Working with employers to advance opportunity

A roadmap to strengthen the eco-system

WEBINAR: 25/3/2024

Report context: Purpose

SVA's research explored ways to strengthen the eco-system of organisations working to advance opportunity, by helping to address barriers to employment for marginalised groups

Project objectives

Objectives of the work included to:

- **Understand the emerging field** - by engaging with the eco-system to better understand current activity, and to identify strengths, gaps, challenges and opportunities to accelerate practice change

- **Explore the opportunities** available to strengthen the field, including the merit of intermediary models and other initiatives

- **Build momentum** in the ecosystem, including raising awareness of potential solutions

Report context: Definition

What do we mean by employer practice change? Let's align on a definition

'Employer practice change' refers to changes made by employers to their employment policies, practices, and culture to create quality job opportunities, and more inclusive, equitable, and supportive workplaces. Changes tend to emphasise creating opportunities for traditionally marginalised or underserved groups

Related policy agenda	Limitations and gaps
Diversity and Inclusion (D&I)	In practice, D&I rarely considers socio - economic background.
Unemployment and the employment services sector	Funding is focused on getting individuals into any job, but does not sufficiently consider job quality.
Skills and workforce development	Oriented towards economic and productivity objectives, with equity a secondary consideration.
Industrial relations	Constrained and shaped by regulatory environment and priorities of existing union members.
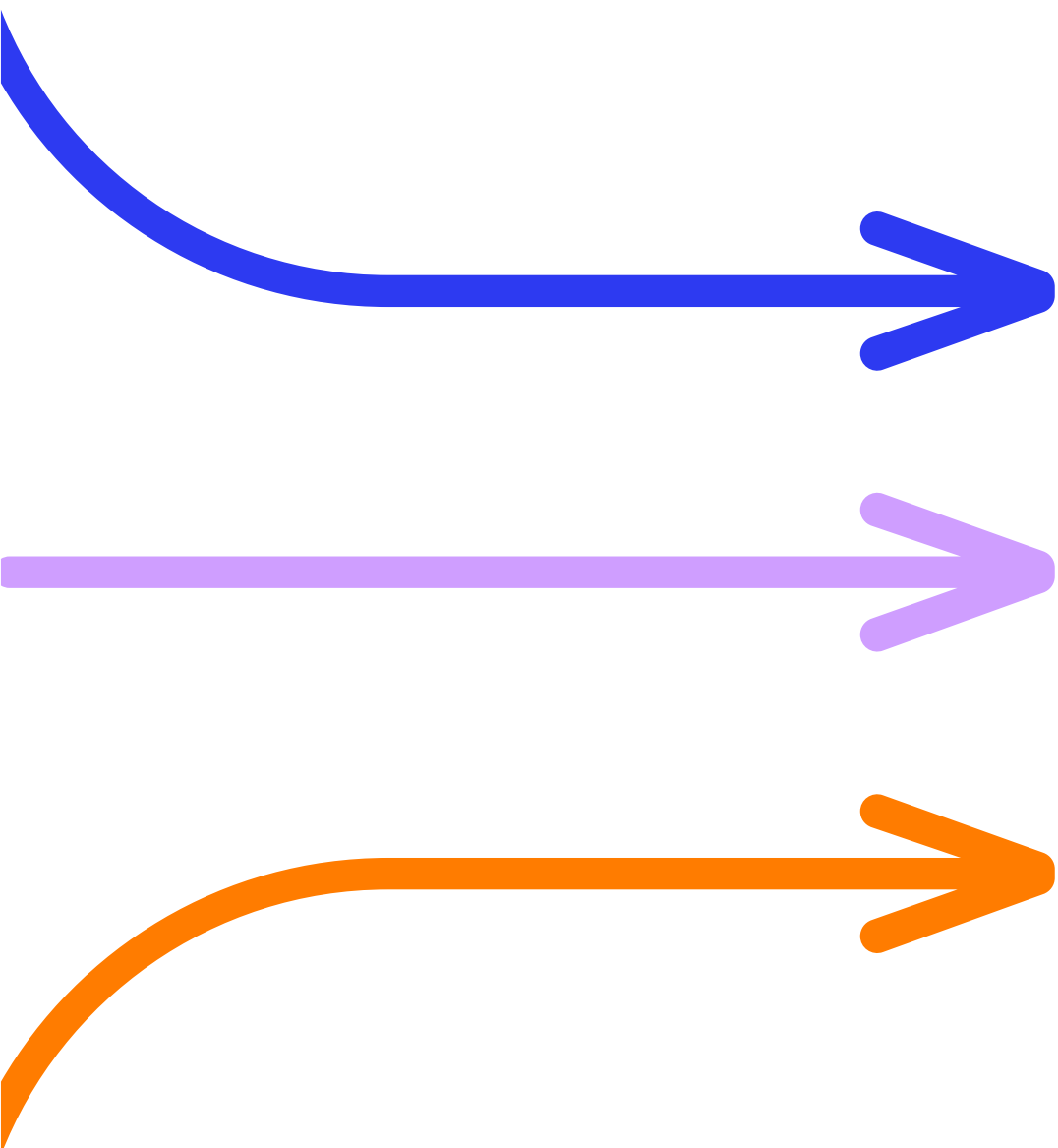
"**Systemic change** is critical for solving some of the greatest social challenges…

…and one of the most important levers for bringing about such change **is field-building** — coordinating the efforts of multiple organizations and individuals around a common goal and creating the conditions necessary for them to succeed"

- The Bridgespan Group, 'The Strong Field Framework'

Report summary: Eco-system characteristics

Our research engaged with stakeholders from across the eco-system, and surfaced several observations about the eco-system as a whole

Insight	Outline
Emerging eco-system and identity	• The employer practice change eco-system is still emerging in Australia. Many stakeholders do not recognise that they are part of a broader network with a shared purpose, limiting ability for large-scale change
Population and issue focus	• Organisations are often focused and organised around a specific population or issue, creating silos which can hinder learning across silos.
Geographic focus	• Organisations and initiatives have different geographic focuses (place-based, state or national), generating deep insights in their focus area, but often inhibiting share learning and action at across the eco-system
Fragmentation and duplication	• There is fragmentation and duplication of effort within the eco-system.
Activity focus	• Most organisations focus on working with individual employers to shift their practice through a programmatic approach. Few are focused on the work required at a systemic level.
Funding	• Funding drives behaviour in the eco-system. Limited funding for employer practice change activities is hindering progress.

Report summary: International case studies

We also profiled six initiatives from the UK and US, identifying insights and inspiration for initiatives that could be adopted in Australia

Insight	Outline
More developed eco-systems	• Both countries have examples of widescale initiatives driving employer practice change.
Intermediaries play a catalysing role	• In both countries, but particularly in the US, intermediaries have played an important role catalysing change
Shared language	• In the US, there has been an explicit effort to develop and use a shared language to describe employer practice change work
Initiatives tailored to local context	• The contexts in the US and UK differ from Australia's, and the initiatives address those contexts.
Inspiration for the Australian eco-system	• Despite differences in each nation, there are initiatives worthy of further exploration in the Australian context. These have informed the opportunities outlined below.

Report summary: Eco-system characteristics

Through our research and analysis, we identified 16 opportunities to strengthen the field and its impact in Australia, across five categories. These are listed in full in the report, and illustrated below

Category	Initiative examples
1. Shared identity	• Bring eco-system actors together to build a community; and develop shared language around employer practice change
2. Standards of practice	• Consolidate and catalogue practice change guides and identify gaps; work towards agreed practice frameworks
3. Knowledge base	• Map existing research and address gaps in the research; implement new data collection and reporting; develop a digital platform to share the eco-system's knowledge
4. Leadership and grassroots support	• Invest in field co-ordination and field-building; and build an alliance of employers to advocate for practice change
5. Fundraising and supporting policy	• Identify new funding for employer practice change and/or field-building; government takes steps to foster the authorising environment

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