

# Diversity management, inequality, and workplace productivity among immigrants: perception of black immigrant workers living in Canada

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**ABSTRACT:** Policies have opened Canada to migrants, often skilled immigrants on a permanent-resident basis, under programmes like Express Entry. Despite such policies, Black immigrants have faced several barriers in their workplace, such as low-wage pay and diminutive advancement opportunities. These findings are represented in a qualitative study that explores how Black immigrant workers in Calgary perceived diversity management and workplace inequality based on Johnson's polarity management theory with the best applications of Benet's Polarity of Democracy (POD) framework. The research used narrative inquiry to gather the subjective explanations of 10 Black immigrant workers who had spent five years in the workforce in Calgary, Alberta. The study exposes the polarity thinking of Canadian workforce diversity and equality. Participants viewed increased diversity as a solution to the problem of inequality, but significantly, many faced enduring challenges in achieving upward adjustments to equalise their workforce. Their polarity management approach revealed vast unconscious biases and 'Canadian experience' expectations still facing Black immigrants three decades after the multiculturalism policy took effect in 1988. The findings, which reveal the dilemma of Black immigrant workers, illustrate the possibilities of paradigm shifts from viewing diversity as an isolated problem to framing it as a polarity that needs to be balanced with an equally powerful one that is equality. A more balanced approach to diversity and equality shows a complete way forward, with positive social change including more equitable and just workplaces, agreement and a mutual understanding to propel industries and society toward a more just future.

**Keywords:** Black, Canada, discrimination, development, employment, migration, policy.

## INTRODUCTION

In Canada, the workforce is becoming increasingly diversified by immigration policy; in this case, the Express Entry Program and policies may reflect a commitment to inclusion. However, the reality for many black immigrants means a different form of contact regarding wages and opportunities. The insistence on 'Canadian experience' and unconscious bias make it tougher for workers in this context. Researchers are attentive to this phenomenon (Turnock, 2019; Ng and Sears, 2020) and have recently explored how leadership and corporate culture can facilitate or frustrate the interest in diversity. This paper is

one of a series of projects looking at the experience of Black immigrant workers in the Calgary context.

Diversity is a universal issue due to globalization (George *et al.*, 2017; Weber *et al.*, 2018). The inability to define diversity has presented many challenges in understanding. Levine (2003) said diversity was a buzzword that organizational leaders used as public relations to appease public members about diversification efforts. Beyond defining diversity, government efforts to solve the diversity problem have resulted in equal employment opportunities and affirmative action laws in

the United States, Canada, and other countries. The purpose of these governmental actions is to find solutions to diversity problems.

Despite efforts to combat the challenges of managing diversity, many policies have not effectively addressed inequality. Lee (2020) said that understanding diversity falls within the democratic norm of factionalism, where various factions have extreme positions and thereby contribute to divisions in terms of diversity and equality. Restricting diversity to factions in democracies may continue to produce inconsistent outcomes (Nadiv and Kuna, 2020).

Nadiv and Kuna (2020) sought to balance the diversity polarity of individualism and societism to find practice-based theoretical solutions to diversity. This consists of looking at the effects of diversity on individuals and groups, especially when an individual's suffering is specific to a particular group. Leaders affect the success or failure of diversity (Hughes and Brown, 2018; Ng and Sears, 2020). Hughes and Brown (2018) and Ng and Sears (2020) opined that the ineffectiveness of human resources (HR) could occur if a CEO does not demonstrate a moral inclination to diversity to promote equality, even if a diversity policy exists. Weber *et al.* (2018) promoted the concept of diversity and said leaders play a significant role in diversity management.

Leaders cannot avoid diversity due to globalization's multidimensional cultural imperatives. Turnock (2019) said that leading purposefully is essential to managing diversity at an organization's top echelon. Therefore, this paper poses the question: How do black immigrant workers in Calgary perceive diversity management? Diversity involves the intricate balance of affirmative action and the promotion of merits above anything else in organizations. Park and Liang (2020) said that organization leaders would not sacrifice merit principles in pursuing diversity, especially in the public sector, to determine whether merit principles obstruct organizational diversity. Some conflicts with diversity management could occur if an organization focuses on merit principles for recruitment and career advancement.

Scholars such as Benet (2013) and Johnson (2014) have explored employees' perceptions of diversity management and expectations involving diversity policies and organizational implementation. They have sought to understand the probable effects of diversity and organizational output and have suggested the impracticability of asserting a definitive correlation between the two. Johnson (2014) suggested aiming for polarity management and shifting from either/or thinking to both/and thinking. Polarity management requires managing four quadrants of a pole's upsides and downsides in two poles' relationships. Each pole has an upside, which Johnson suggested maximizing, and a downside, which Johnson suggested minimizing to achieve better leverage between the two poles.

Benet (2013) formulated the polarities of democracy (POD), which consists of 10 elements divided into five pairs. The ten elements are freedom, authority, justice, due process, diversity, equality, human rights, communal obligations, participation, and representation. The pairs derived from these elements are freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, and participation and representation (Benet, 2013).

Diversity and equality require polarity management to enhance outcomes and resolve paradoxes (Nadiv and Kuna, 2020). Scholars are searching for new theories to address this complex phenomenon. As represented by employees, Crusaders might continually push for the upsides of diversity because they experience the downsides. Tradition-bearers, represented by leaders, might fear letting go of the upsides of equality and thus overlook the downsides of equality or upsides of diversity, which could present issues for individuals and organizations (Johnson, 2014). This study aimed to explore perceptions of black immigrant workers in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, to contribute to the knowledge of both crusaders and tradition-bearers to manage polarity and reduce perceived oppression suffered by crusaders while providing tradition-bearers with positive outcomes.

Despite diversity policies and their implementation, the expanding wage gap between immigrants and their Canadian counterparts indicates ineffective diversity management in the workplace (RBC Economics, n.d.). The wage gap is not the only concern regarding inequality, it is one of the most glaring forms of inequality experienced by immigrants, especially black immigrants. Globalization has resulted in the increased mobility of labour, which has profound implications for diversity management (Nkomo *et al.*, 2019).

Through the federal skilled worker's policy, many skilled immigrant workers come into Canada, specifically Calgary, Alberta, now renamed the Express Entry system. These immigrants expect to engage in work based on their qualifications and work experiences. They hope to attain equal treatment and pay as new skilled workers; they are often downgraded in remuneration and career advancement (RBC Economics, n.d.). Diversity policies and management should address this issue.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### The Polarity of Democracy (POD)

This qualitative study involved using Benet's Polarity of Democracy (POD) (Benet, 2013) as a cardinal theory from the family of polarity management theory by Johnson. The polarity framework involves cardinal principles of ongoing dilemmas between two opposing but interdependent issues or concepts. The theory involves finding better

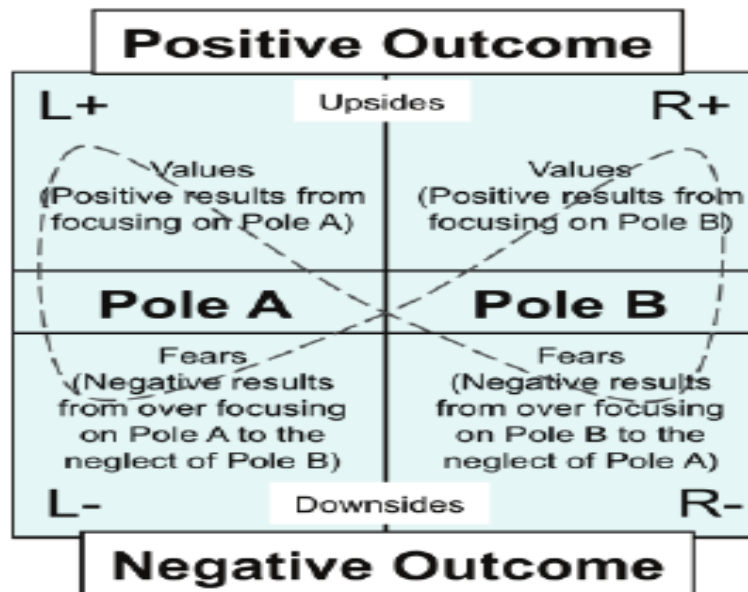


Figure 1. Polarity management extremities.

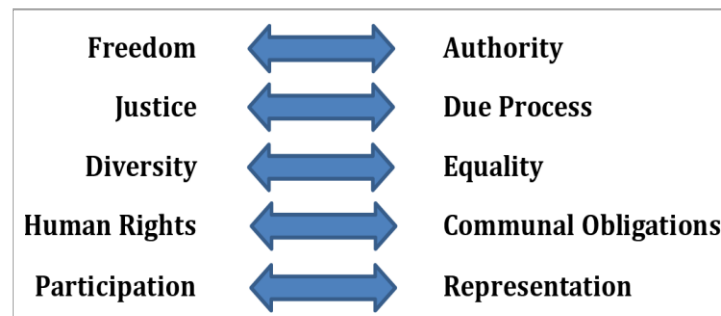


Figure 2. Polarity of democracy.

ways of managing unsolvable situations. As depicted in Figure 1, Polarity management is an appropriate framework for addressing the dilemma of two extreme ends, such as a positive outcome and a negative outcome or diversity and equality, as used in this study.

Benet's Polarity of Democracy (POD) (2013) theoretical framework opined that polarity is the existence of two interdependent issues that should be managed together for better results. Benet developed a theoretical framework with ten elements divided into five pairs. Each pair has two extreme poles that require management for better results. The unique polarity factor differentiates between a solvable problem and one that is only manageable. Thus, an issue with an immediate solution is a problem outside the purview of polarity management.

Figure 2 shows that POD has a philosophical foundation involving "promoting positive social change by overcoming oppression" (Benet, 2013, p.27). Therefore, the theory

facilitated exploring how to achieve parity between diversity and equality. The POD involves overcoming oppression through an equitable society with the democratic principles of 10 elements in five pairs: "freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, and participation and representation" (Benet, 2013, p.31).

The study focused on diversity and equality parity and how to maximize diversity while reducing inequality via a gradual process involving attaining equality. First, organizations require diversity policies in order to measure performance. Second, equal opportunity is used for measuring performance, indicating a paradox. Organizational diversity consists of management strategies, whereas equal opportunity contributes to the outcome of those strategies.

The theory is an appropriate approach to exploring achieving diversity and equality parity. The POD is a theory

built on the conceptual framework of polarity management, which involves distinguishing problems from solutions and dilemmas that require management. The POD suggests overcoming oppression with an equitable society and democratic principles by separating problems and dilemmas. Based on the four-quadrants principle of two opposing but interdependent poles with downsides and upsides, the POD has ten elements divided into five pairs of polarities: "freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, and participation and representation" (Benet, 2013, p.31).

This study focused on diversity and equality parity and how to maximize diversity while reducing inequality by gradually attaining equality. First, organizations require diversity policies to measure performance. Equal opportunity is one of the main instruments for measuring performance (Nadiv and Kuna, 2020). Organizational diversity consists of management strategies, while equal opportunity contributes to the outcomes of those strategies.

Organizational diversity is important in the workplace to enhance inclusion and productivity. This diversity must be anchored on equal opportunity to continue to enjoy the patronage of a diverse workforce worldwide. Organizational diversity includes employing people of diverse origins and genders without discrimination. These people will be given equal opportunities, such as equal promotion, work ranks and status, remunerations, and training on the job. This will promote a good work environment, eliminate fear of discrimination, and enhance quality outputs that will be of national importance.

## LITERATURE REVIEW RELATED TO DIVERSITY AND IMMIGRANTS

### Diversity and Leaders' Roles

Scholars have suggested placing the responsibility of diversity management on leaders at the board and management levels. Turnock (2019) asserted that diversity occurs when leaders purposively chart the way for its implementation. Ng and Sears (2020) identified the CEO as the most critical person for guaranteeing the successful implementation of diversity policies. According to Ng and Sears, a CEO's body language shows the beliefs and moral values enabling HR professionals to implement diversity policies faithfully. Although the position taken makes sense and is incontestable, there is little hope that diversity will achieve the win-win-win contemplation of Sheppard (2018). Suppose a CEO thinks unfavourably about the organization's impartial implementation of the diversity policy.

Rahman (2019) described the need to manage diversity professionally to have its desired outcomes. According to

Rahman, "[T]he role of the leader is important to provide direction and guidance to a group of individuals" (p. 32). Rahman stated, "The role of leadership concerning diversity is to develop a strategic plan that exemplifies the company's philosophy on diversity" (p. 32). The second aspect was a tremendous relief and departure from Ng and Sears's (2020) position, in that leaders have the responsibility rather than the possibly narrow-minded leader as canvassed by them. According to Northouse (2019), leadership contains the three elements of leader, followers, and purpose. Such leadership can enhance the equitable representation represented (George *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, inclusive leaders with diversity policy formulation philosophies may face minimal implementation challenges. Such leaders can attain a win-win-win status (Sheppard, 2018).

Similar to Ng and Sears (2020), Weber *et al.* (2018) stated, "Leaders can overtly strive to manage diversity through their behaviours, decisions and policies" (p. 382). Leaders' unintentional behaviours could provide employees with a perception of diversity. Like Rahman (2019), Weber *et al.* suggested that teaching diversity beliefs across the board focuses on what has occurred at the individual and team levels. A leader may be best positioned to channel diversity in the desired direction; however, singling out leaders rather than leadership can be counterproductive in the long run. The assumption is that a diversity belief system solely championed by a leader could tilt toward that particular leader's biases. In line with Northouse (2019), diversity beliefs appropriately situated within the collective leadership paradigm's arena may be preferable to that subject than a single leader's whims.

Ng and Sears (2020) noted the HR professionals' inability to implement diversity policy effectively if the CEO's body language does not align with the envisaged direction. Body language may appear subjective; however, Nkomo *et al.* (2019) also noted the HR functions constraints. Nkomo *et al.* discussed HR managers' enormous challenges, stating, "Growing political and legal challenges made it difficult for human resource managers to sustain antidiscrimination and equal opportunity justifications for hiring and retaining women and racial/ethnic minorities" (p. 501). Perhaps there is a need to turn to Weber *et al.* (2018) and incorporate the teaching of diversity beliefs across an organization's strata with the explicit objective of achieving the win-win-win model of Sheppard (2018).

The general issue is that although this model has a significant role in ensuring that organization leaders formulate inclusive diversity policies, a system built on collective leadership processes could be a means of achieving integrative implementation and robust outcomes (Northouse, 2019) to address "emotional tiredness and trust issues" (Farmanesh *et al.*, 2020, p.23). Addressing such bottlenecks and mistrust can lead to enhanced organizational performance.

### Challenges of Canadian Experience (CE.)

The first significant challenge for a new immigrant seeking employment in Canada is the prerequisite of Canadian experience (Ku *et al.*, 2019) for a job offer, regardless of the applicant's skills and previous experiences. Ku *et al.* (2019) explained how the employer's insistence on the CE for new immigrants is difficult for immigrants to overcome. The authors noted that employers often discard the experiences of immigrants doing similar work before relocation, which demotivates the individual. Citing Bhuyan *et al.* (2017), Ku *et al.* stated that the CE is a paradox for many immigrants in Canada. The CE has a symbolic meaning in the public's imagination of Canadian exceptionalism; however, it is also an employment barrier for skilled immigrants and racialized minorities" (p. 291).

The CE is a contradiction: Individuals allowed to immigrate to Canada receive immigration rights based on their skills and experience; however, employers disregard such experience as inconsequential upon entry into Canada. Vineberg (2019) concluded that the major inhibiting factor for new immigrants is the selection method, as employers screen applicant-submitted documents without engaging in face-to-face interviews. Vineberg suggested that the impersonal means of selection is perhaps the reason for the poor outcomes of immigrants and the expanding wage gap between immigrants and their Canadian-born counterparts.

Labour market discrimination is much more complex than the immigrant selection system. Various scholars (Branker, 2017; Gauthier, 2016; Vang and Chang, 2019) have explored race-based workplace discrimination. Branker (2017) focused on English-speaking Caribbean immigrants in the Toronto area, noting, "While immigration laws and policies were amended to allow minority persons to immigrate to Canada, discrimination still exists in many forms, and discrimination negatively affects the labour market for racialized immigrants" (p.204). Gauthier (2016) focused on the challenges faced by highly skilled immigrant women in Quebec province who must overcome many socioeconomic obstacles as new immigrants and the implications of such challenges on diversity management. Vang and Chang (2019) researched the lack of equal treatment based on the social constructs of race, age, and other factors. This led Nadiv and Kuna (2020) to challenge Canada's status as a diversified society.

Okeke-Ihejirika (2020) lamented the presumed helplessness of new immigrants who desperately need assistance assimilating into their new environment. Okeke-Ihejirika argued that other factors beyond race, such as language and religion, also contribute to the discrimination faced by black immigrants as they struggle to settle in a new environment. However, beyond the initial stage of settling in a new country, many immigrants find it takes longer to catch up with their Canadian-born

colleagues in the workplace. Ng and Sears (2020) wondered if diversity policy in the workplace is nothing but compliance with equal opportunity and affirmative action laws. Similarly, Nadiv and Kuna (2020) considered an Israeli organization's paradox of diversity management.

Levine (2003) questioned the ideal definition of diversity found in many organizations to show diversity openly and emphasized how individuals construe diversity to have meaningful outcomes. Levine stated, "So far as the dominant organizational fantasy links individual identity to ascribed group membership, it tends to perpetuate and even exacerbate the difficulties posed by diversity in organizations" (p. 279). Similarly, Janssens and Steyaert (2019) advocated for a practice-based theory to deconstruct individualism and the societal aspects of the diversity ecosystem. There appears to be confusion in continuously viewing an individual from the prism of an assigned group.

Branker (2017) expressed the same sentiment about the categorization of immigrants from the Caribbean as "visible minorities" (p. 207), who usually experience a higher level of discrimination than most ethnic groups. Lee *et al.* (2018) further advocated for breaking the silence of those who suffer "racism injuries" (p.1). Mikkelsen and Wählin (2020) also discussed the hidden and forbidden emotions that result from frustrations. They perceived discrimination despite the diversity policy, as witnessed by the outcome of diversity management.

The purpose of diversity is integration (Vang and Chang, 2019). However, some diversity policies appear to be mere acts of compliance with government regulations (Ng and Sears, 2020), with paradoxical outcomes to implementation (Nadiv and Kuna, 2020). George *et al.* (2017) described diversity management as "a faithful initiative aimed at achieving equal, diverse, and equitable representation without compromising merit" (p. 239). This definition of diversity has four aspects: equality, diversity, equitable representation, and merit. I address the intersection between equality and diversity under conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Sheppard (2018) defined diversity as the win-win-win model:

The win-win-win model is simple, and it is the future of business (Cook, 2017). It comes down to this: Doing good in business is the same as doing good for business. This means organizations must focus on what is best for employees, customers, and other stakeholders to experience growth and success. Successful businesses know that ethics cannot take a backseat to mere profits. (p. 126).

Beyond the ethical imperative, Sheppard suggested a winning proposition for employees, organisational leaders, and customers while transacting business. Employees are

the interface between customers and the organisation; therefore, any arrangement that lacks an employee focus might not have optimal results. Farmanesh *et al.* (2020) considered this symbiotic relationship. They suggested that the "existence of emotional tiredness and trust issues can extremely [and] negatively impact the relationship between workforce diversity and organisational performance, which in turn can be costly for the organisation" (p. 23). Therefore, achieving the win-win-win condition envisaged by Sheppard requires transparently implementing a diversity policy. Therefore, a strictly linear linkage exists between diversity, diversity policy, and diversity management.

### Immigrant-focused discriminations

Vang and Chang (2019) described the discrimination immigrants face in Canada. Citing Pettigrew and Taylor (2000), Vang and Chang noted, "Discrimination is the unequal treatment of individuals or groups based on social markers such as race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and age" (p. 602). The focus of this study was racial discrimination against Black immigrants. However, it could be challenging to discern if Blacks of African origin experience the same discrimination as those from the Caribbean, as pronounced differences might not be apparent. Discovering the difference could require hearing how the individual speaks, including an accent. It might be a similar challenge to discern different Asian ethnicities until one knows the individuals more intimately.

At this juncture, pervasive discrimination is not an experience limited to the workplace alone. Tuyisenge and Goldenberg (2021) researched the structural racism immigrants experience in the health sector and their treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the country being party to "global and national policy instruments" (p. 651), Canada still cannot achieve human dignity for all. Tuyisenge and Goldberg contested that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected immigrants because they have low-paying jobs. The inadequate attention given to people considered to be lower class further contributes to the issue.

In a CTV News report on September 2, 2020, the University of Calgary officials announced removing "potential barriers for Black applicants" (White, 2020) in the law school after many years of denying the existence of systemic racism in the educational sector. That a citadel of knowledge such as the University of Calgary deliberately presented obstacles for the Blacks aspiring to study law is a phenomenon beyond imagination. Similarly, the new minister of justice, a Black man, called for diversity within Alberta courts to instil confidence in the justice system (Connolly, 2020). The emphasis is not necessarily because the minister is a Black man but that the man's last hope (the court system) is also not transparently

diversified, leaving much to be desired.

Discrimination is also an issue deep-rooted in the school system. Shizha *et al.* (2020) researched the plight of African immigrant high school students who suffered systemic discrimination from teachers and school career counsellors. They found that the young people's essential nurturers often reneged on their fiduciary responsibility of providing unbiased care by not guiding Black students in the right direction. Instead, adults often guide black youth toward employment based on the courses they advise the students to take. Despite their availability, Shizha *et al.* found that school board leaders rarely employed foreign-trained teachers familiar with students' needs and aspirations. African parents suffer a lack of sufficient representation in the school systems; therefore, their children often receive inadequate guidance in schools. Vang and Chang (2019) believe that not all discrimination results from prejudice and lack of tolerance for other group members; however, it is often challenging to agree with Van and Chang, especially considering those who have experienced discrimination firsthand.

Garg and Ganesh (2018) postulated that diversity aims to achieve inclusion for all individuals in a specific space. Garg and Ganesh noted that discrimination of any sort is an unacceptable practice, as it negates diversity principles. However, discrimination exists in nearly all community strata, from school systems, health care organizations, and workplaces to justice systems; it is often complained about in hushed voices. Lee *et al.* (2018) advocated breaking the silence of racism injuries. Openly discussing the pains and agonies of discrimination, such as segregation of opportunity and racial profiling (Law faculty at the University of Calgary), reduces discrimination. According to Mullaly (2000), racism is "an oppressive and devalued manner" (as cited in Lee *et al.*, 2018) in which the members of the dominant group treat those in the outer groups as subordinates. Racism can occur at the individual and institutional levels. When masked at the institutional level, racism enables the perpetrators at the individual level to operate in disguise. Discrimination is not a fair practice, as it obstructs societal cohesion (Garg and Ganesh, 2018).

According to Memduhoğlu (2016), diversity is a distinguishable phenomenon among humans, given their different cultures, ways of life, appearances, and many other factors that delineate some groups from others in the larger society. This is imperative when considering the common saying that individuals now live in the global village. Diversity enables different people to bring different perspectives to tasks and duties, which could benefit organizations if adequately harnessed. However, successful diversity can only occur with proper recognition of what an individual brings to the workplace in an atmosphere of mutual respect and transparency. An environment opposite to what Memduhoğlu described may result in discrimination; rather than contributing to

progress, such an environment may cause suboptimal conditions and injuries (Farmanesh *et al.*, 2020), especially if it contains some racial colouration (Lee *et al.*, 2018).

## METHODOLOGY

This study continues using a qualitative narrative inquiry approach to examine Black immigrant workers' perceptions of diversity management at work. Given the change in data collection modes because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a step-by-step process used virtual platforms, such as Zoom, to interview participants. This exemplifies the changes in qualitative research because of the use of technologies, particularly in the context of the pandemic, where many researchers had no choice but to operate remotely to collect data.

Ten talented Black immigrant workers in Calgary, Alberta, with at least 5 to 10 years of experience in the Canadian workforce, were purposefully sampled. Each individual was interviewed to discuss experiences in diversity, inequality, and social integration in the workplace. Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed through thematic analysis to identify consistent diversity management barriers and enabler patterns. Qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo was used to help ensure the rigour of the findings.

Moving away from past portrayals of single-sided interviews, an additional feature of this improved method is the background reflections on how virtual interviews may alter the depths of personal contact compared to face-to-face encounters. These features informed the interpretations of data and contributed to the study's findings about how Black immigrants in Canada experience organizing structures in the work environment.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This qualitative study explored diversity through a narrative inquiry of Black immigrant workers' perceptions of diversity policy implementation in their workplaces in Calgary, Alberta. A purposive sampling was used to recruit skilled black immigrant workers to participate. I explored whether participants perceived diversity as a solution to discrimination or a dilemma that required management alongside its opposing but interdependent pole of equality. Participants perceived that properly managing diversity could be a way to reduce some of the challenges of migrating to Canada. They indicated they did not necessarily think about diversity with equality, according to the Polarity of Democracy (POD). Nearly all participants perceived or understood Canada as a multicultural society, which provided them with the comfort that they would receive reasonably good treatment upon arrival.

Therefore, some were shocked when they encountered the concept of Canadian Experience (CE) when they attempted to enter the workforce in Canada, leading them to consider the issue of diversity. Many participants quickly found ways of coping with growing bills and dwindling resources when they emigrated to Canada. Many had to make stopgap employment arrangements quickly.

Through in-depth interviews, participants provided their knowledge and perceptions of diversity. According to Johnson (2014), team-building and specific thinking can directly impact perceptions of diversity as employees pursue common goals. Johnson noted that either/or thinking involves focusing on alternatives, whereas both/and thinking centres on mutual inclusiveness. Interviews with 10 participants occurred via Zoom. Data integrity was maintained through cloud recording and the use of password-protected devices.

Triangulation occurred via copious note-taking during the interviews. In addition, a human resource professional was engaged to understand recruiters' points of view. I shared interview transcripts with participants during member-checking to achieve validation and triangulation.

The perceptions cover such issues as the painful experiences about the request for Canadian experience before they could have a foothold in the workplace, subsequently affecting their movement even when fully engaged. Other issues affecting their perception were the observable unconscious bias and some subtle discrimination they suffered in the workplace. For the reasons above, they contested that the lack of proper and effective diversity management hampers their integration into the mainstream of the workplace. For instance, Participants Q and R, who came from Europe to Canada, expected that diversity is much better in Canada as a multicultural society. They, therefore, had high expectations about diversity in Calgary.

While it took each participant's various periods from getting into the workplace, all identified the initial bottlenecks they had to go through. Some participants later identified that those initial bottlenecks also affected their progression into higher cadres in their workplace. Though Participant P took some time deliberately, it was different for Participant Z, who initially wanted to set up a business. However, he was told he had no Canadian experience in the retail business. With some of these experiences, there was almost some kind of agreement that diversity could, in great measure, narrow down the period of getting jobs suitable for their experiences and certificates.

### Central themes to diversity management perception

The study identified three main themes that emerged from workers' narratives regarding their perceptions of diversity management in light of their Black immigrant worker

**Table 1.** Emergent themes and their frequencies.

Themes	Frequency	Source	Percentage occurrences
The Canadian experience	98	Interview data	40%
Unconscious bias and subtle discrimination	87	Interview data	35%
Immigrant integration process	62	Interview data	25%
Total	247		100%

experience – working under the Canadian experience (CE) requirement, unconscious bias and subtle discrimination, and the immigrant integration process (Table 1). The findings reflect the complex nature of Black immigrant workers' experience of attempts to integrate into the Canadian workforce and the strategies they have employed to achieve successful integration.

Three themes were identified from participants' narratives about what it means to experience diversity at work: the CE requirement, unconscious bias and subtle discrimination and the immigrant integration process.

### **Canadian Experience (CE)**

Most cited the Canadian experience (CE) (Ku *et al.*, 2019) requirement as the most significant impediment to Black immigrant workers in Canada. Forty per cent of participants indicated that lack of CE was a significant barrier to finding work above basic entry-level jobs commensurate with their qualifications and experience. The rationale for the requirement of CE is a contradiction, as immigrants are admitted based on qualifications and work experience obtained in foreign countries but then are discounted when they arrive on Canadian shores (RBC Economics, n.d.).

The narratives described frustrations with the arbitrary CE process and participants circumventing it and finding undocumented jobs. Many who had worked for years in other countries had professional experience but were forced to work in lower-level jobs, often irrelevant to their credentials, to earn money. This can result in underemployment and lead to feelings of cheatedness and degrading professional performance.

Still, the COVID-19 pandemic caused some changes in the enforcement of CE requirements. Global talent shortages have also led employers to embrace remote work, forcing them to relax their CE regimes as remote work permits companies to outsource from international labour markets. Ultimately, there could be an opportunity to rehabilitate the CE requirement altogether in order to make outcomes more equitable for immigrants.

### **Unconscious bias and subtle discrimination**

They point to 'unconscious bias and subtle discrimination';

35 per cent cite this as a serious workplace challenge. People found themselves passed over for promotion, assigned fewer important projects, or presumed less competent than the locals simply for being born elsewhere or having brown skin (Gauthier, 2016).

They described instances when they felt they had not been taken as seriously as others – particularly when, for example, they had been promoted into a leadership role. Others refused to take orders or were surprised that they were competent. This bias often does not manifest itself in overt acts of discrimination but rather in subtler ways that are often more difficult to address through organizational policies.

They said that although awareness – for example, following the fight for justice that became a social movement for black lives under the banner Black Lives Matter – was growing, it often did not lead to changes in organizational behaviour. Many organizations had adopted diversity policies, but, in general, participants felt that the policies were performative: they were not enforced or substantively carried through. Participants found that, while many organizations have implemented diversity hiring practices, workplace cultures often do not support the growth and flourishing of minority employees.

One of the clearest signs of unconscious bias was the environmental factor – microaggressions, or comments meant or not as stereotyping, such as questions about US accents or how well people spoke English as their first language and as native users of English. In our focus groups, we heard many comments about feeling isolated or frustrated by microaggressions. These environmental challenges convey the sense that diversity efforts are cosmetic.

### **Immigrant integration process**

Integration into the Canadian workplace—cited most frequently at 25 per cent—continues to be a daunting task for Black immigrant workers. Despite Canada's multicultural reputation as a sought-after immigrant destination, many participants noted that this perception does not translate to a welcoming or supportive workplace environment. Nearly all explained this negative circumstance as a function of complications with workplace norms that remained unfamiliar or exclusionary.

A common plotline told of ethnic minority workers whose

employers would leave them largely unsupported, to the point of being 'left to swim or sink in the workplace.' A common theme across these narratives pointed toward the lack of mentorship and structured occupational support within work settings, making it hard for some to adjust to the Canadian workplace (Branker, 2017). This can lead to alienation, particularly if paired with unconscious bias or microaggressions as a 'sequel.'

However, we see both the pitfalls and promise of pandemic-era work-from-home. While the pandemic has created friction against immigrant integration (no drinking water cooler gossip leads to fewer 'in person' networking and mentoring opportunities for immigrant workers when trying to build reputations), it has also enabled more holistic and spatially flexible work arrangements. One supervisor, a manager of student workers, explained: they do not need people to start and end their day on a regular schedule, and [I do not] need everyone doing it simultaneously.

Additionally, the integration process may suffer from the perception among some agencies that managing diversity can be reduced to a tick-box exercise rather than a lever for progress. Many interviewees believed it is not enough for organizations to have a diversity policy that encourages multicultural representation in their workforce but also develop more systematic approaches to diversity that build on this mandate. Specifically, interviewees called for more deliberate onboarding arrangements, mentoring schemes, and other 'diversity and belonging activities' that explicitly address the challenges of immigrant employees.

### Emerging themes and their implications

The findings from this project emphasise the intricate nature of Black worker diversity management in Canada. The Canadian experience criterion, conscious and unconscious bias, and the immigrant integration process all adversely impact each other to create a complex web of hurdles preventing the full labour force participation of Black immigrant workers in Canada.

The message the Engage and Win authors are sending rings authentic. Diversity management has to shift from the 'compliance' mode to the more strategic 'equity' approach. Diversity management has to mean more than ticking the boxes of hiring minority or female workers; it has to include efforts to bring about accommodation to enable them to integrate into the workforce and rise up the ranks fully. That means addressing unconscious bias, eliminating the CE barrier to promotion, and making the workplace more inclusive.

Furthermore, by reshaping workplace culture, the post-pandemic era also invites a different way of thinking about it. Greater remote work may offer possibilities for more equitable hiring (regardless of where applicants live). However, it could potentially cause new challenges with

accommodating remote workspaces for all employees, particularly those from marginalized groups.

### Summary

The results portray not only the current realities of Black migrants in Canada but also one way forward. As work organizations respond to global events and changing labour markets, there might be an opportunity to refocus diversity management. Such change would shift from diversity being a 'challenge' to be managed into diversity being a catalyst for change, provided organizations are willing to make necessary structural and cultural adjustments.

### Conclusions

The findings underline that, despite Canada's diversity hype, Black immigrant workers still face considerable barriers to their full integration and advancement in workplaces. The CE requirement, unwitting bias and subtle discrimination remain systemic dysfunctions that hinder the full promise of diversity management in Calgary's workplaces. The results also underscore the need for another paradigm shift: the switch must move away from diversity as a 'compliance issue' to diversity as a core strategic organizational asset.

The COVID-19 pandemic's mandated use of remote work offers both opportunities and challenges for immigrant workers. Some of this is relatively straightforward. Immigrant workers value remote work's flexibility and its potential for international collaboration. This work set-up, however, has exacerbated the isolation of many who, without the space to network and observe Canadian offices first-hand, will have a harder first foothold in the Canadian work culture. For employers in Canada, these developments point to the urgent necessity of creating more inclusive virtual work environments and rethinking the 'essential-Canadian-experience' requirement.

Moving beyond the persistent problems teased out by this work requires investment and commitment to robust diversity training that involves treating overt discrimination, unconscious bias, and more subtle inequalities embedded in organizational systems and workplace cultures. It takes leadership accountability to break down these barriers—recent evidence shows that instilling an awareness of such 'identity threat' within management structures is highly effective. An organization can grow and reach its full potential only when its heart is proven through trust and equality for its staff.

### Policy implications

This study's findings offer clear implications for policy-

makers and leaders of organizations committed to increasing workplace diversity:

1. **Rebalance the Canadian experience requirement:** Policymakers should collaborate with key industries to rebalance our enhanced emphasis on the requirement of Canadian experience, especially in areas where international collaboration has increased during the pandemic. This type of shift could help break the sorts of bias against skilled immigrants (with particular implications for Black workers) that have motivated such obstacles towards equitable hiring in the first place.
2. **Train for unconscious bias:** Though most firms have diversity policies, studies found that unconscious bias remained the biggest obstacle in moving towards real diversity. Policymakers should consider legislation for a broader range of unconscious bias training, especially in industries where there are extremely high instances of immigrant workers.
3. **Promote inclusive leadership:** Evidence suggests that whether or not diversity policies achieve their goals can depend heavily on the attitudes and behaviours of organizational leaders. Policymakers could support organizational changes that incentivize inclusive leadership practices, for example, by encouraging CEOs and senior managers to devote time and effort to promoting and embedding diversity and inclusion within their organizations.
4. **Encourage immigrant integration programs:** Federal, provincial, and municipal governments should continue to fund and expand immigrant integration programs, especially for labour market integration. Cultural bridging, mentoring, and networking programs can help newcomers navigate the cultural differences of the workplace.

The pandemic has revealed the fragility and potential resilience of workplace diversity efforts. With proactive policies to address these issues, Canada can recover its reputation as a multicultural society where newcomers fit in at work.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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