



How Businesses Should Think About Benefits In Light Of DE&I

BY: **KAREN DeBORTOLI**

It's easy to be skeptical about organizations' attempts to address diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I), especially those who approach their DE&I responsibilities as a tick-box exercise, rather than a program of effective action. But employers who want to grow and thrive in the decades to come have to realize that their ability to recruit and hold on to talented people will suffer without meaningful support for an inclusive and diverse workforce.

What does DE&I in the workplace look like?

While 'DE&I' is a term that gets tossed around a lot, we need to be clear about what it truly means for a workplace to be diverse, equitable, and inclusive. The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat defines such a workplace as one that recognizes and supports individuals with an array of "identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, perspectives, and experiences" that are representative of

our current and evolving population. This business approach to DE&I strives for fairness and impartiality, while aiming for substantial equality of opportunity for every worker. It values those differences to create a welcoming, supportive and respectful – in other words, inclusive workplace.

Social And Health Trends

In 2020, the Canadian government launched a joint initiative with the private sector to promote diversity in corporate Canada through the '50-30 Challenge.' Boards and senior management are asked to target gender parity (50 per cent) and significant representation of under-represented groups (30 per cent) in their organizations. As noted in a news release from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada:

"Women, racialized persons, people who identify as LGBTQ2, and people living with disabilities (including invisible and episodic disabilities), as well as

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, are under-represented in positions of economic influence and organizational leadership, including on corporate boards and in senior management."

Other highlights on diversity in Canada from a Statistics Canada report in 2021 show:

- 23.6 per cent of Canada's population is foreign-born – the highest proportion in the G8 countries.

- Canada's largest source of immigrants from 2006 to 2020 was Asia.

- 40 per cent of racialized people in Ontario who were surveyed by the Ontario Human Rights Commission report experiencing discrimination because of race or colour in the last five years.

- Almost 6.3 million people identified themselves as a member of a visible minority group.

- 61.4 per cent of participants in the labour force in Canada are women; but less than one-fifth of all leadership roles were held by women.

- 22 per cent of people aged 15 years

and over have a disability, which represents 6.2 million Canadians.

Many Canadian CEOs do give DE&I measures priority and want to see progress. The problem is that many policies don't seem to be sustainable: too often, they become 'pilot projects' or rely on a high-level training afternoon for senior managers, without reaching deeper into the workforce itself. To be successful, efforts at building a diverse workplace need to include recruitment, business unit organization, and employee training and development opportunities leading to promotion and furthering of careers.

Supporting DE&I Through New Benefit Offerings

With more employees in the driver's seat in the current labour market, companies are shifting to more cultural issues, values, and improved work environments – the so-called soft side of HR – to attract and retain talent. However, companies must put words into actions to have an impact.

One vital initiative employers need to take to foster and grow an inclusive workplace is to offer resources and benefits that support and are valued by a diverse workforce. To do that, companies need to have a critical understanding of the needs of all their workers and to structure their benefit offerings accordingly. These include financial programs for those struggling in a paycheck-to-paycheck world, flexible working conditions that value cultural difference and support workers who are also caregivers, and wider training and development programs to attract and engage those who have in the past been too often passed over.

• Financial Wellbeing

As shown in the '2019 Canadian Financial Capability Survey,' average household debt represented 177 per cent of income, up from 168 per cent in 2018. In addition, Canadians under age 65 or with household income under \$40,000 are more likely to feel that they are under financial stress, as are single parents and those who are separated or divorced. Offering programs to help workers improve their financial literacy will give them access to tools and resources to better manage their finances. More targeted measures can also be offered to vulnerable groups.

• Flexibility

Offering remote work can allow differently abled people to more easily join the workforce, as well as support semi-retired professionals and working parents. Enabling remote work opens up possibilities for hiring specialized talent regardless of their actual location. Adding floating holidays to the time off policy can support people from various cultural and religious backgrounds. Expanding time off and a generous paid parental leave policy can make a meaningful difference for working adults who are navigating child and/or



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elder-care needs.

• Professional Development

On-the-job training and development can allow an organization to attract candidates from different economic and educational backgrounds. Recognition of educational and professional experience gained outside Canada, or through non-traditional means, can also broaden the pool of available candidates.

• Data Analytics And HR Tech

Analytics reveal a deeper and truer picture of the makeup of the workforce and the challenges workers face. For instance, company research might reveal that women make up half the workforce; but a deeper dive into analytics will show how many of them are in key senior positions or are at the low end of the wage scale.

HR technology is already helping organizations live and work by DE&I practices. Diversity is a reality, but equity and inclusion is a choice, giving business and HR leaders an important role in changing

workplace norms for individuals, the company, and the entire community.

Employers can reimagine the employee experience through the use of data analytics and HR tech to:

- help identify and remove unconscious bias from hiring and promotion decisions
- create greater equity in pay practices
- track progress toward DE&I goals through the use of analytics
- create improved development and advancement opportunities for underrepresented employee groups.

Data analytics can track population demographics and determine if the company's DE&I metrics are changing across generations. Employers can glean insights by correlating wellness and DE&I data with social determinants of health such economic stability education access, healthcare access, and social and community contexts. Data visualizations can be leveraged to measure DE&I success metrics in real-time – attraction, retention, promotion, engagement, and participation. And, of course, analytics are indispensable in tracking the effect of DE&I practices on business performance.

Smart, Successful Workplaces

The most successful organizations in the world recognize that diversity and inclusion spur innovation, increase productivity, and create a healthy, respectful workplace. Greater diversity and inclusion enable organizations to leverage the range of perspectives needed to address today's complex challenges. Targeted, meaningful, and effective DE&I initiatives make workplaces smarter and more successful, while also contributing to increased job satisfaction, employee retention, and revenue.

In the end, companies must now acknowledge the true power of diversity and ensure that all individuals bring their best selves to work. **BPM**



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