

Brazil and Canada workplaces – reflections of our societies

Cultural differences between countries are sometimes reflected in their languages, dances, music, and culinary habits. With globalization and the ability of many corporations to operate in multiple countries, comes the need to understand the impact that a local culture has on the organizational culture. When comparing Brazil with Canada, some differences in business processes can go unnoticed, but on the Inclusion and Diversity front, these differences are present and heavily felt by women and equity-seeking groups.

Inclusion & Diversity

Inclusion & Diversity, or I&D as per our “Inclusive by Design” business call, is not a trend nor a new marketing strategy trying to get consumers to spend more, it’s not a new concept, and it is definitely not going away anytime soon. The business case for I&D is strong; investing in I&D can drive organizations towards significant value creation with double-digit financial impact¹. But **I&D is a business strategy, and nothing changes until behaviour changes.**

Diversity is representation; it’s all the things that make us unique. When diversity is embraced, it opens doors for new ideas and new ways of thinking. **Inclusion is shaping a culture where all members feel accepted, are treated fairly and equitably.** Inclusion is the key to **unlocking the value that diversity brings.**

One of the challenges faced by companies on their I&D journey is the focus on Diversity without equal attention to Inclusion. Focus on improving representation can bear fruit but increasing representation in unwelcoming environments can backfire. Without inclusion, new hires can feel isolated thus minimizing their ability to fully contribute.

How are work environments different in Canada and in Brazil?

Brazil, like Canada², is a country of immigrants, full of diversity, colours, multiple accents and cultures... with a past that includes colonization, a history of abusing, killing and taking over indigenous people’s lands and cultures, and a display of wealth built over the suffering of slaves. While this represents a difficult past, without reconciliation and efforts to eradicate unfair treatment and social disparities, it signals inequities that will continue.

When trying to explain the differences in organizational inclusion and diversity maturity levels in Brazil versus Canada, the reality is that all the disparities present in society are replicated inside workplaces in both countries. The beliefs and

behaviours demonstrated at home and in social environment are brought to the workplace, including racism, sexism and other negative and positive “isms”.

The conditions and treatment of women in today’s society is a compelling example. The Global Gender Gap Index 2018 published by the World Economic Forum³, ranks Canada in the 16th and Brazil in the 95th position out of 149 countries. This index measures the relative gaps between women and men across four key areas: health, education, economy and politics.

Representation combined with a sense of safety and belonging are crucial for professional development and full engagement in society. **Safety and belonging are very basic human needs.** When a sense of safety is missing in their everyday experiences, and extra steps are required to ensure their well-being, women are left at a disadvantage to their male peers who need not be concerned with those same issues.

Another aspect to consider is the presence in everyday interactions of sexist language and jokes which can diminish a woman’s ability to participate and fully engage in the organization. Unfortunately, these behaviors, classified as micro-aggressions⁴, have a severe impact in women’s advancement in the workplace. The same impact on the sense of belonging caused by micro-aggressions can be seen in the advancement of people of colour, LGBTQ, persons with disabilities and with most equity-seeking groups when reviewing current workplace conditions.

The everyday experiences of women and equity-seeking groups in the Canadian workforce tends to reflect the society represented outside the work environment. Contemporary Canadian society represents a higher level of acceptance and respect for diversity than that seen currently in Brazil. Canada still has a long way to go towards establishing truly inclusive and diverse workplaces and communities, but in most accounts, it is doing a better job than many countries in the Americas, and is significantly more inclusive than Brazil.

The achievement of this more inclusive status by Canada, didn’t happen overnight; it is a result of efforts from the women’s movement, government investments and commitments, and corporations understanding the power of consumers belonging to these groups. More recently, recognition of the fact that attraction and retention of top talent is impacted by organizational culture has advanced workplace equity in Canada.

Creating a culture of inclusion is feasible and achievable

The light at the end of the tunnel for Canadian companies seeking a competitive edge, and for Brazilian companies seeking growth and innovation, are the advances being made in I&D and a better understanding of how to create a culture of inclusion, how to address biases in the systems and process, and how to activate inclusive leadership.

The way to create more inclusive workplaces and societies starts with each individual taking responsibility for the change they want to see. So long as inclusion is viewed as an issue of interest only to equity-seeking and special interest groups, we will not achieve all that is possible. When discussing inequalities, Brazilians still face the dismissal reaction from most privileged groups who tend to quickly reject concerns by classifying them as “mememe”⁵. Champions and allies coming from positions of privilege must get engaged to make real change possible.

Corporations can change, but it will take transforming the behavior of human beings⁶ part of these organizations to achieve this transformation.

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References:

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