



# Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace



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# About WorkWithUs

WorkWithUs is a non-profit, professional staffing organization that combines leading-edge technology with a comprehensive candidate support structure to ensure success for both clients and candidates.

By utilizing a single point of contact approach, our proven model reduces the complexity and cost of coordinating a diverse workforce program. We assess all candidates for work-readiness and skill level and assume all risk and liability as the candidate will be an employee of WorkWithUs.

Whether your organization has needs of a few hours per week, would like to find a stellar temporary candidate to help fill a vacancy, or you want to expand the diversity of your talent pipeline or candidate pool, WorkWithUs can help recruit, qualify, match and manage the right individual for your team. Temporary hires can transition to permanent employees.



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## Diversity and Inclusion: Why It Matters

The first question that typically arises when organizations consider creating a diverse and inclusive workplace is “why?” and the answer is clear: investing in a diverse team is good for business and for people.

Workplaces that promote diversity and inclusion (D&I) benefit from access to a greater range of skills, experiences, and perspectives that can contribute to an organization’s productivity and success. It also helps to drive change, innovation, growth, and the development of culture.

In addition, diverse and inclusive environments give employees a sense of comfort, belonging, and the opportunity to feel valued and respected.

Therefore, it is important for companies to look beyond the status quo of their hiring practices when building a workforce.

D&I has been an important part of human resources in the last two decades, but only recently has it evolved from a “nice to have” initiative to an imperative business strategy.

Many organizations have realized demonstrated benefits in corporate performance as a result of its implementation, ranging from greater employee engagement, to overall workplace productivity, to the problem-solving strength that multiple perspectives can offer.



# What is Diversity and Inclusion?

Ironically, there are many definitions for the term ‘diversity’. Some scholars see it as ‘the variation of social and cultural identities among people who work together in a defined employment setting’.<sup>1</sup> For others, it’s characterized as ‘heterogeneity among team members on specified demographic dimensions’,<sup>2</sup> while others describe it as ‘varied perspectives and approaches to work that members of different identity groups have’.<sup>3</sup>

In today’s business lexicon, however, diversity has become a ‘shorthand for groups that are not part of the existing workplace norm’.<sup>4</sup>

The broadest view of diversity is comprised of two main parts:

**Social categories**<sup>5</sup> are those that are visual or are related to an individual’s belonging to certain social groups, sometimes called ‘bio-demographic’ – including race, gender, sexuality, disability, etc.

**Functional diversity**<sup>6</sup> operates differently and is usually less obvious: this includes diversity of job roles, experience, education level, etc.

While both types of diversity are valuable, they require different types of management, as their dynamics operate differently in a team.

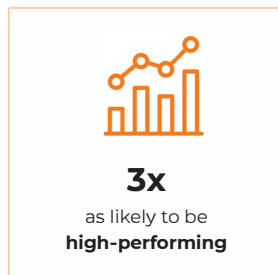
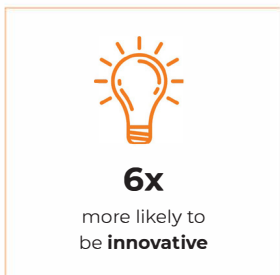
# Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace

Diversity is about creating an inclusive culture that values and uses the talents of all would-be members.

An inclusive workplace values and provides equal opportunities to all employees regardless of differences and backgrounds (e.g. ability, age, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc) in order to achieve their maximum potential at work without discrimination.

It's also important to recognize that employees may associate with multiple identities that intersect. For example, an Aboriginal woman with a disability may identify with both categories equally. As such, building an inclusive culture can accommodate, celebrate, and leverage all of these differences.

## Organizations with inclusive cultures are:



Source: Getting to Equal 2018: The Disability Inclusion Advantage, Accenture. Based on 45/140 U.S. companies that were part of the study.

Having a sense of belonging, feeling respected and valued, and being surrounded by a level of support and commitment from others to do your best work are some of the main factors that define inclusion in the workplace.

From a performance standpoint, data has shown that organizations with inclusive cultures are six times more likely to be innovative, three times as likely to be high performing, eight times more likely to achieve better business outcomes, and twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets.

# SPOTLIGHT:

## How inclusive is your workplace?

Are your job advertisements and applications accessible for people with vision disabilities? Are resources and information provided in accessible formats?

Is the language (print or spoken) in your workplace inclusive (eg. partner vs. husband/wife which assume heterosexuality or is discriminating slurs or jokes confronted)?

Is your recruitment and selection process fair for all applicants? Is there diversity among employees hired? Are you able to provide accommodations for applicants if required?

Is your staff educated on multicultural sensitivity, including cultural differences?

Does your workplace have established relationships with and information available from various culturally specific organizations?

Is your workplace accessible for people with disabilities? Does your workplace meet occupational health and safety regulations for persons with disabilities?

Is every individual who works in, visits or is served in your workplace treated with respect and equity?

Are your facilities physically accessible for persons with disabilities (e.g., ramps, elevator buttons, braille signs, etc.)?

Source: Navigator, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2019.

# Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace

Improved perceptions of D&I among employees are linked to better organizational performance measures, including higher engagement among employees and lower rates of absenteeism.

Deloitte found that when employees perceive that their **organization is committed to D&I**, they are also **80% more likely to state that the organization provides** “great customer service, shares diverse ideas to develop innovative solutions, and works collaboratively to achieve their goals.”

Other research has demonstrated that within businesses, **gender and racial diversity** can help companies to **increase sales, attract a greater number of customers, possess a greater market share, and earn larger relative profits.**

Finally, diverse teams **understand customers’ and clients’ needs better than homogeneous organizations**, which often fail to consider different perspectives.

At WorkWithUs, we have seen the success stories of organizations who have decided they would start out small by hiring from our temporary labour pool before eventually finding a very strong business case to either hire full time or expand their diversity and inclusion policies to actively consider working with persons with disabilities, including mental health and addiction challenges, moving forward.

## Benchmarking Study

According to a Canadian benchmarking study by the CCDI and Dalhousie University in 2018, the overwhelming majority of senior leaders who were surveyed perceived diversity and inclusion as a good business strategy.

Out of the 56 responses from senior leaders, 73% indicated that they emphasize D&I in their business strategies, and 68% indicated that



they frequently communicate about D&I to their employees.

When respondents were asked if their organization strategy is aligned with its business strategy, the majority (64%) agreed or strongly agreed. 60% agreed that senior executives are participating in internal diversity committees, and 63% believed that diversity goals are included in strategic HR plans.

Only a third of the respondents (32%) indicated that they were satisfied overall with the resources and time their organization dedicated to D&I education and training, and only 15% agreed or strongly agreed that mentoring programs, with the focus on advancement for underrepresented groups, exist.

In the same vein, when it comes to tracking diversity during hiring, promotion, and retention of employees, only 40% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their organization sets diversity goals for specific positions. Similarly, only 28% agreed or strongly agreed that their organization tracks the diversity of candidates who are receiving promotions.

The results suggest that senior leaders see value in D&I as a business strategy and perceive it as a positive contribution to an organization’s performance. However, these findings also indicate that though respondents see participation from senior leaders when it comes to D&I, they also perceive insufficiency in the resources and time allocated to it.

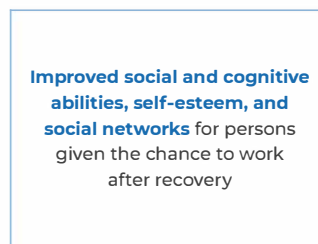


# Mental Health and Addictions

While many positive steps have been made in defining diversity in the workplace, we believe that diversity should extend beyond gender equality.

Other characteristics such as age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, beliefs, socioeconomic status and mental health status should also be considered in the scope of a conversation on diversity.

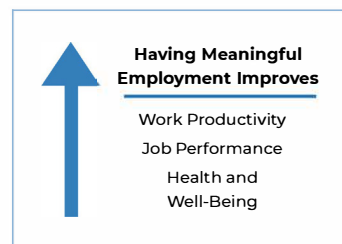
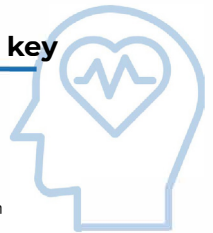
One example we find particularly compelling to mention is individuals who are grappling with **mental health and addictions** challenges, both at work and in the journey back to work.



Source: 500,000 Canadians miss work each week due to mental health concerns, Global News, 2017.

## Resources are key

- Employee and family assistance programs
- Colleague support
- Accommodations from employers



Source: Employment and Education for People with Mental Illness, CMHA.

- **1 in 5** Canadians experiences a mental health condition or addiction problem. This figure equates to 20% of the Canadian population (which equates to approximately 7.1 million individuals).
- **1 in 2** Canadians under the age of 40 will experience a mental health problem or illness by the time they turn 40.

Statistics show that individuals with a mental health condition are more likely to be unemployed, with unemployment rates as high as 70% to 90% for those with the most severe cases. According to a survey by Morneau Shepell, depression and anxiety are considered the most prevalent mental health conditions that affect employees in the workplace (2017).

For those who are employed, around **500,000 Canadians** are unable to work due to mental health problems in any given week. Furthermore, compared to older workers, employees aged 30 and under are twice as likely to take sick leave related to mental health concerns.

In spite of this critical mass of individuals who are struggling, and in some cases suffering, in silence, the conversation around opening a hiring pool to persons with disabilities—including and especially mental health and addictions challenges—is still fairly uncommon.

# Why Hire Persons with Disabilities?

## Stigmatization: A Barrier Made of Beliefs

When most people think about accessible workplaces or spaces, they tend to think about structural improvements or enhancements, like ramps, elevators and buttons on doors, that can be made. And while these are important steps to take in creating an inclusive-built environment, we would also advocate for building a culture of accessibility.

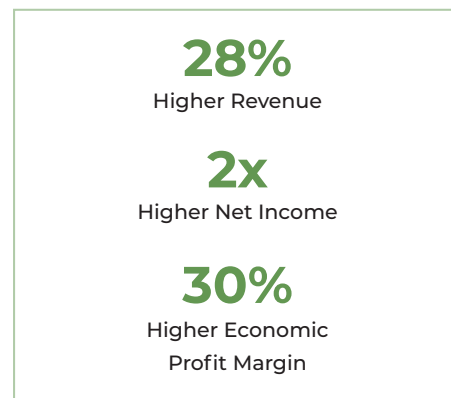
While physical and mental disabilities can present unique challenges to those who live with them, stigmas and beliefs about what these individuals can't do is far more prohibitive. Beliefs that persons with disabilities cannot perform regular tasks as other employees do lead to fewer opportunities and lower paying jobs.

To be clear, those beliefs about limitations are opinions rather than facts and the impact is substantial, not just to persons with disabilities, but also to employers and the economy as a whole.

In Canada, **650,000 Canadians** with disabilities who either worked in the past or said they were capable of working, were in fact not currently working. To put that into perspective, the number of working Canadians in January 2019 was estimated to be about 18.9 million.

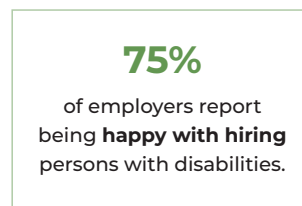
Research from the Conference Board of Canada shows that failing to provide accessible workplaces to accommodate people with disabilities could cost Canada billions of dollars in lost economic growth. If businesses were to be more accessible and inclusive towards people with disabilities, the economic impact for Canada would be significant (Globe and Mail, 2018).

There is already evidence gathered to show just how significant the impact is to companies who choose to be more diverse and inclusive in their hiring practices by including persons with disabilities.



According to a report by Accenture, companies (on average) gain 28% higher revenue, double the net income, and 30% higher economic profit margins (2018).

Furthermore, companies that have improved their inclusion of persons with disabilities are four times more likely to have total shareholder returns that outperform those of their peer group.



Source: Disability in Canada, Facts and Figures. Unstoppable, Easter Seals.



Source: Getting to Equal 2018: The Disability Inclusion Advantage, Accenture.



# Strategies to Build a Diverse and Inclusive Workplace

## **Educate Your Leaders**

It starts from the top. Your organization's executives and senior leaders are instrumental to your diversity and inclusion efforts. Forward-thinking organizations realize that leaderships' support of diversity programs is perceived as a reflection of the organization's commitment and values.

Consider management training to help prevent unconscious bias. Unconscious bias occurs when individuals make judgements about people based on gender, race, and other factors without realizing they're doing it.

This type of training helps make people aware of this form of bias and drives home the importance of modeling inclusive behavior—such as engaging in active listening and encouraging different points of view—in meetings, performance reviews and other interactions.

## **Form a Diversity and Inclusion Council**

Consider forming a council comprising a dedicated group of eight to twelve influential leaders who are one or two levels below the CEO. Carefully select them for their passion and commitment to inclusion.

Ideally, councils should be involved in goal-setting around hiring, retaining and advancing a diverse workforce and in addressing any employee engagement problems among underrepresented employee groups. Most councils meet quarterly to review organizational feedback and troubleshoot challenges.

## **Celebrate Employee Differences**

It's well-known that diversity in teams lead to better decision-making, greater innovation and ultimately higher returns. But inclusion is what connects people to the business, and we believe it's one of the core reasons they stay.

## Listen to Employees

Good communication and open dialogue is essential when it comes to understanding employee experience. Voicing concerns can feel daunting, however, establishing a safe and accessible space for communication can go a long way towards helping employees feel more comfortable, and that they are being listened to.

## Hold More Effective Meetings

Creating an inclusive culture is not a linear process. It will take time and consistent effort. Here are some ways companies can improve when it comes to conducting more effective meetings with employees.

Distribute meeting materials in advance and share questions to be discussed. This is helpful for workers for whom English is a second language and for introverted employees who function better when they are given time to process information before reacting to it.

Give credit where it's due. When someone is recognized for an idea that someone else put forward earlier in the meeting, point out who shared the idea originally.

Be conscious of your communication style. Don't assume you know more than others by explaining concepts they may already understand—a behavior sometimes referred to as “mansplaining” when done by men to women.

Promote active debate and be courteous. If one colleague interrupts another, call attention to it to underscore the importance of letting everyone be heard.

## Communicate Goals and Measure Progress

Establish and clearly communicate specific, measurable and time-bound goals as you would with any other strategic aim.

Conduct a full audit of your people processes—from recruiting and hiring to developing and retaining employees.

Identify any shortcomings and measurable discrepancies around inclusiveness in your organization.

Instill rigor into inclusion strategies with data-driven plans, and measure the results.

Establish a clear business case for how the company will benefit by having a more inclusive culture by asking:

- What are our inclusion goals?
- What are the reasons for those goals?
- How do we quantify inclusion?
- How will inclusion impact our mission, brand or bottom line?

# Why Invest in Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace?

***“Diversity is not the end goal, but it is a means to a more inclusive, more just, and more effective workplace.”***

— Rachel Miller, Wavelength

With increasing trends of global migration and a greater push for equal opportunities, organizations within the private sector, public service, and non-profit industries must constantly adapt to meet the expanding needs of a growing and diverse clientele.

Inclusivity is not only beneficial for the workplace, but it can also benefit an organization’s capacity to compete and capitalize on opportunities in the local and global marketplace.

Hiring from marginalized groups simply for the sake of adding diversity to your organization is insincere. People deserve to be recognized for their skills and potential contributions to a company.

Research accumulated over the past 20 years indicate that investing in workplace inclusivity increases the likelihood of success in an organization by improving several factors.

- Decision-making at the management operational level.
- Helping to attract and retain skilled employees and leaders.
- Raising staff morale.
- Providing proper educational training that contributes to feelings of inclusion and psychological safety in the workplace.



Source: TalentLyft, 2018.

Valuing diversity and inclusion goes beyond mission statements and platitudes. Organizations with the best practices incorporate intentional policies and processes that promote diverse talents and voices. They recognize that inclusion requires efforts both from management and personnel of an organization.

# Conclusion

Whatever motivation prompts the discussion about being more diverse and inclusive as a workplace, the benefits to individuals, communities and economies are clear. At WorkWithUs, we believe in empowering members of our community to find meaningful employment. Productive work has been identified as a leading component in promoting positive mental health and in paving the way for a rich and fulfilling life in the community.

Organizations with inclusive cultures have employees that are six times more likely to be innovative, three times as likely to be high-performing in their work, eight times more likely to achieve better business outcomes, and twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets in the workplace.

Although there's still work to be done to further diversity and inclusion practices in the workplace, the data and experiences gathered to date point to one simple but important conclusion: by investing in building diverse and inclusive organizations, everyone benefits.

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