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Diversity in Canadian Workplaces Summary Report

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

For over 35 years ACCES Employment has been assisting jobseekers from diverse backgrounds who face barriers to employment to integrate into the Canadian job market. Approximately 80% of those jobseekers are newcomers to Canada and include racialized minorities from over 80 countries who are looking for employment that reflects their skills and experience.

We continue to achieve strong outcomes and results, with approximately 80% of clients finding work in their field, aligned with their experience and qualifications. This success is built on the strength of our network of more than 2,500 employers in various sectors in Ontario and across Canada.

However, we know racialized minorities continue to face challenges and barriers during the three main phases of the employment process: hiring, retention, and career mobility. While many employers have dedicated diversity and anti-racism policies within the workplace, these have not always translated to more equitable hiring, retention, and career mobility practices.

Diversity in Canadian Workplaces is an innovative project funded by Canadian Heritage that seeks to examine and confront the challenges and barriers faced by racialized minorities during the hiring, retention, and career mobility phases of employment. From an equity perspective, it is important to identify and address those practices which provide certain opportunities to some people and not others based on their identity characteristics. Through a series of three virtual roundtable discussions with highly engaged groups of employers from various sectors in our network, we learned about their best practices and policies, as well as their challenges in creating and maintaining diversity and inclusion strategies through the three phases of employment.

Following this report will be a white paper that will include these findings, as well as findings from an environmental scan examining the practices that are currently being implemented at a broad range of organizations across Canada. From there, we will develop training workshops and resource materials to assist employers in our network to ensure the success of racialized individuals in the workplace beyond hiring.

WHAT DOES EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION MEAN?

The terms Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are sometimes used interchangeably even though they have very different meanings and require very different strategies and action plans. Before we can understand the challenges and training needs that ACCES can support, we need to understand how diversity, equity, and inclusion are viewed and understood.

When it comes to understanding diversity and inclusion, a popular phrase (originating with Verna Myers) has been circulating on social media: "Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance." Regarding employment practices, diversity reflects hiring individuals with different religious, cultural, racial, and sexual identities, while inclusion is retaining and supporting the career growth of these employees long after they are hired. When asked, "what does a diverse and inclusive workplace look like to you?" responses from our employer roundtable discussions seemed to focus on a few key concepts. These include a working environment where all employees feel included and respected; a conscious effort to incorporate genuine diversity in hiring practices (not merely hiring token employees from each group); and educating employees, clients, and leadership, to reflect the importance of EDI in their attitudes and behaviours. Lastly, it was noted that EDI needs to be present at the leadership and management level, who should reflect and represent their counterparts in all levels of the organization.

SECTION 1: RECRUITMENT

ACCES has developed strong expertise in working with employers to move through any challenges they experience in the hiring process, including any gaps in knowledge or understanding of internationally attained credentials, education and/or experience. The employers we spoke with have developed a variety of EDI strategies throughout the recruitment process to ensure the success of racialized candidates.

Candidate Sourcing Strategies

Recruitment typically begins with the writing and posting of a job description. To ensure it is inclusive, participants recommended that specific criteria be addressed, including the following:

- careful wording that focuses on the technical skills needed for a role rather than core competencies, which may be subjective or misunderstood
- deleting educational titles, which may not be universally recognized
- removing acronyms and language which may not be familiar to all candidates
- eliminating the expectation that a candidate must have Canadian experience
- including a clearly worded, highly visible EDI statement on all job postings

"Let's stop focusing on the Canadian experience and focus on the person's experience. Yes, we have some of the best institutions globally, but that doesn't mean there are not amazing institutions around the world that have qualified candidates or even better candidates to do the job. Do other countries look down on our education qualifications? No, they don't. We need to change the perspective of how we look at it." - Karam Tawfiq, Global Leader Human Resources, DAC Group

Interview and Selection Process

To ensure a more equitable interview and selection process, participants spoke about the various strategies being used in their organizations:

- removing names, employment gaps, etc., from resumes prior to hiring managers receiving them for review to reduce unconscious biases associated with that information
- utilizing online tools to ensure wording in job postings are inclusive to all potential applicants
- creating intentionally diverse interview panels that are reflective of the workplace community and requiring all employees involved in the interview process to undergo a mandatory program, which includes unconscious bias and sensitivity training
- offering interview candidates a choice of who they would like to see on their interview panel, which gives them a voice and increases their comfort level with the process and the organization
- introducing a combination of personal interactions and digital tools to the hiring process to help break down unconscious bias barriers
- adding transparency and balance to the hiring process, such as having multiple individuals from various levels of management involved in the interview process, ensuring thorough interview notes are recorded and reviewed and requiring hiring managers to justify hiring decisions in writing

Challenges

Candidate sourcing, interview, and selection strategies are not without challenges, some of which can be attributed to unconscious bias, also referred to as 'affinity bias,' which is the tendency to hire someone who is "similar to us" or "looks like us."

"We can't forget about affinity bias. People tend to think of the negative side of unconscious bias and affirm that they're not biased against anyone, but what they're actually doing is gravitating towards people who are like them." - Pete Morra, Sr. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Manager, Softchoice

Other challenges that were noted:

- misunderstanding of non-verbal communication cues. In some cultures, for example, avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect, whereas in Canadian culture it is not
- assuming newcomers to Canada have poor communication or English language skills
- discounting the value of international education backgrounds and credentials because they are unfamiliar to hiring managers

Unconscious Bias Training

To counter some of the recruitment challenges, many of our participating employers have implemented various types of unconscious bias training with hiring managers and/or all staff. Here are some notable examples:

- BMO is creating awareness through enterprise-wide e-learning material focused on recognizing that there is a cultural shift that needs to happen.
- Previously, teams at CIBC had participated in a half-day facilitated unconscious bias training workshop.

However, the company felt there were gaps in the program—as focusing on unconscious bias alone was not enough to examine equity and inclusion in today's landscape—and cancelled the program. In its place a virtual program was implemented called Leading with Equity and Inclusion, which goes into detail about systemic racism, microaggressions, reconciliation, equity, and more. The company hopes it will equip leaders with the tools they need to assure its workforce reflects the clients and communities it serves, while being able to support an inclusive environment.

- Randstad has implemented training for all hiring managers, not only to empower them with the information and knowledge they need to recognize unconscious biases, but also call out those biases in the recruiters who bring forward candidates. The training is designed to provide space for everyone to have open and honest conversations while creating a necessary level of discomfort to effect change and "correct with compassion." It is centered around the notion that putting ourselves in another person's shoes shows we can significantly reduce our unconscious biases.
- IBM has implemented a system where hiring managers must have a "License to Hire," which is based on the completion of several trainings and courses connected to D&I to be certified to interview candidates.
- Finastra is focusing on training their recruiters and sourcing partners rather than only hiring managers because company D&I practices cannot move forward without partner support.

"It's not enough to know that you have bias and how to disrupt it. Understanding the role of systemic racism is critical to creating equity in business and talent processes as well as creating inclusive experiences for team members and clients." -Rachel Koffman, Director, Inclusion & Diversity, CIBC

Development Opportunities

Employers believe they can overcome unconscious bias in the recruitment process by helping to change the narrative and by teaching their employees how to correct with compassion.

Suggested next steps:

- Define diversity, equity, and inclusion and explain what each truly means.
- Create, encourage, and facilitate spaces and opportunities for staff to engage in open conversations on topics relating to EDI, including sharing lived experiences to avoid affinity bias.
- Provide tools to train everyone involved in the hiring process, not just recruiters.
- Write or utilize online tools to generate inclusive job postings—postings that are factual and objective, include an EDI statement, and avoid gender-based and other limiting language.
- Look beyond Canadian experience and focus on the transferable skills that will make candidates successful within the organization. This includes properly communicating with new employees and asking the right questions to ensure they are not being eliminated from other roles where they may be a good fit.

SECTION 2: RETENTION

ACCES helps employers to effectively move through challenges related to cultural bias in communicating with, and retaining, racialized employees. Employers have developed a variety of strategies aimed at retaining their diverse employees, which were expressed during the roundtable discussions.

Anti-Racism & Leadership Training

For many employers, what was once anti-racism training through enterprise-level events and workshops, is now transitioning into open conversations about systemic racism, including anti-Black racism, to ensure that all employees, regardless of their role and background, develop a better understanding of racism and unconscious bias.

Here are some examples from our discussion:

- TD Bank started an "uncomfortable conversation series" for all colleagues to talk about what's on their mind. The platform offers an opportunity for employees to voice their concerns and talk about what they want to see moving forward. From there, the company created a task force to ensure priorities are set and that measurable data can be attained to show the organization is "moving the needle."
- Rexall removed the words "culture fit" from their conversation because of the implication that the term implied "people that look like us." They replaced it with more inclusive words that reflect individuals who represent diverse communities, opinions, and experiences and will enhance company culture, also known as "culture add."
- Randstad introduced "Rise Chats," which gives space for all employees (including senior leadership) to safely share their story. It has created a wave of compassion because everyone is learning to better understand the silent struggles of their peers.
- KPMG has a 4-pillar anti-black racism strategy, including education and equity talent processes, which has expanded to a broader communication and EDI strategy in a holistic way to include all employment equity groups equally.

In companies where leadership is mostly comprised of white, able-bodied men, there is often hesitancy to have open conversations and to take the difficult steps to educate, inform, and disrupt the narrative. But it is no longer acceptable to tiptoe around the issue, everyone needs to join the effort to improve equity, diversity, and inclusion in Canadian workplaces.

"Your leadership has to champion your entire D&I strategy. If they don't embody it and they don't promote it, no one else is going to take it seriously. Your D&I person should be reporting directly to the CEO because it's the CEO who is going to champion that strategy. If the strategy applies across the whole company, then it has to start with the top person." – Leisa McKenzie, Employee Experience Business Partner, Girl Guides of Canada

Diverse and Inclusive Work Environment

A conscious effort needs to be made to ensure there is alignment between recruitment practices and retention efforts, including ensuring that employees feel supported and valued. It also needs to be clear to all employees that hiring processes are equitable and fair. Recruitment can lead to diversity in the workplace, but if employees from equity-seeking groups do not stay and move up in the company, then inclusion and equity will continue to be a problem.

"There's a culture shift that needs to happen. We must ensure our teams are supportive of each individual throughout the employment lifecycle; although the individual may have a great hiring experience, sometimes the moment they get on the job or move within the organization, they are faced with discrimination and bias throughout their career." - Alicia Dalgado, HR Manager for Credit Operations

Here are examples from the discussion:

- Miratec Inc., which has hired many newcomers, posts jobs internally before posting externally to give all employees an opportunity for growth within the company. This strategy has the added benefit of employees often sharing the postings within their own diverse networks and, when the position is opened externally, those applicants are among the stream of other candidates.
- 4S Consulting Services is actively supporting and working with their employees on career mapping and finding room for growth within the company.
- At the City of Toronto, a large proportion of employees are front-line workers and, therefore, cannot participate in enterprise-wide initiatives. To strengthen inclusion, the city adopted a customized model where small-chapter initiatives were created by each business area leader. Uptake has been good and has led to increased engagement among employees. The focus is now on creating various opportunities and a safe space where employees and leaders can talk openly and honestly about wellness and mental health in the context of inclusion and individual experiences. This will enable staff to continue to have these difficult but open conversations.

Career Pathways and Tracking

Career mapping to help ensure racialized employees progress in their careers, while also tracing a company's overall success in meeting their operational EDI goals, is key to holding leaders and the overall organization accountable for fostering and maintaining a diverse and inclusive workplace.

Here are some examples from the discussion:

- Softchoice has a five-year hiring plan that goes beyond recruitment. Data is regularly reviewed with VPs making it easier to understand the numbers and to see where there may be specific issues in recruitment and/or career progression.
- Jacobs Engineering Group uses a real-time dashboard system to ensure that every hiring manager sees the same data on hiring, attrition, and promotion to ensure they are meeting their operational EDI goals.

Development Opportunities

Employers can expand their EDI strategies beyond training on unconscious bias to include a greater focus on adapting and enhancing key organizational processes.

Suggested next steps:

- Identify individuals within the company to champion and support open conversations.
- Invest in training/programs designed to help all employees go beyond understanding unconscious bias to create conscious efforts and activities that will facilitate EDI activities and shift workplace culture to help racialized individuals succeed.
- Strategize opportunities for career mapping with all employees as part of their retention process and suggest solutions for those who struggle to create enough opportunities for career growth within the company.
- Create a forum where people can share their ideas and experiences and confront uncomfortable topics without judgment.

SECTION 3: CAREER MOBILITY

ACCES works with employers to assist them in supporting racialized employees with career mobility in the workplace. Through ACCES's support, employers have developed a variety of strategies designed to ensure all employees have an equal opportunity to advance.

Mentorship and Coaching

Mentoring programs play an important role in ensuring racialized employees progress in their careers. Mentoring helps strengthen skills, boost knowledge and understanding, build relationships, and encourage employees to develop the skills they need to advance. Similarly, reverse mentoring programs between C-suite executives and racialized employees help leaders understand some of the challenges faced by their employees and provide the opportunity for them to better see their talents.

Here are some examples from the discussion:

- TD Bank launched a successful combined communication skills and mentoring program specifically for racialized employees. The four-week program helped employees develop communication skills that prepare them to become stronger leaders. This was followed by a six-month mentorship program to build relationships that paired participants with leaders to take on a business challenge.
- KPMG created a reciprocal mentoring program, which paired Black senior managers with C-suite leaders to enable both participants to share experiences. Facilitators from the Black Professional Network were also brought in to help create a safe space for participants by starting the conversation, sharing their own experiences, bridging gaps of silence, and keeping the conversation moving forward. Feedback on the program, and the lack of targeted one-on-one mentoring, led to the creation of a dual program that combined both reciprocal mentoring and traditional mentoring. KPMG stressed the importance of both forms of mentoring because developing employees without educating leaders ignores the biases and barriers that exist.
- RBC pairs entry-level employees with mentors in leadership roles based on similar diversity groups. This provides employees with the opportunity to connect with "leaders who look like them."
- Rogers Communications arranges mentoring for employees that takes into consideration the employees' preferences concerning the mentors' identities.
- Finastra launched a mentoring program under an EDI banner that allows anyone to become a mentor or mentee. Finastra has also introduced a reverse mentoring program where entry-level hires sign up to mentor senior leaders. This program is still in its infancy and results have yet to be analyzed.

"On the journey to creating more inclusive and equitable workplaces, a mistake I often see made is organizations putting all of their focus on development programs for equity-deserving groups—such as women or people of colour—and thinking that this is what will drive change. However, this approach makes two false assumptions: that the organization already has in place systems that are fair and free of bias, and that under-represented groups have some gaps in their capability that is causing the disparities we see in hiring or advancement. Instead, to create lasting change, it is the organization and the decision-makers around equity-deserving groups that need to shift to remove the systemic and individual biases that are presenting barriers. And that is the harder, but necessary, work organizations need to be focused on doing." - Stephanie Braid, Director, Inclusion & Diversity, KPMG in Canada

Career Growth into Leadership

Career growth goes beyond mentoring opportunities; it needs to involve a clear plan on how to ensure employees are progressing in their career. All phases of the employment process need to be about more than meeting targets. C-suite executives need to be educated about the importance of EDI to ensure their attitudes reflect the organization's policies and there is equal opportunity for growth into leadership ranks.

Here are some examples from the discussion:

- Jacobs Engineering Group always promotes leadership roles to employees within the organization. Every employee is frequently reviewed from a technical and readiness perspective and then approached when an appropriate opportunity arises.
- Softchoice goes to great lengths to ensure diversity in its hiring pipeline by partnering with community organizations (e.g., ACCES Employment) who specialize in working with candidates from diverse backgrounds and tracking all candidates that come to them through those pipelines.
- CANADA MASQ Corporation suggested that to better facilitate career mobility, companies should consider building strategic alliances within their network. With such a framework in place, employees' career development could include moving to a partner organization. Once there, they can also become a resource.

These career growth strategies are not without challenges:

- Ecolab mentioned that while they do career mapping with all employees as part of their retention process, they often struggle to create enough opportunities for career growth within the company.
- Miratec Inc. echoed those comments, stating that their organization simply does not have room for growth in certain areas and, as such, they often lose long-term employees to other companies.

Development Opportunities

It is important for Leadership staff to champion their EDI strategies and ensure their attitudes, behaviours, and polices are all aligned.

"You have to have the blessing of leadership and leaders should live the values they are hoping to implement, otherwise it's just a checkmark like everything else. Nothing can move forward if you don't have buy-in right from the top." - Carmen Jacques, Student Recruitment Manager, CPA Ontario

Suggested next steps:

- Invest in programs for targeted one-on-one mentoring for employees on all levels.
- Hold leaders accountable to EDI practices, including tying compensation to performance.
- Launch an allyship program to use knowledge and privilege for progress.
- See the value of career growth outside the organization rather than holding people back for the good of the company.

CONCLUSION

ACCES currently uses a variety of onboarding support tools and communications training to help employers gain a better understanding of cultural differences and their effect in the workplace. With the support of this project, ACCES will implement, refine, and grow these strategies, in combination with training priorities gathered through the roundtable discussions, to develop focused workshops and resources to support hiring managers and direct managers in assuring the success of racialized individuals. In addition, these roundtable discussions served as a 'safe space' where employers could share the successes and challenges of their current EDI strategies and best practices for confronting and eliminating the barriers that racialized employees must face.

Thank you to all who participated.