

NEW STUDY UNDERSCORES NEED FOR MORE WORK TO MAKE CANADA'S WORKPLACES DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE

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The majority of Canadians have positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusion programs, but a new study reveals there is more work to be done to achieve truly inclusive workplaces. Smith School of Business and Catalyst Canada offer tips to help your organization increase the effectiveness of its D&I initiatives.

By Kristen Sears

The importance of diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives has been a growing topic of conversation and focus for organizations over the last number of years. The question is no longer *why* diversity and inclusion matters, but rather *how* to accelerate the process to reap the benefits that come with having a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

The good news is that D&I initiatives are working. A new study commissioned by Smith School of Business at Queen's University and Catalyst Canada found that, at firms with D&I programs, women are more likely to report that they have leaders at work who are also women. They are also more likely to report they can be authentic in the workplace, without pretending to be someone else to fit in.

Additionally, most working Canadians (69%) have positive attitudes towards D&I programs. Seventy per cent also believe that D&I initiatives help all employees reach their potential.

One problem, though: 40 per cent of Canadian employees "don't know" whether their company has a D&I initiative. And when employees are unaware, D&I programs are unlikely to achieve their full impact, says Tanya van Biesen, executive director of Catalyst Canada.

"We're fortunate enough to live in a country where people have positive attitudes towards diversity and inclusion, but as we drill down to the organizational and individual level, that's where we start to see inconsistencies," van Biesen says.

Some organizations still treat D&I initiatives as a bit of a 'poster project'. Simply stating that diversity and inclusion is important isn't going to do anything. Yet some companies still believe that this is a strong communication tactic."

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Also of concern are persistent negative attitudes toward workplace D&I initiatives. 33 per cent of men and 20 per cent of women believe D&I initiatives are no longer necessary. Furthermore, 38 per cent of men and 26 per cent of women believe that employment equity laws discriminate against those not among the four equity groups (women, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples and visible minorities).

“There is indeed a portion of the population that is not on board,” says Jana Raver, professor of organizational behaviour at Smith.

Workplaces need to ensure people are not just aware of their D&I initiatives, but that everyone feels that they are part of the process, Raver says.

“Inclusion is not only limited to four groups,” she says. “We can make inclusion about far more than that. When people are on board from other groups, they can act as champions, supporters and sponsors for people from some of these additional groups who may not be as privileged.”

So, what can organizations do to increase the effectiveness of their D&I initiatives? Here are four tips:

- **Communicate:** Make everyone aware in your organization about D&I initiatives and objectives. Highlight the benefits via story-telling and research, and bring all employees into the conversation so that they too can contribute.
- **Train:** Make sure managers have the skills to implement D&I programs. Provide them with training, managerial development and workshops.
- **Engage men:** Men, especially those in leadership positions, can be influential in achieving gender equality. Ninety-six per cent of organizations report progress when men get involved in gender diversity initiatives, according to BCG.
- **Measure results:** It’s helpful to separate measurement into two categories: activity metrics and outcome metrics. Outcome metrics are larger corporate goals, such as a company aiming to have half of all leadership positions held by women within four years. Activity metrics represent a number of actionable steps that together help achieve D&I objectives. For example, when hiring, committing to building candidate shortlists that are composed of 50 per cent women.

“There is no one ‘silver bullet’ solution that is going to lead to a more diverse and inclusive workplace. In order to make change you have to execute many activities concurrently,” van Biesen says.

In February 2019, Smith School of Business and Catalyst Canada announced a strategic partnership, with the shared goal of creating a more diverse and inclusive workforce, in Canada and around the world. [Learn more about the partnership here.](#)