



DEI in the Workplace: A Discussion Guide for Leadership Teams

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Introduction

The Canadian Marketing Association (CMA) made a pledge in 2020 to combat racism, discrimination, unconscious bias, and systemic barriers to inclusion in the marketing profession.

One action it has taken is to conduct research to identify actionable insights about the challenges that employees from BIPOC and other marginalized communities face in the workplace, and identifies steps that organizations and colleagues can take to improve outcomes not only for individuals but also for the organizations where they work.

In all three years of the research, survey results indicate that having well-diversified leadership makes employees feel valued, included, and invested in business success. There was near unanimous agreement (96%) — even among organizations whose leadership is not diverse — that a diverse and inclusive workforce is a business growth opportunity. In diverse and inclusive work environments, there is greater innovation and creativity, a better understanding of customers and clients, and stronger employee morale and engagement.

Yet many organizations have not made much progress in increasing the diversity of their senior leadership.

Purpose of this guide

This guide provides conversation starters to help organizational leaders articulate a commitment and define the scope of activities they will undertake to create a more inclusive and equitable work environment, and to improve employee engagement and morale.

A crucial step in creating more equitable and inclusive workplaces is to create a safe place for employees to have open and meaningful conversations. Many of the conversation starters in this guide can be adapted for this purpose.

Conversation starters

These conversation starters are intended to help organizational leaders articulate a commitment and define the scope of activities they will undertake to create a more inclusive and equitable work environment, and to improve employee engagement and morale. We have provided findings from our research to provide context.

Choose which topics are most relevant to begin discussions in your organization.

Many of the questions can be readily adapted to facilitate discussions with staff throughout the organization.

1. Your workplace today

- Are you working to build an inclusive workplace?
- If not, what barriers are preventing you from doing so?
- What tools and resources would help you overcome these barriers?

2. Your employees' sentiments and expectations

- Have you observed a shift in employees' sentiments and expectations related to inclusion in your workplace?
- Do you feel things are worsening or improving?
- If things are worsening, are you taking steps to improve inclusion and engagement?

3. Interview panels at your organization

- Do you ensure your hiring panels are diverse?
- Are you exploring new channels to reach a broader talent base, including immigrants?
- If not, is it something you are considering for the future?
- What would it take to make this a standard practice?

Relevant research findings

There is near universal agreement that having a diverse and inclusive workplace supports business growth. There is greater innovation and creativity, a better understanding of customers and clients, and stronger employee morale and engagement.

Relevant research findings

Employees at less diverse organizations are far less likely to feel included at their workplace and are more likely to be less engaged at least sometimes. By comparison, only few employees in organizations with well-diversified leadership say they feel disengaged (17%) and nearly all (94%) say they feel included.

Relevant research findings

Respondents who have diversity in senior leadership cite using diverse hiring panels as their number one tactic to ensure they consider all available talent.

4. Preventable employee loss

- Are people in your organization promoted based on merit?
- Is attraction and retention a priority for your organization?
- Have you considered the impact that a DEI focus might have on your attraction and retention strategy?

5. Ageism

- Is age discrimination tolerated in your workplace?
- Do you think this has always been the case in the marketing profession?
- Does your company actively avoid putting older marketers in front of clients? What other behaviours or policies have you observed in your organization that impact older workers?
- Do you see an opportunity to promote the experience of older workers in balance with the innovation and skills of younger marketers?

6. Mentorship

- Do you have a mentorship program in your workplace?
- If not, is this something you are considering implementing in the future?
- If yes, have you considered mentorship in both directions to level the playing field for all employees?

7. Employing newcomers to Canada

- Do you place a higher value on Canadian experience and education in your workplace?
- If so, why do you believe this is important, given that you must be able to reach consumers from diverse backgrounds?
- Do you foresee a change in this mindset in the future?
- What are your challenges (if any) in recognizing foreign education and experience credentials?

Relevant research findings

Employees in organizations with well-diversified leadership experience a halo effect of believing that making efforts to prioritize DEI helps them attract and retain talent in the current competitive marketplace. They are less likely to experience preventable employee loss compared to their counterparts in organizations that are lacking diverse leadership (49% vs 75%).

Relevant research findings

Respondents classify employees as older starting at about age 48. Almost half of respondents (44%) say age discrimination is tolerated in the workplace more than other forms of discrimination, and nearly five times as many older marketers feel their company actively avoids putting them in front of clients.

Relevant research findings

Mentorship appears to be a powerful means of breaking down barriers and improving employee growth and organizational success. Two-thirds of respondents indicate that at least part of their success is due to being mentored by an employee who was older than the average worker.

Relevant research findings

Canadian marketers must reach a diverse and pan-ethnic consumer base, yet a surprising number of respondents indicate that Canadian experience and education is preferred when making hiring decisions. Even in organizations with well-diversified leadership, almost half (45%) of respondents agree that their organization prefers candidates with Canadian experience and education.

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About the Canadian Marketing Association

The CMA is the voice of marketing in Canada and our purpose is to champion marketing's powerful impact. We are the catalyst to help Canada's marketers thrive today, while building the marketing mindset and environment of tomorrow.

We provide opportunities for our members from coast to coast to develop professionally, to contribute to marketing thought leadership, to build strong networks, and to strengthen the regulatory climate for business success. Our Chartered Marketer (CM) designation signifies that recipients are highly qualified and up to date with best practices, as reflected in the Canadian Marketing Code of Ethics and Standards. We represent virtually all of Canada's major business sectors, and all marketing disciplines, channels and technologies. Our Consumer Centre helps Canadians better understand their rights and obligations.

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