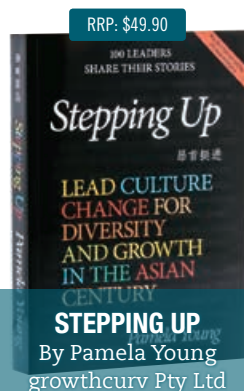


SHELF LIFE

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RRP: \$49.90
STEPPING UP
 By Pamela Young
 growthcurv Pty Ltd



RRP: \$39.99
INCLUSIVE GROWTH IN AUSTRALIA
 Paul Smyth and John Buchanan (Editors)
 Allen and Unwin



RRP: \$27.99
BIG DATA
 By Viktor Mayer-Schonberger and
 Kenneth Cukier
 Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing

Global business consultant Pamela Young begins her Preface with the statement that “*Stepping Up* is for leaders of business and society who are looking to increase productivity and achieve growth in the Asian Century.” It’s a suggested readership that almost certainly encompasses the membership of Ai Group, and those looking for some strategic direction in progressing their business – particularly from the perspective of workplace culture – will find food for thought here. Young’s core hypothesis is that our potential can only be unlocked through a commitment to greater diversity, both in terms of gender and culture, with a view to realising full participation both in the workforce and broader society – a goal she says has significantly eluded Australia relative to our global trading partners. She approaches the problem systematically and thoroughly over 12 logically sequenced chapters heavily complemented with quotes from ‘100 leaders’ representing both Australia and the region. The diversity evident in their extensive opinions adds an extra dimension to Young’s work that makes *Stepping Up* what any important contribution to public policy debate should aim to become: a conversation starter. Young herself has certainly perceived this: her personal blog @ www.stepsingupaustralia.com.au is designed specifically as a companion to the book, and as a forum for more Australians to join the conversation.

The Global Financial Crisis left many economic commentators to ponder the reign of the free market; in Australia, no lesser critic than Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered a lengthy and (in) famous essay on the de-bunking of neoliberalism. Paul Smyth and John Buchanan, Professors of Social Policy and Business respectively, set out to investigate a post-neoliberal paradigm “that has at its core the quest for a better integration of economic and social policy” – a movement that, locally, they trace to the reform agenda of the Howard Government, which emphasised investment in human capital. Indeed, echoing a refrain close to the hearts of many in industry, Smyth and Buchanan argue that productivity is “nearly everything” when it comes to raising living standards, and while social policies might have loftier and broader goals, they must be compatible with economic growth. Echoing Pamela Young’s emphasis on diversity as an ingredient for productivity, the editors chose their title to similarly underline the importance of social inclusion in economic growth. They gather an impressively credentialed team of contributors to deliver a series of chapters over five parts perhaps highlighted, from an industry perspective, by Professor Gerald Burke’s examination of Australia’s skills challenge; Saul Eslake’s dissection of our productivity performance; and Don Scott-Kemmis and Roy Green’s perspective on the scope and role of – and shared responsibilities for – innovation.

Self-styled as “the first big book about the next big thing”, *Big Data* wastes no time in conveying its subject’s massive potential – it is subtitled: “A revolution that will transform how we live, work, and think.” On face value, therefore, it’s not difficult to see why the authors – one the ‘Data Editor’ at *The Economist* and the other an Oxford Professor of Internet Governance and Regulation – have been pilloried in some quarters as “cheerleaders” for big data. Such a dismissive reaction, however, would be ill-advised. While thoroughly exploring the undoubtedly transcendent opportunities on offer to those who manage to turn unstructured-information overload into insight, this book holds a significant sting in its tail. Its most important and telling contribution may be in its examination of big data’s “dark side” – the issues of privacy and “propensity” that lurk behind its seemingly limitless potential. Propensity refers to the use of algorithms to make predictions about what we are likely to do – something already being explored in law enforcement circles to predict crimes before they occur, leading the authors to fear a real-life *Minority Report* where punishment could actually precede a criminal act. It’s one of the more sinister sides of big data that prompt the authors to warn against its “fetishisation” – blindly deferring to its possibilities without properly appreciating its limitations.

Ask the author

Q&A Why did you write this book? To share what I had learned from working in more diverse cultures around the world. Australia has many attributes, but achieving diversity remains a challenge to business growth and social advancement. I believed that I could help leaders by sharing what I had learned about changing cultures. When I see people struggling to achieve change, my tendency is to want to roll up my sleeves and help – so I did. I interviewed 100 leaders from across Australia and Asia to obtain the research needed to put a stake in the ground. Now we can work forward from here.

As a first-time writer, what was the most difficult part of the process? There were two difficult stages. Getting started was the first: it took a long while to get comfortable about sharing my private thoughts on these sensitive topics – “Gosh, someone might read them and judge me!” After I started the interviews, I realised other leaders echoed my impressions and this gave me confidence to be more open and honest; I found that my thoughts became clearer and my writing more succinct. The second difficulty was synthesising the research findings and years of culture change experiences into a book that would attract the broadest possible readership. Achieving social change is a prerequisite of achieving diversity in the workplace so we need people at all levels of business and society to read it.

PAMELA YOUNG author of
STEPPING UP