



**Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion  
Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion**

# Success stories

**CIBC**

**A Canadian case study in diversity and inclusion**

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## **CIBC: A Canadian success story in diversity and inclusion**

By Brenda van Ginkel, Associate, with research by Tracy Pan, Research Assistant, and thanks to Matt Petersen at CIBC for talking with us for this case study.

# Diversity and inclusion as a brand asset

A culture of diversity and inclusion inside one of Canada's leading financial institutions has allowed a transformative initiative to grow; one that is supporting both talent and business strategies and feeding innovation. While CIBC has nine affinity networks for employees, this case study examines their newest, the International Professionals Network. This network came out of a need that was identified in examining the experience for newcomers to Canada working at the bank, in the context of CIBC's existing diversity and inclusion initiatives. The effects of the network have reached beyond international hires, extending to the wider employee base and to leadership as it has helped to feed innovation for the bank's marketplace strategy.

We interviewed Matt Petersen, Senior Director, Diversity & Inclusion, CIBC Human Resources, about their diversity initiatives for newcomers to Canada. Before developing the International Professionals Network, he and team lead on the newcomer portfolio, Shemina Khimji, looked at the time spent on recruitment, how they were coaching managers on hiring inclusively with regard to people who were new to Canada, how managers handled difference and how they created inclusion.

They found a gap in their people strategy; although they were hiring people who were new to Canada, they weren't doing enough to support the newcomers once they were hired. This case study examines how the International Professionals Network has not only improved the workplace and customer experiences for newcomers, but helped the bank innovate and transform mindsets.

## Moving the needle on engagement

Being invested in diversity and inclusion wasn't new to CIBC, which has won numerous awards for its initiatives promoting women's leadership and advancement and inclusion for LGBT employees and customers and persons with disabilities. For years, the bank has had programs to remove the barriers for newcomers, address recruitment and build outreach to clients of different ethno-cultural identities.

The most frustrating barrier that newcomers looking for jobs frequently face is a requirement for Canadian experience, which effectively closes doors for qualified professionals with global experience. While the solution for the problem in the financial sector has traditionally been career-bridging programs that give newcomers Canadian experience, Matt and Shemina wanted to do more. They wanted to change the mindsets of hiring managers who over-emphasize Canadian experience and help the employees who were new to Canada feel more comfortable at work so they could contribute to their best ability; improving job retention, talent development and advancement.

The bank already had two programs that addressed the challenges for newcomers and hiring managers. Their existing bridge programming for newcomers had a high success rate: CIBC partnered with Career Edge in developing their Career Bridge Internship Program, which offers paid positions for job-ready immigrants to translate their international experience into good jobs here in Canada. From that program, 87% of the participants have transitioned into full-time employees on completing their internships.

The bank had also reached out to **The Mentoring Partnership**, developed by TRIEC (Toronto Region Immigration Employment Council) in 2004 to help skilled immigrants connect to meaningful employment. By the end of 2014, TRIEC had matched 500 of the bank's employees to mentoring relationships with immigrants. That initiative continues to cultivate more understanding, and respect, for immigrant job seekers. When asked about the experience in internal employee surveys, 96% of the mentors reported a better appreciation of the talent and experience that skilled immigrants brought to the workplace; were more likely to interview and/or hire skilled immigrants; and could understand the cultural norms and the labour market barriers faced by this group better. Hiring managers reported that they were better at motivating, coaching and developing people, and could better support immigrant professionals in adapting to the workplace.

However, newcomers were still frequently placed in positions that were junior to their experience, affecting morale and retention. And expectations weren't universally understood. That learning might have been the first piece in identifying the unmet need for the International Professionals Network. Within the bank, there were already four employee resource groups representing different ethno-cultural identities – Asian, South Asian, Black and Hispanic. Most members were Canadian-born and the groups were bringing the international talent that was coming on board into their communities.

## The opportunity for change

With their attention on an inclusive workplace, Matt and Shemina saw an opportunity to engage their ethno-cultural networks in developing a program for those in the networks who were new to Canada; to help them adapt, integrate and advance their careers, cultivate peer support and build inclusion from within. The goal for the International Professionals Network was to help newcomers understand the expectations in the workplace so that, against a backdrop of a better picture of work and cultural identities and values in North America, they could adapt as they choose – and to help other employees understand their diversity.

They recognized that workplace culture changes from one part of the world to another, and with talent largely coming from China, India and the Philippines; people were arriving with different

work and social toolkits. Those cultural differences affected job expectations, satisfaction and performance. A program was designed with events and seminars on cross-cultural awareness and business communication to address the unsaid rules and norms for networking and social cues in the North American context – creating inclusion out of the small social complexities on the job that can be uncomfortable to talk about and have larger effects on advancement.

They built on a vision for an inclusive workplace environment where newcomers could be comfortable, didn't feel the need to hide their differences and were able to be authentic, with the resources and supports to experience inclusion and excel. Workshops for the International Professionals Network were developed to include presenting skills, a lunch event on business dining etiquette and e-learning modules on intercultural competence from TRIEC's **Campus** publicly available diversity resources.

CIBC describes the goal of their **diversity strategy** as “an inclusive environment so that employees of all backgrounds can bring their whole selves to work where they are celebrated for their unique skills, perspectives and experiences, and can fully participate in creating business success.” Assessed against that, the diversity team saw perceptions change across the organization, which was translating to more inclusion:

- The mindset about newcomers changed within the employee base, extending even to a shift in perception within prototypical straight-white-able-bodied men.
- International professionals also developed more inclusive mindsets; many were from homogenous societies with less experience in diversity and became more inclusive of other diverse cultures and identities.
- While the goal was to create inclusion for the international talent, other diverse employees experienced more inclusion as international employees become more comfortable with differences.

Data from the bank's employee surveys showed those in the International Professionals Network felt that what they learned in the program made them more comfortable in their workplaces, helped their development and made them feel they could excel in their jobs.

- Overall, the program received a 90% satisfaction rating from the employees who were part of it.
- Across the whole organization, the program is credited for opening up peoples' perceptions of difference over eight categories of human rights. Of the 44,000-person workforce at CIBC across Canada surveyed, 86% said they felt free to be themselves at work, demonstrating the inclusion that newcomers are feeling.

## The innovation trigger

Diversity is an essential component of innovation, which has never been more essential to the Canadian banking sector than now. The effect of the International Professionals Network has been to connect CIBC's people strategy with their marketplace strategy. The bank taps the network to advise on marketing, communications, products and services. After all, who better understands the

needs and desires of potential customers arriving in Canada and global banking clients than the newcomers working at the bank?

CIBC has aggressively marketed banking services to Canadian newcomers for years, starting with its prominent presence at Toronto Pearson International Airport and continued sponsorships of community-based events. The bank has been tapping its affinity networks for advisory councils that help shape media placement, messaging, imagery and content. Newcomers from the International Professionals Network are helping the bank reach this target audience in authentic and meaningful ways as employees contribute to the business strategy, helping the bank promote a global mindset and develop customer-centric products that address the unique needs and expectations of Canada's newcomers.

## Tactics that make a difference

When asked what made the International Professionals Network effective, Matt Petersen identified three tactics that are essential to any diversity and inclusion initiative's success.

### **Make sure leadership is onsite and contributing**

When leadership shows up, people feel what they're doing matters. Executive leadership celebrates cultural events such as Pride, Diwali and Black History Month with employees, which has an impact. People get the message that their differences are supported, that leadership cares about what they care about and it sends a message to everyone that these events are meaningful.

At CIBC, about 40% of the people attending these events are allies and those interested in learning about other cultures. The net effect CIBC has found is that when leadership participates in these events, people feel validated; they feel they can contribute and can achieve their potential.

Beyond showing up for events, when leaders from the organization invest their own time with the networks, it sends a message that the work of these employee-run volunteer groups is valuable.

### **Show the organization is invested**

Financial support is important as well. An organization invested in diversity and inclusion needs to show their commitment by investing the financial resources to execute the strategy and support employees. CIBC has six employees leading their range of diversity and inclusion initiatives within the bank, which allows the resources for strategic planning that's tied to the bank's goals and objectives for employees and clients – and to carry out program development.

With financial support, the bank has been able to develop more advanced programming with online resources on their intranet. Now diversity networks and programming can reach more people as access has expanded to employees across Canada, in particular, those in more remote parts of the country, and those who are newcomers and less likely to find their diversity represented in the communities they're living and working in. The online community brings them together with others.

## **Set up a structure and governance**

The last tactic driving success is to support the initiative with structure and governance. CIBC integrates diversity and inclusion into operational and marketplace planning so their strategies and programming can dovetail with goals for employee engagement, client relations and business development. By approaching their diversity groups as more than grassroots groups with a feel-good strategy, the outcome is a unique diversity and inclusion platform that is a part of the bank's operations, with measurable results and transformative effects that people feel a part of.

## **Connecting core strategies**

CIBC's diversity and inclusion programming for newcomers is perceived at every level as valuable support for employees and for learning about connecting with a diverse client base, creating a circle between employees and the marketplace. For employees, the International Professionals Network not only meets their needs so they can work better, it tells them they are valued for their experience as a newcomer in business development. For the bank, the initiative has connected their people strategy with their marketplace strategy, signaling to newcomers that the bank can support them for employment and for their banking. The bank is building a brand that embraces diversity for a competitive advantage.

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## The Success story initiative

There is astonishingly little published that shines a light on diversity and inclusion successes in Canada, though there are many, across a wide range of organizations. Case studies referenced by trainers and leadership tend to be reporting on different countries, cultures, political and economic settings.

The goal of this initiative is to support diversity and inclusion leadership with stories that are relevant to what's happening now, here in Canada. By sharing their stories, we celebrate the successes of Canadian organizations while contributing to learning for everyone that cares about diversity and inclusion.

The employers who have developed initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion as priorities in the workplace are responding to an increasingly competitive economy that's responsive to the diversity of employees – and the country. We are grateful to those who have participated in interviews.

This is the first case study; the series will be published monthly through 2016. Subscribing to our monthly newsletter at [ccdi.ca](http://ccdi.ca) will keep you updated with the latest case studies, which will all be posted online at [ccdi.ca/successstories](http://ccdi.ca/successstories). For more information, contact [communications@ccdi.ca](mailto:communications@ccdi.ca).

## The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion

The CCDI has a mission to help the organizations we work with be inclusive, free of prejudice and discrimination – and to generate the awareness, dialogue and action for people to recognize diversity as an asset and not an obstacle. Through the research, reports and toolkits we develop and our workshops, events and workplace consultations, we're helping Canadian employers understand their diversity, plan for it and create inclusion.

CCDI's leadership has a proven model that's cultivated trust as an impartial third party. Our expertise is focused on the topics of inclusion that are relevant in Canada now and the regional differences that shape diversity.

A charitable organization that thinks like a business, we have created a niche with our innovative research technology and data analysis that brings a deeper understanding of Canadian diversity demographics and mindsets at any given moment.

CCDI is grateful for the support of Employer Partners across Canada. For enquiries, contact Susan Rogers, Chief Client Officer, [Susan.Rogers@ccdi.ca](mailto:Susan.Rogers@ccdi.ca) or (416) 968-6520.

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