

Workforce Diversity: The Fresh Face of Employment in Canada



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Workforce diversity and you

Canadian employers are making significant strides in inclusive hiring and improving accessibility across an increasingly broad range of industries. If you haven't yet implemented a diversity hiring strategy, it's likely your workforce already reflects a variety of cultures and capabilities.

Successful companies that have already implemented an effective corporate diversity program are reaping the benefits of such forward-thinking planning: they enjoy the innovative and creative solutions that come from 'outside the box', gain a competitive advantage and stand apart from their competitors. Moreover, they enjoy the positive impact of workforce diversity on their bottom line.

As a business leader, you're focused on growing your business, being as profitable as possible, and engaging your workforce. You know that your success depends on attracting and retaining the best employees available - employees from any and all walks of life. You're also facing the challenges of an imminent workforce shortage as baby boomers prepare to retire and birth rates continue to decrease. You want to fill those vacancies with the best possible candidates.

Why a diverse workforce is important

Statistics Canada predicts that by 2031, at least one in four Canadians will have been born outside Canada - the term 'visible minority' may become obsolete in time. In 2006, immigrants made up over one-fifth of Canada's labour force. And by 2011, immigrants are expected to account for all net Canadian Labour force growth, and for all net population growth by 2031.

That's the same year that the Conference Board of Canada predicts the majority of new hires will be from an immigrant talent pool. And that also means potential clients, customers, business partners and consumers. Not only are your job applicants already coming from an increasingly diverse hiring pool, but many of your existing clients are themselves from diverse backgrounds. After all, 5 million households in Canada are non-English speaking.

And if you need more proof, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) recently adjusted its 2010 immigration plan by increasing the 2010 quota for economic immigrants, in response to the need to increase the available skilled workforce to fill Canada's economic recovery. The CIC predicts that the need for economic immigration will only increase in the years to come.

Hiring homogeneity has gone the way of the dodo. Employers willing to open up their hiring criteria to include diversity would have, according to an RBC study, access to an additional 1.6 million Canadians from which to staff their organizations. And, the study found these newly-employed Canadians would generate an estimated \$174 billion in personal income. To say that the benefits to workforce diversity hiring are far-reaching is an understatement.

How to improve your workforce diversity

The most successful companies have successfully integrated workforce diversity into their corporate vision. They provide mentorship, networking and career development opportunities. They create, update and execute regular inclusiveness training. They establish in-house diversity councils and committees, and assign leadership roles. They target for hire those diverse groups in which their research shows they are lacking. And they adapt their interviewing and hiring criteria as necessary to ensure opportunities are available to everyone.

Here are more suggestions to consider as you enhance your diverse workforce:

Management buy-in is critical

A successful diversity implementation begins with a commitment from management. Like all things, success - and its antithesis - flow downstream.

Planning is essential

Before you do anything, make sure you have a plan to implement changes to your hiring that do, in fact, support and encourage diversity hiring across all levels of your company. The impetus to adjust your hiring to reflect an inclusive platform comes from the top. It needs to be written into your corporate strategic planning.

Articulate the vision

Paint a picture of diversity and inclusion that is part of your company culture, values and mission – the things that define your organization. The picture – your company's vision - should include the benefits of diversity, both corporately and individually. And use every opportunity to share your company vision so there's no ambiguity about where you and your company stand.

Make sure your teams understand the connection between workforce diversity and the bottom line and that diversity can help you reach your corporate goals. Conduct regular organizational assessments so everyone can measure results. That way, you can fine tune your diversity strategy to suit your business.

Communication is key

Communicate frequently with management as well as employees so that information about trends and issues are understood and shared freely through regular reporting. And make sure your employees know that management is onside and supportive. Communicate the business case for diversity clearly in a way that makes sense for your organization. Be as specific as possible. Build a management team that reflects the diversity you're looking to build into your workforce.

Make sure you communicate your commitment to diversity in your marketing and communications programs and on your website. People from diverse backgrounds actively target organizations that demonstrate a commitment to diversity in the workplace by conducting online searches. Your commitment could make the deciding difference to a top candidate who's considering her or his options.

Audit your systems and processes

Execute a thorough audit on your company's recruiting, interviewing and integration processes and practices and be prepared to adjust them to account for cultural differences in behaviour, communication, body language and how these differences are received and interpreted. This includes optimizing HR policies, management styles and how teamwork is established, defined and encouraged to operate. And your physical space will require a thorough analysis to ensure it's accessible.

Train your recruiters to understand subtle cultural differences. Review your employee issue resolution process to ensure that it's fair and effective, and so that issues or complaints can be dealt with promptly and thoroughly. Ensure that your hiring, compensation, discipline and promotion practices are equitable. Demonstrate fairness regularly.

Buddy up

Think about establishing a 'buddy' or mentorship program that assigns a new diverse employee with a more seasoned employee who can guide them through company processes and help them understand and learn your company's practices and the nuances of working in your organization. Ideally this mentor could have a similar cultural background, providing a fundamental understanding of the challenges a new diverse employee faces.

What is workforce diversity?

Workforce diversity includes the obvious differences you see when you look around: race, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, age, religion and ethnicity. But it's also the less obvious traits, the subtle differences that often register with us unconsciously, such as socioeconomic status, marital status, educational background, language, accent and appearance. We all have something that makes us unique, some special talent or ability that we bring to the table that differentiates us from our colleagues. That's diversity at its best.

Diversity hiring is a competitive advantage

Sourcing people from a diverse background is an essential part of a successful employment strategy. Workers who vary in age, gender, ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background or culture, ethnicity and language, make a positive contribution to an organization's workforce — they're an asset to company culture and the bottom line. And a diverse workforce brings innovative and creative solutions to an organization from 'outside the box'.

An effective corporate diversity program is a powerful way to gain a competitive advantage and stand apart from your competitors.



Benefits of Workforce Diversity

It can't be overstated that diversifying your workplace brings real bottom-line value to your organization. First, you'll fill vacancies and enjoy increased productivity and creativity with high-calibre candidates. You'll have a wider pool from which to draw in the face of a shrinking workforce, and your hires will be more resistant to frequent turnover, more deeply engaged and focused. You'll break down barriers, using the information and experience that your diverse hires bring. You'll attract a new customer base. You'll be an attractive business partner on a global level through more knowledgeable communication capabilities and the ability to communicate in a variety of languages and with an innate respect for cultural differences. Your market share will increase through access to new markets.

You and your local community and economy will mutually benefit from your investment in its citizens. Still closer to home, you'll be providing all your employees with a healthy work environment that is supportive and inclusive. Being known as a diversity employer will differentiate you from your competitors as a thought – and action – leader.

Workforce diversity is good for business. And for life.

Best practices

For more in-depth analysis, Randstad Canada polled some of our clients for their insight on diversity in the workplace. We asked a range of companies, from small to large, about their current hiring practices, retention, workforce diversity policies, strategies and outlook.

The results indicate that while only 38% of the employers polled currently have a diverse workforce hiring policy in place, a surprising 72% believe that having a diverse workforce could enhance their team dynamic and give their business access to new markets.

But it isn't enough to talk the talk. We asked these companies to describe how they walk the walk. Here's a brief list that highlights some of their best practices:

Educate. Provide diversity and sensitivity training from the top-down

Recruitment. Ensure interview teams are diverse

Respect. Make everyone feel at home within the same perimeters

Equality. Do for one employee what you are willing to do for every employee

Reinforce. Organize social activities that take into account different ethnic groups

Promote. Encourage postings of local events on community bulletin boards

Awareness. Attend job fairs sponsored by immigrant services societies

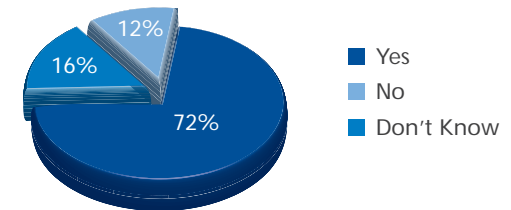
Just over half of the employers polled said they anticipate a shortage of qualified workers in the next five years and approximately 67% believe they currently have a more diverse workforce than 5 years ago.

These forward-thinking companies are not only placing an emphasis on making a positive contribution to their workforce – but on their bottom line.

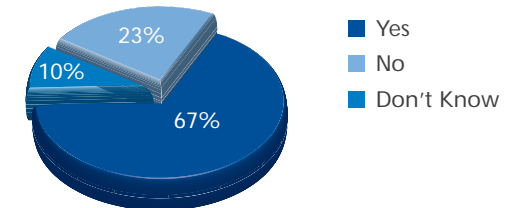
About Randstad's Canada Workforce Diversity Study

The study examined the trends in workplace diversity of approximately 1500 participants (Randstad clients) that range from small to large Canadian companies in industries as diverse as financial services, manufacturing, telecommunications, information technology, the energy sector and government. The quantitative study was launched September 15, 2010 and ended October 15, 2010.

Do you think having a diverse workforce could enhance your team dynamic and give your business access to new markets?



Would you say your company has a more diverse workforce now than five years ago?



About Randstad

Randstad is Canada's largest provider of staffing and HR solutions. Last year, we helped employers fill more than 30,000 positions in industries as diverse as financial services, manufacturing, telecommunications, information technology, the energy sector and government. Randstad Canada specializes in temporary and permanent placement staffing services, as well as contract and permanent solutions for managers and professionals. Randstad is also a leading provider of vendor management solutions and recruitment process outsourcing.

This full range of staffing and HR solutions, together with our unrivalled national footprint, enables us to develop highly customized solutions that help Canadian organizations manage their talent strategies.

Our Staffing division provides temporary and permanent staffing services to specific industry sectors and markets. Our Staffing consultants' in-depth knowledge of the labour market and their extensive candidate database allow them to efficiently respond to their clients' recruitment needs when they arise. Call one of our specialized consultants today or visit randstad.ca to find out more about our Staffing division.