Understanding class at work

"Social class is a little like 'swagger'. It is hard to define, and tough to measure, but you know it when you see it".[1]

What is class?

Class refers to a person's social standing compared to other people in Australia, based on factors such as their wealth, income, education, occupation, connections, networks, hobbies and leisure activities. All these factors combine to determine a person's status, power and/or position – that is, their social standing or social class.

Diversity Council Australia uses **"class marginalised"**, **"middle class"**, and **"class privileged"** to describe people's class background – though many other terms are commonly used, such as:

Class marginalised:
lower class, working class, blue collar, battlers, lower socio economic status, poor, the working poor

Class privileged:
upper or higher class, posh, white collar, elite, aristocratic, monied, affluent, ruling class, high society, 'bougie'
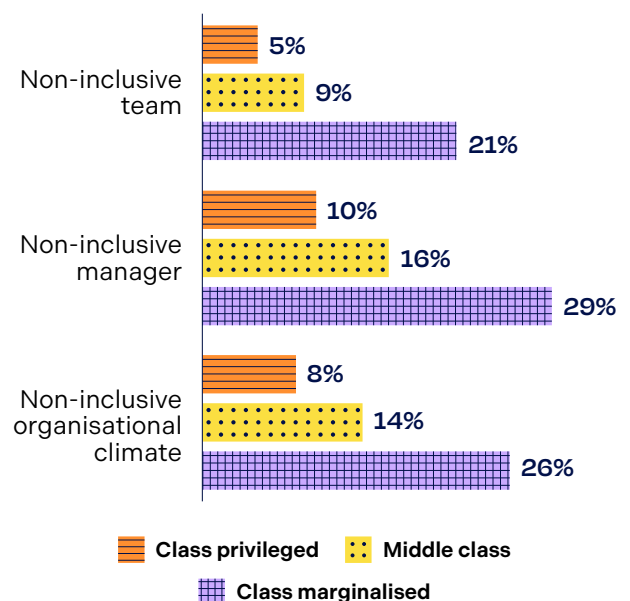
Does class count at work?

Yes. We found that class marginalised workers are:

x4 — 4 times more likely to be in a **non-inclusive team** than class privileged workers

x3 — 3 times more likely to have a **non-inclusive manager**

x3 — 3 times more likely to work in a **non-inclusive organisation**[2]

Non-inclusive team
- Class privileged: 5%
- Middle class: 9%
- Class marginalised: 21%

Non-inclusive manager
- Class privileged: 10%
- Middle class: 16%
- Class marginalised: 29%

Non-inclusive organisational climate
- Class privileged: 8%
- Middle class: 14%
- Class marginalised: 26%

Legend: Class privileged | Middle class | Class marginalised

DCa Diversity Council Australia

Which class am I in?

Use the table[3] below to explore your class background. Which class do you think you fall into for each of the factors in the left-hand column? Some factors may change over time while others can stay the same. For example, even if you mostly identify with the middle class column, you might find that you have also had experiences of class marginalisation or privilege throughout your life.

	Class marginalised	Middle class	Class privileged
Household income	Lowest	Between bottom 20% and top 20%	Highest
Disposable income	Least likely to have disposable income	Some disposable income	Most disposable income
Property ownership	Least likely to own property	More likely to own property	Most likely to own property
Residence	Poorer lower status suburbs furthest from well-paid work	Wealthier higher status suburbs closer to well-paid work	Wealthiest highest status suburbs closest to well-paid work
Education level	Lowest	Higher	Highest
Education type	Public school, TAFE &/or 'elite' university	Mix	Private school &/or 'elite' university
Job pay & security	Lowest	Higher	Highest
Job status/prestige	Lowest	Higher	Highest
Powerful networks	Lowest access to influential people who can create work & career opportunities	Some access to influential people	Most access to influential people who can create work & career opportunities
Hobbies & interests	'Lowbrow' affordable (e.g. rugby league, reality and sports shows, commercial TV)	Mix	'Highbrow' expensive (e.g. art, classical music, wine tasting, golf, cycling, sailing)
Intergenerational advantages	Least likely to have generational advantages	More likely to have access to generational advantages	Most likely to have access to generational advantages

1. J Sheppard and N Biddle, *Social Class in Australia: Beyond the 'working' and 'middle' classes,* ANU Poll, 19, The Australian National University, Canberra, September 2015.

2. Findings drawn from DCA's 2025–2026 *Inclusion@Work Index*.

3. Table constructed based on data from DCA's 2025 *Class Inclusion at Work* consultation survey, and the following sources: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australia's welfare 2023 data insights, catalogue number AUS 246, Australian Government, 2023, accessed 14 July 2025. A Leigh, 'Australian Mobility Report Cards: Which Universities Admit the Most Disadvantaged Students?', Australian Economic Review, 2021, 54(3):331–342, doi:10.1111/1467-8462.12430. D Carter, 'Jane Austen, Monet and Phantom of the Opera – middlebrow culture today', *The Conversation,* 2020, accessed 23 April 2025.