, had made significant progress in developing women's career paths in the organization, such as supporting them in returning from maternity leave, establishing a mentorship program for women, and other initiatives. But in 2010, women held only 20% of senior leadership positions. The concern was that unconscious bias was still influencing selection decisions.

To address this gender imbalance, BBVA devised a very simple and effective strategy. They simply removed name, gender, and age information from all assessments of candidates being considered for their HIPO pool. The focus is now purely on merit (experiences, accomplishments, capabilities) and not on anything that clearly identifies the candidate's gender. After only one year of this practice, already 10% more executive-level high potentials are females.

How can you neutralize bias at a smaller company where a candidate's gender, ethnicity, age, or other identifying characteristics cannot be concealed?

At Duke Energy, managers and HR representatives identify successor slates for specific positions through a process that helps ensure objectivity. Managers submit a list of successors for designated positions. HR analyzes the fit of designated successors for a position based on matching the detailed position profile and the candidate's talent profile. HR runs a query for alternative qualified successors based on the position profile, and candidates from both lists are considered in all talent reviews. The goal of this effort is to ensure the successor slate includes only viable candidates and that all qualified candidates are being included, even those not known to the hiring manager.

At Mexico-based CEMEX, one of the largest cement producers in the world, rapid growth and international acquisitions made it impossible for managers to keep track of the knowledge and skill sets of the organization's employees. This lack of information made it difficult to make informed, objective decisions for succession planning and leader career development.

CEMEX created a data-driven tool that helps identify the best-qualified set of candidates for open leadership positions. There are four major families of factors in a leader profile—knowledge, experience, performance and potential, and personal profile—all weighted to reflect the relative importance of that factor for successful performance at a specific level. These leader profiles are created through a rigorous process that includes a 360-degree review, a performance and potential assessment, personal profiling exercise, and emotional intelligence test.

Every leadership position has a position profile that details the requirements for success, developed in part from an interview with the incumbent. By matching leader and position profiles, the tool performs a very sophisticated fit analyses of candidates for open positions.

A valuable aspect of this tool is that it allows CEMEX to conduct real-time succession planning. All of this information is contained in a database and run off of a search engine. Just enter a position title, and the system will identify the most qualified successor candidates throughout the organization.

Objective-fit analysis tools (such as these developed by Duke Energy and CEMEX) mitigate the natural biases—conscious or unconscious—that affect leadership choices and could limit the pool of qualified diverse talent in leadership pipelines.

2 Establish Your Organization's Framework for Diversity, but Enable Regional and Local Ownership

Companies in different countries and regions around the globe have unique challenges and needs. For example, in Europe, we hear a focus on gender and age issues. In Australia, it's about aboriginal representation as well as gender issues. Even within a single country, one industry or part of the business might be challenged by ethnic representation, another with a focus on gender, and another by multiple generations in the workforce.

Most multinational organizations identify enterprise-wide D&I goals to ensure consistent improvement across operations. To reflect local variances, though, organizations should enable regional leaders to set locally relevant objectives within that centrally determined framework. The best organizations identify business and HR strategies shared across operations. They guide leaders on how to assess and embed diversity and inclusion in these processes within their unique legislative, cultural, and operational environments.

Create relevance by enabling regional (or local) ownership of diversity and inclusion programs and goals within an organization-wide framework.

Case Example: G4S

International security solutions group G4S has more than 650,000 employees in 125 countries. How can a company with such a global footprint establish diversity practices that will be locally relevant in all of its operating locations? How can it benchmark its divisions against global goals when local context varies so much?

G4S identified eight specific business and HR processes critical to its diversity and inclusion efforts and then provided local leaders with a framework to evaluate their business's progress in each of those eight areas.¹ Dimensions already exist across the business, so diversity and inclusion are seen as integral to the organization.

The framework delineates five progress stages for each process area, with a set of questions or indicators for business leaders' self-assessment. The self-assessment tool doesn't specify that a business unit must reach a specified metric, but it provides a globally consistent indicator or necessary piece of evidence to indicate the business has attained a defined stage in the maturity index.

Each business leader hosts focus groups to do this self-assessment collaboratively with employees. The evidence is then not just theoretical but reflects the employees' voice. G4S reports that employees are more engaged because they are included in the process. Business leaders are more accountable because the goals and efforts are more visible. The entire assessment and action plan is consistent with the global framework and relevant to the needs and context of the local business.

It's too early to talk about the year-over-year impact of this tool on D&I metrics. The initial objective of the tool was to give business leaders a relevant way to assess and improve the state of diversity and inclusion in their unique environments—and to use their feedback to continue to sharpen the tool.

What gets measured, gets managed; it's all too easy to say that diversity and inclusion are simply too complex to measure in a global organization. You must provide the tools and guidance for managers to make diversity and inclusion relevant and measurable.

¹ In developing this framework, G4S did an extensive review of other companies' approaches and applied some work from other experts, especially Julie O'Mara and Alan Richter.

3 Assess and Reward Progress, Not Just Outcomes

Most organizations set global D&I standards or long-term objectives, but to most effectively drive D&I progress, local leaders need to be given incremental objectives that reflect differences in starting points and capabilities. To do this, organizations should work with local business leaders to set feasible, short-term outcomes and visible milestones to assess progress.

Case Example: BAE Systems

BAE Systems is an aerospace and defense company based in London with operations around the world. Like G4S, the company has developed a D&I framework that allows for local leader ownership and input. Instead of trying to roll out a one-size-fits-all approach to setting D&I objectives, it decentralized ownership to the business leaders—still under a global framework, but allowing for more individual interpretation and prioritization.

BAE has taken that idea a step further and created a mechanism for setting interim steps and holding leaders accountable for progress. They didn't just set long-term aspirations; they required business leaders to set interim progress objectives, year by year, specific to their business units. The objectives are defined in one-year increments, but leaders also have to state where they'll be in five years and the specific path they plan to follow to achieve that goal. While there are some mandated minimums, regions can localize the index to some extent based on their own context and priorities.

Finally, BAE has built in hard and soft accountability to those goals, with a percentage of each business leader's year-end bonus tied to success in achieving his or her one-year objectives. In addition, the agenda for quarterly CEO updates now includes a details on how business leaders are progressing against their stated plans and milestones from the D&I Maturity Index. There is peer accountability in monthly review calls run by the diversity and inclusion head at BAE.

The tool has been in place for only two years, but BAE has already seen that D&I organizational goals are now more relevant and tangible across the business. By the end of 2012, BAE expects 60% of business leaders to move up to the next maturity level in all four dimensions in the tool.

To implement D&I objectives relevant across the organization:

- Allow some flexibility for business leaders to define locally relevant objectives within an organizational framework and strategy.
- Measure progress against predetermined progress objectives, not just long-term final outcome goals.

It is difficult to measure progress against a final outcome that feels remote and intangible. Encourage progress against progress metrics, with managers setting incremental objectives integrated with overall company priorities.

4 Use Sources Trusted by Candidates to Expand the Pool of Diverse Talent

Most organizations work to improve their diversity recruitment efforts by better targeting diverse candidates or making the organization more attractive to them. Companies are active in this area, working with diversity associations, targeting diverse job boards, using social media, recruiting from the “right” campuses, and so on. However, these channels aren’t delivering the expected results. CEB research shows that fewer than one in five HR executives are satisfied with their ability to effectively recruit diverse talent.

As it stands, companies are all competing for the same pool of diverse talent. What if you could increase the size of the diverse talent pool and attracting a larger share of this expanded pool? There are two effective ways to do that:

Use trusted, personal sources of information. We know from our data that 90% of diverse candidates turn to and trust more personal sources of career leads, such as referrals from people they know—teachers, career counselors, family, and friends. However, organizations tend to focus their diversity recruitment efforts on impersonal channels, such as job boards, print media, and social networking sites. Those impersonal strategies have the organization fighting to find the best talent in the same pool every other recruiter is targeting.

Influence the career influencers, such as teachers and career counselors, to draw diverse individuals into the talent pool and make the organization more attractive to those individuals. For instance, BAE’s own research indicates school children think engineering is “boring.” So they’re working to make engineering more attractive as a profession, starting at the elementary school age. BAE conducts road shows at schools (jointly with the Royal Air Force) to showcase exciting technologies or products its engineers have developed. BAE provides lesson materials teachers can use to infuse engineering into the class work, and the company works with career counselors to encourage them to steer students into science and engineering in general—and BAE in particular.

BAE has seen some positive results that show promise for the longer-term impact of these efforts: 85% of students feel more positive about engineering after participating in a road show. And although only 2% of engineering apprentices in the United Kingdom are women, 7% of BAE's apprentices are women.

Most organizations aim to achieve gains in their diversity recruitment efforts by better targeting, or making themselves more attractive to, diverse candidates. Since these gains can be lost when other companies adopt the same strategies, the best organizations focus on increasing the size of the diverse talent pool and attracting a larger share of this expanded pool.

5 Hire for Inclusive Behaviors

Most organizations evaluate manager candidates' D&I knowledge and values to assess alignment with the organization's D&I values. The best organizations assess manager candidates' past demonstration of inclusive behaviors to determine their likelihood to demonstrate these behaviors in the future. To help accomplish this goal, organizations should ask manager candidates to identify specific inclusive actions and experiences that demonstrate their history of inclusive behavior, not just beliefs.

Case Example: Sodexo

Sodexo is a food and facilities management company with approximately 120,000 employees and headquartered near Washington, DC. The company believes managers who value diversity—and, more importantly, exhibit inclusive behaviors—more naturally select, collaborate with, and retain diverse talent. So Sodexo has an explicit focus on hiring individuals who have demonstrated competencies in diversity and inclusion.

When hiring for management positions, Sodexo uses a competency-based interview guide that includes several questions related to “championing diversity and inclusion” and “respecting diverse opinions.” Both the recruiter and the hiring manager are given specific questions to ask and guidance on other ways to determine a candidate’s knowledge, experience, and actions related to inclusion.

The interview questions are not just “yes” or “no” questions or very general descriptions. The focus is much more around “tell me,” “what did you do,” and “how have you” questions that call for answers that describe specific behaviors or actions rather than general opinions.

6 Reinforce Inclusive Behaviors During Critical Moments

To foster inclusion, most organizations rely primarily on D&I training, which improves the perceived value of inclusion but does not necessarily result in a more inclusive work environment. An organization with 10,000 employees is likely to spend 40,000 person-hours in diversity training. Our research shows that this investment does have an effect on how workforces perceive the value of diversity; two out of three employees say diversity is important, and two out of three say their leaders believe it as well. Yet fewer than one-half of employees at companies around the world believe their organizations actually value diverse perspectives.

There are a lot of reasons why current diversity and inclusion training fails to create sustained improvements in the actual inclusivity of the work environment, but one reason is that it is often not reinforced. There's a one-off course, once per year at best, on inclusion and diversity training but little else across the year to make that real for employees. However, when that initial training is supplemented with periodic reinforcement of the right inclusive behaviors, behavioral change is sustained across time. Companies can get a very real *reinforcement dividend* by reinforcing the right behaviors from managers and peers during critical moments in the employee life cycle.

Case Example: Telstra

Telstra is a telecommunications company based in Australia with more than 43,000 employees. The company realized that training programs increase awareness of diversity but don't always change behaviors. Rather than just having blanket training about why employees should value diversity and inclusion, it wanted to help managers and employees understand how to practically apply those values in interactions where they have a disproportionately strong impact.

Telstra moved from a program-based approach that shaped how employees think about diversity to a practice-based approach that provides very clear expectations on how to foster a more inclusive environment. It identified critical moments when managers should exhibit inclusive behaviors and created customized messaging and support for managers for each of these

interactions. For example, specific guidance is provided for conversations at onboarding, during performance reviews, and in team meetings.

The concept sounds simple, but it represents a significant shift in perspective. Most organizations position diversity as somewhat of a punitive requirement that is focused on the company's deficits and theoretical in nature. What exactly does it mean to be inclusive? In contrast, Telstra has embraced a positive focus on diversity: "How can this help the business?" "What does good look like?" "Here are some very practical actions you can take that will build an inclusive work environment."

Rather than just having blanket training about why you should value diversity and inclusion, help managers and employees understand how to practically apply inclusive behaviors in specific situations.

7 Promote a Leadership Value Proposition That Attracts Diverse High Performers

Despite marginal improvements in workforce diversity, organizational leadership remains homogenous. On average, 7 out of 10 executives in Fortune 500 companies are white males, while women and ethnic minorities have relatively small representation. In the European Union, female representation on executive teams varies from about 20% in Sweden but trails off pretty quickly to a low of 3% in Germany. To get ahead of potential legislation related to gender imbalance, organizations need to self-regulate and improve representation.

To achieve greater minority representation in the leadership pipeline, most organizations focus on improving the skill sets of diverse talent. However, even with the right skills, these employees don't often see a match between themselves and their perceptions of what is expected from company leaders. Many companies have discovered that diverse talent doesn't lack the ability to move up; they just don't perceive the proposition as attainable or valuable enough. Even high-performing women are 25% less likely than men to view rising to a senior management position as important.

The best organizations improve the leadership value proposition for diverse talent by aligning personal goals of diverse high-performing employees to leadership opportunities and helping to reduce the personal sacrifices necessary to advance to leadership positions.

Most organizations overly focus on development programs for diverse talent instead of improving the attractiveness of leadership positions for diverse talent. Often, it's not that they can't make the move up; it's that they don't necessarily want to.

Case Example: Cochlear and Nestlé

Australia-based Cochlear makes hearing aid devices, employs about 2,500 people, and faced a very common challenge we hear from our members. Despite having a significant number of high-performing women in the organization, women seemed to be chronically underrepresented in the HIPO pool. There were two challenges to address:

- Many high-performing women didn't see a clear alignment between their strengths and a leadership role at the company.
- Women lacked the networks to help them understand and navigate leadership career paths.

Through its Leadership Presence Program, Cochlear reactivates women's desire for a leadership role and shows them how it would be supported in the company. The core of the program is a one-day workshop, supplemented with various pre- and post-workshop activities.

In the process, women create a personal mission statement and map it directly to their career goals and the company's needs. This is a critical step for helping women see that their personal strengths and passions can be directly aligned with their leadership career goals at the company. The next important piece of the program helps women build networks to increase their insight into leadership roles and develop a personal brand that reflects who they are and where they want to go.

Of the 30 women who have gone through the Leadership Presence Program to date, 68% have taken on new responsibilities. Some have moved vertically and some laterally, but the moves are testament to increased aspiration in this segment. Even those who have not taken on new responsibilities are showing increased levels of discretionary effort and intent to stay.

[Through its Leadership Presence Program, Cochlear is improving the relevance, attractiveness, and perceived attainability of a leadership career path for high-performing women in its organization.](#)

Case Example: Nestlé

Lack of employee mobility hinders a company's ability to tap into the best talent for a leadership career path where relocation is required. High-performing, mid-level women are 13% less willing than men to relocate abroad to advance their career, and this data set represents the women we most want in our HIPO pipelines. Often, women in dual-career relationships avoid relocation due to the potential of losing the income from their partner's career. This difference across genders naturally reduces the number of women in the leadership pipeline.

Nestlé was conscious of the underrepresentation of women in its senior leadership positions. Its own internal research confirmed that one of the biggest barriers to achieving a senior leadership position was mobility, especially with dual-career couples. It was a problem for both men and women, but 80% of dual-career women said it was a significant barrier.

The company's head of Gender Balance and Diversity tackled this issue by collaborating with other companies in the headquarters area and creating a Self-Sustaining Dual-Career Network. This program improves job search opportunities for the relocating employee's spouse in two ways:

- It extends relocation support to spouses, such as local job market guidance and networking to decrease the risk of families losing that second source of income.
- It partners with other organizations to create a self-sustaining and scalable network of employers and spouses for dual-career support.

One of the draws of this program is that spouses of high potentials tend to be high potentials themselves. The spouses they work with tend to speak at least three languages and have an MBA or equivalent, so this is a serious quality talent pool. Multinational recruiters are happy to discover such qualified candidates. Spouses are happy because their partners are being proactively helped in finding an appropriate job. Companies are happy because they can tap into a great talent pool.

The success of the program is reflected in its growth from 350 spouses in 2011 to about 700 in 2012 and from seven companies to more than 30, some of which are already working to set up similar networks with other companies outside Switzerland.

Closing Thoughts

Diversity and inclusion matter—not just because of stakeholder and legislative pressures—but because diverse and inclusive workforces lead to better business outcomes. Despite the attention and resources directed to this topic for many years, organizations are not progressing toward creating the truly diverse and inclusive environments they desire. To achieve better results, organizations need to focus on seven imperatives in three main areas of focus:

Define relevant diversity and inclusion objectives. Allow some flexibility for business leaders to define locally relevant objectives within an organizational framework and strategy. Second, measure progress against predetermined progress objectives, not just long-term, final outcome goals.

Build a diverse and inclusive workforce. To change the game when it comes to recruiting diverse talent, we need to expand the pool by using personal sources and influencing the influencers. We also need to focus on hiring for inclusivity, not just diversity; we can actually test for inclusive behaviors in the interviewing process. Finally, we need to shift from a focus on awareness training to driving behavioral change through reinforcement at critical moments.

Create a diverse leadership pipeline. We need to improve the leadership value proposition for diverse talent by realigning personal goals with leadership opportunities, expanding networks, and redressing the cost-benefit of relocation for spouses. Second, we need to neutralize potential biases, a remedy that can be as straightforward as removing identifying attributes that could play a part in managers' talent decisions.

About CEB

CEB is the leading member-based advisory company. By combining the best practices of thousands of member companies with our advanced research methodologies and human capital analytics, we equip senior leaders and their teams with insight and actionable solutions to transform operations. This distinctive approach, pioneered by CEB, enables executives to harness peer perspectives and tap into breakthrough innovation without costly consulting or reinvention. The CEB member network includes more than 16,000 executives and the majority of top companies globally.

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For More Information

 <http://www.executiveboard.com/>

Global Headquarters

1919 North Lynn Street
Arlington, VA 22209
United States
Tel: +1-571-303-3000
Fax: +1-571-303-3100

Frankfurt

An der Welle 4
60322 Frankfurt am Main
Germany
Tel: +49-(0)69-7593-7600
Fax: +49-(0)69-7593-8200

London

Victoria House, 4th Floor
37-63 Southampton Row
Bloomsbury Square
London, WC1B 4DR
United Kingdom
Tel: +44-(0)20-7632-6000
Fax: +44-(0)20-7632-6001

New Delhi

6th Floor, Tower 10-B
DLF Cyber City, Phase-II
Gurgaon 122 002
India
Tel: +91-124-479-6000
Fax: +91-124-479-6001

Singapore

80 Raffles Place
#30-02
UOB Plaza 1
Singapore 048624
Tel: +65-6645-4200
Fax: +65-6491-5337

Sydney

77 King Street
Level 8
Sydney, NSW 2000
Australia
Tel: +61-(0)2-9321-7500
Fax: +61-(0)2-9321-7650

