



WORKPLACE CULTURE

TOOL 5: ENHANCING DIVERSITY, EQUITY,
AND INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

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TOOL 5: ENHANCING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

Who is this for

High Priority

- DEI and HR Professionals
- Senior Executives and management

Practical Information

- People Leaders

Useful to Know

- Frontline Staff

What guidance does it provide?

- Understanding the difference between diversity and inclusion
- How to advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace
- Understanding what equity means for workers with disabilities
- How to enable an equitable working environment

Take-home points

- As an organization working towards diversity, you can leverage for cross-organizational support, create a culture of accountability across the employment life cycle and routinely review workplace policies for inclusion for strategic management.
- With equity, an organization understands that they may need to treat people differently, by providing varied resources, privileges, and support, to treat them fairly. When equity is paired with diversity and inclusion, employees do their best work, and the business is primed for success.

DIVERSITY INCLUDES DISABILITY

Diversity Includes Disability

Today, socially conscious consumers pay close attention to corporate public stances on global issues such as climate change, human rights, poverty, and more. Industry leaders have learned how to respond to these social needs and are working to create positive change.

“Companies that embrace diversity and inclusion in all aspects of their business statistically outperform their peers.” – McKinsey Research [1]

While businesses have devoted notable efforts towards gender parity, racial equity, and inclusion of the LGBTQ2S+ communities, one aspect of diversity that must not be left behind is disability. Building a diverse workforce is simply not possible without including workers with disabilities.

“At TD, we believe that inclusion is key to combating racism in all its forms. Our work to further our inclusive journey includes working to improve representation at the executive levels, creating spaces for open dialogue, continuing to host enterprise-wide colleague events, developing and delivering training on and awareness of pan-experiences of Pan-Asian colleagues and further exploring financial investment and volunteering in the Pan-Asian community.”

It’s More Than Just Hiring Diverse

Our population is changing demographically – 1 in 5 people in Canada have one or more disabilities, and this number will continue to grow as the population ages.² Businesses can no longer afford to ignore the many qualified candidates with disabilities – they need to better reflect and keep up with the changing marketplace.

Hiring	Retaining
Take time to understand the types of barriers that persons with disabilities may face when applying. For more details, click Recruitment Tool 1	Remember that making efforts to diversify hiring is only one side of the coin – in fact, it means very little if a person with a disability is hired and experiences exclusion and barriers to access within the workplace.

HOW CAN A BUSINESS ADVANCE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION?

“Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.” - Vernā Myers, VP Inclusion Strategy at Netflix

Despite their best intentions, companies that invest in diversity without inclusion will not see the strategic benefits of hiring workers with disabilities. Simply put, workplace diversity does not equal workplace inclusion.

- Accommodations and workplace supports can be implemented to ensure that workers have what they need to thrive on the job
- An inclusive workplace culture supportive of workers with disabilities can be perpetuated

How Can a Business Advance Diversity and Inclusion?

Canadian companies leading the way towards disability inclusion understand the importance of:

1. Cross-Organization Support:

- Leverage organizational change and initiatives for disability inclusion at multiple levels of influence: senior executives, middle management, and frontline staff
- Secure top-level commitment, include disability confidence as a board priority, and add it to an executive portfolio
- Create space for dialogue, conversation, and questions among middle management to grow their disability confidence
- Equip middle management with the support and resources they need to facilitate staff learning about disability confidence
- Engage frontline staff and inspire a sense of responsibility within them to change

2. Culture of Accountability

- Integrate diversity and inclusion throughout the employment cycle (recruitment, interviewing, onboarding, accommodation, performance management).
- Provide regular disability awareness training on topics like the Accessible Canada Act [3], human rights legislation, sensitivity, accessibility, neuro-diversity, mental health, and unconscious bias <https://toolkit.ccrw.org>
- Create opportunities for employees to drive change through resource groups and inclusive initiatives.
- Encourage employees to become disability inclusion champions and lead conversations and initiatives.



HOW CAN A BUSINESS ADVANCE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION?

3. Strategic Measurement:

- Routinely review workplace policies for inclusion, with particular focus on strengthening policies that may be specific to people with disabilities (e.g., disability discrimination and harassment, workplace accommodations, etc.)
- Identify meaningful diversity and disability inclusion metrics for your company
- Develop a detailed implementation strategy to move the needle on any defined metrics for diversity and disability inclusion
- Identify areas of success in your diversity and inclusion efforts, and encourage similar activities (e.g., for staff) and externally (e.g., for partners)

“DEI is a comprehensive benchmarking tool that helps us assess our existing practices and identifies opportunities to improve our efforts so that we can boldly grow the good in business and in life. At BMO, Diversity and Inclusion are our core values and we are excited to receive a top score and work with our leaders and employees on making BMO a great place to work for all.” - Tricia Myers, U.S. Head of Inclusion & Diversity, People & Culture

ADDING EQUITY TO THE PICTURE

Adding Equity to the Picture

Top businesses are taking concrete steps towards embracing equity in the workplace. They recognize that equitable workplaces can elevate the impact of diversity and inclusion efforts and foster an inclusive culture.

What is Workplace Equity?

The Government of Canada (2022) [4] defines equity as:

Fairness, impartiality, even-handedness. A distinct process of recognizing differences within groups of individuals and using this understanding to achieve substantive equality in all aspects of a person's life.

Equity in the workplace refers to a state where every employee, regardless of their intersectional identities, backgrounds, and lived experiences, has access to fair opportunities based on their individual needs.

Equality vs Equity

With equity, an organization understands that they may need to treat people differently, by providing varied resources, privileges, and support, in order to treat them fairly. When equity is paired with diversity and inclusion, employees do their best work, and the business is primed for success.

Without equity, the business benefits associated with diversity and inclusion can be threatened. Even the most diverse company will fail if employees with disabilities do not have a fair and equitable opportunities to fully participate and advance their careers. Nobody wants to feel undervalued or stagnant in their role at work.



ADDING EQUITY TO THE PICTURE



In the first image, it is assumed that everyone will benefit from the same support at the bank. They are being treated equally.

In the second image, individuals are given different supports to make them have equal access to the bank. They are being treated equitably.

In the third image, all 3 can access the bank counter without accommodations or supports because the cause of inequality was addressed. The systemic barrier has been removed.

The Importance of Equitable Leadership

Successful businesses understand the importance of equitable leadership. People who lead with equity ensure that nobody is left behind. They ask questions about who is not at the table, and why? They aren't afraid to challenge longstanding stereotypes, biases, and microaggressions in the workplace.

When leaders are focused on equity, they challenge negative biases and stereotypes towards workers with disabilities, and act as effective change agents for inclusivity and accessibility for all. [5]

- They are open to continuous learning, which enables the business to grow
- They celebrate diversity, and this includes disability
- They recognize the value in having diverse perspectives – staff with different educational backgrounds, functional abilities, and ways of thinking
- They are more successful in engaging individual and collective action.

A culture of equity invites people with disabilities to be their authentic selves at work.

INTERSECTIONALITY AVATARS

Intersectionality Avatars

Salima:

Let's talk about microaggressions! French is the official language at schools in my home-country and I have been speaking English ever since I can remember! So, when someone compliments me on my French or English skills, it feels like a reminder for me that I am not from here, almost like I do not belong as others who were born and raised here do.

Taylor:

Ouff, that is harsh. For me, it is when a well-meaning person says they will offer me a makeover, to show me how pretty I could be as a girl. As if that was the sole reason why I am non-binary. I will not even get into how often I am referred to with the wrong pronouns!

Dante:

It is insulting, and I know exactly how it feels. Being a large Black guy with aphasia, people are constantly amazed by my aptitude at solving difficult issues at work. I have spent 30 years on the job and gotten all the advanced degrees necessary to get to where I am, but I have to constantly prove myself anyway.

HOW CAN A BUSINESS ENHANCE WORKPLACE EQUITY

How Can a Business Enhance Workplace Equity

The Government of Canada has established the Employment Equity Act, which seeks to remove systemic barriers for people in 4 designated groups in federally regulated workplaces: [6]

1. Women
2. Indigenous peoples
3. Persons with disabilities
4. Members of visible minorities

On top of following your legal requirements under the Employment Equity Act [see [Legal Briefing](#)] here are some best practices that you can invest in to enhance workplace equity:

Invest in education and supports. Address systemic barriers for women, BIPOC, individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQ2S+ by offering workplace education programs and partnering with organizations that provide childcare, transportation, and housing [7]

Support pre-employment opportunities. An excellent way to attract students, graduates, and workers with disabilities is through the development of bridge experiences. Pre-employment opportunities such as co-op placements, paid internships, and job trials can draw in people with disabilities towards your organization and help them build skills relevant to your business. [8], [9]

Focus on skills-based hiring. Many hiring decisions hinge upon factors such as educational attainment and history of work. However, people with disabilities face profound barriers to access and participation in education and employment. They should not be barred from working when they have skills required to do the job. Rather than requiring a university degree or continuous work experience, rethink what ‘counts’ as knowledge, recognize other qualifications, and consider making hiring decisions on the basis of skill and potential. [10]

Be transparent with pay structure. Ongoing and open discussion of pay structure and wages need to be normalized to achieve pay equity. Gaps in earnings for workers with disabilities can be kept in the dark if conversations about pay happen in private. To ensure that employees are compensated fairly and address the potential for undervaluation of work, transparency around pay structure is needed and wages should recognize the value of work – equal pay for work of equal value. [11]



HOW CAN A BUSINESS ENHANCE WORKPLACE EQUITY

Include equity-based training opportunities. Without equity, professional development plans would be one and the same across an organization, regardless of the intersecting identities and various levels of education, skills, and lived experiences of workers. To bridge skills gaps among employees, equity-based approaches to training and targeting upskilling is needed. [8]

Empower workers through resources groups. Networks and employee resource groups are effective avenues where individuals with alike interests can rally together, engage in discussion, and develop awareness and initiatives that support a given cause (e.g., disability, LGBTQ2S+, intersectionality, etc.). Understand that although workers with disabilities can become champions for diversity, equity, and inclusion, they are not point persons solely responsible for the education of others. Encourage the participation of all workers, with and without disabilities, to join these groups.

Challenge biases. Workers with disabilities, along with other equity-seeking groups, are disadvantaged in the workplace. Persons with disabilities experience the most significant gaps in their representation in the workforce compared with other designated groups.[12] Through training and ongoing dialogue, organizations can hone increased awareness of the biases that inform negative attitudes and unfair treatment of equity-seeking groups and begin to engage in conversation and open dialogue about how to make the workplace more equitable and inclusive.

Ensure diverse cross-level representation. While efforts to hire more diverse workers have increased, equitable opportunities for career advancement are not always the case. Workers with disabilities and Indigenous workers frequently remain in entry-level or low paying jobs. [13] To truly pave the way towards equity at your company, performance management and promotions must equitable, and diverse representation in executive, management, technical, and board roles is needed.

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