



WHY EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION MATTER

"It is not that individuals in the designated groups are inherently unable to achieve equality on their own, it is that the obstacles in their way are so formidable and self-perpetuating that they cannot be overcome without intervention. It is both intolerable and insensitive if we simply wait and hope that the barriers will disappear with time. Equality in employment will not happen unless we make it happen."

— **Judge Rosalie Silberman Abella**

Royal Commission on Equality in Employment, 1985

TERMINOLOGY



Employment Equity

- Encourages the establishment of working conditions that are free from barriers
- Seeks to correct conditions of disadvantage in employment, and
- Promotes the principle that special measures are required to address gaps in representation for the four employment equity designated groups in Canada (women, racialized people [visible minorities], Indigenous peoples from North America, and persons with disabilities) who research shows experience systemic and persistent discrimination in employment

Equity

The fair and respectful treatment of all people and the reduction of disparities and barriers experienced by Indigenous peoples and members of the equity-seeking groups. Equity does not mean treating everyone the same way, without regard for individual differences. Instead, equity requires acknowledging and accommodating these differences so that all employees are able to contribute their best to the organization.

Inclusion

The practice of creating a sense of belonging and involvement in the workplace, where the inherent worth and dignity of all employees are recognized and valued. An inclusive workplace capitalizes on the rich diversity among employees by valuing and respecting their talents, beliefs, backgrounds, and ways of living.

Diversity

The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation.

Representation

The types and numbers of different people present in the workforce. When we talk about representation in the workplace, the focus tends to be on visible differences, because certain groups have faced persistent systemic discrimination in the workplace based on their visible differences. These groups have been identified by the federal government as the focus of employment equity programs and include women, racialized people (visible minorities), Indigenous peoples from North America, and persons with disabilities.

The lack of representation of these groups in the workforce may reflect underlying issues such as discriminatory hiring practices and an organizational culture that is not inclusive. Representation is a “check-in” metric that enables organizations to assess whether they are removing barriers to hiring, are making merit-based hiring and promotion decisions, and have an inclusive organizational culture.

WHY DO THIS WORK?



While many people focus on the moral imperative to implement workplace equity, diversity, and inclusion programs, i.e., “It’s the right thing to do,” there are other equally compelling reasons why organizations need to engage in this work—with tangible benefits for all employees and organizations as a whole.

Legal Imperative



The Ontario *Human Rights Code* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* place specific obligations on organizations to treat employees fairly and to create workplaces that are free from discrimination, harassment, and violence. The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* also requires that all employers remove barriers to employment for persons with disabilities.

Included in this legislation is the requirement to address interpersonal discrimination, harassment, and violence when they occur, but also to foster a work environment and organizational culture that reduce the chance of these inappropriate behaviours occurring. Organizations also have an obligation to identify and address systemic discrimination.

Demographic Imperative



Canada’s demographics are changing. The country is a dynamic mix of cultures, races, religions, abilities, and gender and sexual identities. Employees from diverse communities, backgrounds, and identities bring different life experiences, cultural understanding, language ability, and ways of thinking that help them relate to, understand, and meet the needs of service users and clients.

An organization focused on implementing equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) enhances its capacity to connect to a broader and more diverse pool of potential employees. As the competition for talent intensifies, organizations must do all they can to capitalize on the diversity of the labour market and the talent that top applicants offer.

According to Statistics Canada:¹



51%
of the Canadian population identifies as female



27%
of the Canadian population is racialized (visible minorities)



22%
of the Canadian population aged 15 and over lives with one or more disabilities



6%
of the Canadian population is Indigenous



4%
of the Canadian population aged 15 and over identifies as 2SLGBTQ+



23%
were born outside of Canada

¹ Statistics Canada. (2022). Canada at a glance, 2022. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/12-581-x/2022001/sec6-eng.htm>

Statistics Canada. (2023). Census profile, 2021 Census of Population.

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&DGUIDList=2021A000011124&GENDERList=1,2,3&STATISTICList=1,4&HEADERList=0&SearchText=Canada>

Statistics Canada. (2022). Immigration, place of birth, and citizenship – 2021 Census promotional material.

<https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/census/census-engagement/community-supporter/immigration>

Business Imperative²



Attract top talent

Employers with a demonstrated commitment to EDI are more likely to be positively regarded by the public in general and by prospective employees in particular. This positive corporate image helps an organization's ability to attract and retain high-calibre employees from diverse communities, backgrounds, and identities. Studies show that the majority of employees want to work for a company that values EDI.³

Strengthen employee loyalty and retention

EDI programs help create an environment where all employees can bring their full selves to work, feel valued, and are more likely to be happy and engaged in their work. In addition, organizations that implement formal non-discriminatory and inclusive human resources policies and practices strengthen employees' confidence that they are being treated in a fair and equitable manner. This, in turn, increases employee loyalty and retention.

Increase creativity and innovation⁴

Organizations that encourage and support workplace inclusion are better able to attract and retain top talent from diverse backgrounds, communities, and identities. Greater employee diversity means a greater diversity of perspectives, approaches, knowledge, and skills within the organization, which can then boost the organization's creativity, innovation, and overall success.

Increase organizational performance⁵

Employers that create and support an inclusive work environment—an environment in which all employees feel they are valued, safe from harassment, and treated fairly and with respect—are typically rewarded with increased morale, better performance, and higher productivity.

A recent study shows that companies with 30% or more women executives are more likely to outperform companies with smaller proportions of women executives.⁶ In addition, businesses with increased gender and ethnic diversity among their leaders tend to financially outperform their competitors.

² Forbes Insights. (2011). Global diversity and inclusion: Fostering innovation through a diverse workforce. https://images.forbes.com/forbesinsights/StudyPDFs/Innovation_Through_Diversity.pdf

³ Caminiti, S. (2021, April 30). Majority of employees want to work for a company that values diversity, equity and inclusion, survey shows. <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/04/30/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-are-important-to-workers-survey-shows.html>

⁴ See for example:

McKinsey & Company. (2023). Women in the workplace 2022. <https://womenintheworkplace.com>

Reynolds, A., & Lewis, D. (2017, March 30). Teams solve problems faster when they're more cognitively diverse. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2017/03/teams-solve-problems-faster-when-theyre-more-cognitively-diverse>

Rigger, D. (2018, March 12). How a diverse workforce can be your competitive advantage. Human Resource Director Australia. www.hcamag.com/opinion/how-a-diverse-workforce-can-be-your-competitive-advantage-247585.aspx

⁵ Stazyk, E. C., Davis, R. S., & Liang, J. (2012). Examining the links between workforce diversity, organizational goal clarity, and job satisfaction [Paper presentation]. 2012 Annual Meeting and Exhibition of the American Political Science Association, New Orleans, LA, USA. <https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/centers/cwf/individuals/pdf/DiversityClarityandSatisfaction.pdf>

⁶ McKinsey and Company. (2020, May 19). Diversity wins: How inclusion matters. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>

Business Imperative



Decrease human rights complaints and grievances

EDI programs engage the organization in an ongoing process to eliminate harassment and discriminatory barriers to hiring, advancement, and inclusion. As a result, these initiatives help to reduce the financial and human costs of human rights complaints and grievances.

Better employee performance

Employees who feel safe and welcomed in the workplace focus better on their work and perform at a higher level. Those who don't feel safe and welcomed may struggle to concentrate or perform tasks effectively and safely, reducing the quality of their work.

Improve service delivery

A diverse workforce helps organizations understand and respond to the needs of an increasingly diverse client population at three levels:

- At the *strategy level*, where strategic decisions about policies and programs are made
- At the *design level*, where decisions about service delivery are made
- At the *service level*, which is the point of contact between the organization and its clients and service users.

Special Programs and the *Human Rights Code*

The Code allows for programs designed to help people who experience hardship, economic disadvantage, inequality, or discrimination. The Code also protects these programs from attack by people who do not experience the same disadvantage.

