

The Diversity Forum

WINS

Diversity is Strength

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Why should my organization care about Diversity, Equity and Inclusion?

By Brian Sankarsingh, [WINS Advisory Board Member](#)

Over the past few years, the words diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have been consistently appearing on the radar in the workplace and boardrooms in Ontario. Initially, the focus on DEI initiatives and discussion was to help organizations better reflect societal demographics in their own workforce. Now the purpose is far more all-encompassing.

This is not an “affirmative action” mandate that businesses hire based on race; it is about helping businesses recognize the significant potential losses they will incur if they do not infuse diversity, equity and inclusion throughout their entire operations.

But what do those words really mean?

Diversity begins at the front door. Just as businesses must spend time considering the look and feel of their front lobby, they must attend to the composition of their workforce. Diversity occurs when the makeup of an organization's staff accurately reflects differences within its political, social, and business environment.

If diversity happens at the front door, then equity must be present at every desk, cubicle, and meeting room in the organization. Equity refers to giving fair access and opportunities for advancement to all employees.

If equity happens at every desk, cubicle, and meeting room, then inclusion must permeate every aspect of the corporate culture. Inclusion occurs when all members of an organization are treated fairly and with respect, are given equal opportunities, have access to the same resources, and can contribute to their highest potential to the organization.

If we consider the presence of diversity to be the acceptance of the differences between people, then equity occurs when every business process is seen as fair and unbiased, while inclusion comes from every member of staff feeling welcomed and listened to.

Why can't we just fake it?

Can companies simply insert anti-discriminatory and anti-racism clauses in their human resources manuals without focusing on living out the true ideals and principles of these corporate policies? Absolutely yes! Like any social movement that becomes a key driver for positive corporate and organizational culture, companies may implement a quick fix to ensure, or appear to ensure, compliance.

The findings contained in a report by Josh Bersin indicate that many organizations are only going through the motions of DEI without any real accountability in place.

Diversity
Equity
Inclusion

Diversity
Diversity happens at the front door! The makeup of staff reflects the differences in the political, social and business environment

Equity
Equity must show up at every desk, cubicle and meeting room in the organization. Each member of staff sees it reflected in their colleague

Inclusion
Done right, inclusion is baked into the culture of the organization - an integral part of its DNA. Management and staff live the idea in all the work they perform

The report uncovered some concerning statistics:

- 75% of companies do not have DEI included in the company's leadership development or overall learning and development curricula. Rather, DEI is treated as a compliance issue
- Only 32% of companies mandate any form of DEI training for employees and only 34% offer such training to managers
- 40 percent of companies view diversity work as a way to mitigate legal, compliance or reputational risks, with HR in an enforcer role

The report uses Coca Cola as an instructive example. Driven by a \$200 million class action lawsuit in 2000, Coca Cola spent years trying to address DEI issues in the areas of leadership and pay equity. While the company made progress in increasing diversity, it failed in changing its corporate culture. Now, two decades later, they are refocusing their efforts on inclusion and equity. Coca Cola found out that a modification to their HR practices was not enough to ignite change in the existing corporate culture. Of course, they had statistics to show that they were pursuing a path to diversity in the organization. However, something was missing, and it did not take long for the same employees who were hired to meet HR's "diversity" requirements to discover what it was. In the case of our graphic above, in pursuing diversity through an HR-only approach, Coca Cola only affected the diversity that was coming through the front doors and neglected what was happening in the cubicles, assembly lines and the culture of the organization.

How to address such mistakes? The report identifies five essential strategies to foster a healthy DEI corporate culture:

- Listen, hear and act – ensure that employees are listened to and that there is action on their requests
- Strengthen HR capabilities in all roles – embed DEI in all aspects of HR programs and give HR the ability to meaningfully consult on DEI issues
- Engage senior leadership commitment – hold all leaders accountable for DEI outcomes
- Set goals and measure them – set, measure, and communicate DEI metrics
- Create accountability for results – DEI should not only be embedded in all corporate learning and leadership programs but promoted within the organizations' ecosystem, including with partners, vendors, and consultants

Is it worth the effort?

The Coca Cola example might sound extreme, but its lessons are very real. Several factors prove that a well implemented DEI program creates a successful business and engaged and happy employees.

A workplace with diverse viewpoints, where employees are encouraged and feel safe to raise innovative ideas and perspectives will always experience a higher productivity and improved efficiency. This diversity could also imply different gender, demographic and geographic perspectives, giving the organization a true global presence in the marketplace.

An organization that actively advocates DEI may also realize lower rates of turnover because employees feel they are being listened to and their suggestions acted on. This promotes a general sense of wellbeing that may translate to a better work/life balance. A central aspect of DEI is accountability, and this means that when employees see leaders take ownership and accept accountability, they too will be more likely to do the same. This can lead to a greater degree of pride in the organization and ownership of its vision and mission. A robust DEI policy ultimately leads to a safer workplace where employees are comfortable and unafraid to call attention to discrimination if they see it. This comfort should be apparent in the boardroom, the shop floor, or the interview room. Over the course of time, this results in a workplace with less conflict. Finally, an organization that prioritizes DEI will inevitably enhance its own brand and reputation and this means being seen as a market leader.

In conclusion, unless DEI becomes part of the business strategy, many organizations will fail in implementing it and end up either faking it or abandoning it altogether. DEI demands a change in corporate culture. It is not about the number of diverse employees in the workspace. It is about creating the atmosphere for the acceptance of all peoples, from all demographics and every gender and to have them treated equally and feel included. This is true for a corporation as much as it is true for our society at large.



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A fresh outlook on DEI: Workplace inequities in 2022

By Mark Lovewell, Veronica Seeto & Hitu Sood, WINS Team Members

Employment inequities, which are a reality for many who live and work in Canada, have significantly worsened in the last two years.

For most of the workforce, financial security and personal well-being have been major concerns. So have the makeshift rules instituted by employers to protect health and safety. With family care sustaining major disruptions, some people have had to leave the workforce to provide the missing care no longer available from public organizations.

In addition, perceptions of how the workday should look and feel have changed. Many have come to appreciate the flexibility of remote work. At the same time, there is a consensus that the differential impact of the pandemic has worsened workplace inequities, especially those connected with race, gender and disability.

Earlier this year, WINS conducted a survey that explored emerging employment inequities. The responses from over 600 participants were eye-opening.



Photo: jcomp / Freepik

Income

On many topics explored in our survey, race was the key differentiator in the answers we received. For example, racialized participants were more likely than their non-racialized counterparts to report reductions in income in the last two years.

This result, which resonates with other studies, can be attributed to the instability of many of the jobs in which racialized workers are employed. Also, those with a declared disability were more likely to report a negative change in income than those without.

Workday

In contrast, non-racialized participants were more likely to report a negative change in their work day. This could be because racialized workers are often in positions where disruption and instability are typical, so that the changes brought about by the pandemic were perceived as less extreme.

Mental health

Racialized participants were less likely to report a negative impact on mental health. This can be explained by the so-called 'Black-White Health Paradox', which refers to less frequent reported depression with the black community compared to their white counterparts despite a higher prevalence of chronic medical conditions among the former. This is a useful reminder how differences in resilience can impact mental health.

Family support

One finding especially surprised us. Our hypothesis was that the main distinguishing factor for the amount of time respondents reported spending on family support would be gender, with women of whatever race increasing time spent on family support when compared with their male counterparts.

Instead, it was racialized participants, both women and men, who were more likely to report increased time spent on this activity. The answer probably lies in the pre-existing gender differences and the fact that racialized individuals in Canada, on average, were comparatively more economically affected by the pandemic.

Relations with managers

Another unexpected finding was that racialized participants and those with a disability reported a positive change in relations with their managers. To explain this, it is possible that working at a distance, as was the case for so many during the pandemic, reduced racial visibility and conflict in the workplace, providing a potential benefit of racialized employees and those with a disability.

Workplace relations

On some topics, gender was the key distinguishing factor in participants' answers. For example, a perceived increase in support from their employer was more common for men than for women. Also, a perceived negative change in workplace relations was more common for women than for men. One possible explanation for these results is that relationships with work colleagues are especially significant for women.

On other topics related to workplace relations, there were marked differences in participants' answers based on whether or not they reported as having a declared disability.

Perceptions of differential treatment by employers between male identified and female and nonbinary employees were more common for participants with a disability than for those without.

Participants with a disability were also more likely to see a positive change in relations with management and to report that their employer was transparent about their policies and programs to assist in the removal of workplace and pandemic-related obstacles.

Overall, what general verdicts can we make based on our findings? We see evidence of a blurring of work life into home life. The picture painted has many positive qualities. In general, managers were supportive of the challenges in the last two years and by and large tried to accommodate people equitably regardless of race, gender or declared ability. However, organizations and workplace team relationships did not get the attention needed for real support.

Remote work is not all bad; it is a matter of organizations creating optimal solutions that ensure work-life balance in the post-pandemic age. For example, one of our participants noted, "I know much has been made about running into people in the halls and having spontaneous conversations but when I'm at work, those are huge time wasters and to me they just add to the pressure to work outside of hours to make up the time."

Employers need to explore how workplace inequities can be diminished and transparent communication channels built so that both employees and organizations can reap the benefits of remote and hybrid work. Moreover, greater attention needs to be given to equitable treatment of women and employees with disabilities in the new post-pandemic workplace.

In conclusion, the past will not give many clues to the future of work. The road ahead can only be paved through a partnership and dialogue between employees and employers.

This article was published by Talent Canada on October 11, 2022.

For the complete survey report see <https://www.winscanada.com/showcasing-diverse-voices>

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Thank you for your support to WINS in 2022. Season's Greetings from the WINS Team.