

# The Diversity Forum

# WINS

## Diversity is Strength

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## Navigating Employee Burnout for Diverse Groups

During the past two years, much attention has been paid to the aspects of work-life conflict that can lead to burnout, depression and anxiety. And one thing that has been commented by many observers is that diverse groups – such as women, people of colour and LGBTQ+ individuals – have been affected the most.

How can organizations help combat burnout during this pandemic, keeping this fact in mind? Employers need to recognize that the causes are distinct for various demographic groups. According to the OECD, disadvantaged groups are facing higher rates of mental distress during COVID<sup>1</sup>. According to the Canadian Women's Foundation, for example, since the start of COVID, women have faced increased risk of gender-based violence, more economic stress, increased burdens of caregiving and housework, and reduced access to support services. In terms of race, the City of Toronto's study of COVID's impact on

the Black community found that members of this community had fewer options to work from home, were more likely to depend on jobs in unsafe working environments, and were less likely to send children back to school because of high transmission rates<sup>2</sup>. It is due to such factors that we see different rates of burnout among diverse demographic groups.

Sometimes it might appear that reductions in workload are the only answer for employees who have been most affected by the changes of the past two years. Yet this potential solution can be hard for small- and medium-sized organizations – especially when available resources have already been impacted by increased sick time and other disruptions during the pandemic.

Numerous studies have found that employees who have a sense of control over outcomes are most able to navigate these challenges. This is something employers can realistically provide. Different people have different needs. Individuals from privileged socioeconomic groups may have an inherent belief they have control over work outcomes. In contrast, those from less privileged backgrounds, particularly those who are experiencing imposter syndrome or harassing conditions, may believe that outcomes are outside of their control. According to Gallup, managers are responsible for 70% of an employee's engagement at work. That means managers must be attuned to the distinctive nuances of how various groups are affected by burnout's causes. By being so, they can be well positioned to help all employees gain the level of control they need.

Managers need to consider the neurological dimensions of diversity as well. In this regard, it is useful to remember that how work is done often conflicts with how people best work. Whether it's communicating work expectations with a neuro-diverse individual, requiring arbitrary metrics like being at one's computer 98% of the day, or giving strict work parameters to a wildly creative individual – square pegs are pushed through round holes every day. If managers take the time to learn their team members' personal and professional needs, keeping in mind the nuances related to diversity, it becomes possible to enhance the control they possess to find and achieve positive work outcomes while juggling various commitments.



<sup>1</sup>"Tackling the Mental Health Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis: An Integrated, Whole-of-Society Response," 12 May 2021, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/tackling-the-mental-health-impact-of-the-covid-19-crisis-an-integrated-whole-of-society-response-0ccafa0b/>

<sup>2</sup>Black Health Alliance, "Perspectives on Health & Well-Being in Black Communities in Toronto: Experiences through COVID-19," Fall 2020, p. 8. <https://blackhealthalliance.ca/wp-content/uploads/Perspectives-on-Health-Well-Being-in-Black-Communities-in-Toronto-Experiences-through-COVID-19.pdf>

**If you are a manager handling a diverse team, then what are the ways you can help?  
Depending on your organization and the makeup of your team, you can instill feelings of control over outcomes to your team members with these steps:**

- 01** Provide flexibility to work from home at irregular hours with rules to maintain connectivity with the team.
- 02** Focus on results over time and effort.
- 03** Communicate how you/your organization supports the success and inclusion of diverse individuals. Be as specific as you can and follow through on what you say. Then you'll build trust quickly.
- 04** Clearly establish work expectations and where your team members have autonomy. This will differ based on your team members' abilities and needs.
- 05** Communicate in no uncertain terms what is recognized and what is frowned upon when it comes to compensation, bonuses, and career growth opportunities (professional development or promotions). Lay out the path for professional and compensatory mobility.
- 06** Ensure employee concerns are immediately and effectively addressed, especially when it comes to unfair or inappropriate treatment at work, even when concerns may be inconvenient to the organization and have historically been ignored.

If implemented with forethought and care, these steps should not just aid in forestalling burnout, they should make your organization's entire workplace environment more positive as well.



**Dan Piotrowski, Director HR  
OrixGeoscience, WINS Advisory Board Member**

## Showcasing Community Voices

“How can organizations expand their EDI initiatives at a time when so much organizational energy is being devoted to COVID disruptions and less to its socioeconomic impacts?”



**Juan Olarte, Founder CEO, Digitally Accessible**

Organizations need to make every employee a priority. With a considerable proportion of their staff facing some form of barrier (i.e., accessing the office, communicating with peers and clients) due to factors related to COVID, organizations should be aware of the unique needs faced by individuals. A creative plan should be in place for all. Improvements to processes should include all people and all types of abilities. A distinctive multifaceted approach should be adopted, from recruitment, onboarding, to ongoing employment. People are abundantly diverse and don't fit into one single style. Having considerations for EDI should never be an afterthought.

**Usha George, Academic Director, Ryerson Centre for Immigration and Settlement**

There is a rich pool of newcomers from diverse communities who are looking for work, but unable to find it due to the specifications around vague categories like 'Canadian experience'. We don't hear much about any attempt to reach out to this constituency. Many newcomers and temporary foreign workers have the necessary skills for most of the vacant jobs. What we need is targeted outreach and an assessment system that acknowledges related prior experience. Now that we as a society begin to consider the contours of life after COVID, organizations have to renew their commitment to EDI initiatives with specific goals and expected outcomes.



**Robin Waley, General Manager Diversity Equity & Inclusion, YMCA of Greater Toronto**

COVID has urgently highlighted the inequities that exist in relation to wages, opportunities for advancement, and access to professional development. Employees from marginalized populations who experience these inequities are no longer willing to wait for EDI plans that have been sidelined due to the pandemic. Organizations that do not proceed with these plans will find their staff gradually move elsewhere. The customers an organization serves are also impacted by inequities. To address their distinctive needs, organizations must critically evaluate every aspect of their operations with an EDI lens. This means thinking about the barriers which Indigenous, Black, racialized, disabled, 2SLGBTQIA+, women and low income populations face accessing and fully participating in what an organization offers, and shifting from there. Once these steps are taken, organizations can adapt their EDI initiatives to add new efforts as operations recover over time.

**Ahmad Majid, Executive Director, Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Agencies (SAISIA)**

The need to expand and place more focus on EDI initiatives for organizations has been starkly illustrated by the glaring inequalities felt by many racialized Canadians during the pandemic. Throughout COVID, management teams have been forced to expend much time and effort to create safe and effective workplaces. Organizations can carry this momentum forward and expand their EDI initiatives by continuing to utilize the key skills and qualities that were needed to make it through COVID. These include resiliency, flexibility, mutual understanding and the need to regularly check in and support each other.



## From the Newsstand



Has systemic racism influenced the risks that Canadians have faced during the COVID epidemic? According to a recent report from Western University's Learning Network<sup>3</sup>, the answer is a definite yes. “Systemic racism has had a two-fold effect” on how BIPOC individuals have been affected, argue the report's authors. First, because of structural inequities in the jobs that people do, the living conditions of different groups in the community, and deeply ingrained barriers in access to healthcare, BIPOC individuals are more likely to be infected. And, once infected, these individuals are more likely to face serious illness and death. “As the country continues to grapple with both the coronavirus pandemic and the prevalence of systemic racism, it is essential that the disproportionate impacts of the virus be identified and that the underlying social causes of these impacts be understood and resolved,” the report concludes.

As part of WINS initiative called “Showcasing Diverse Voices”, we use community research to forge solutions for workplace inclusion irrespective of an individual's dimensions of diversity. Through this initiative we are engaging in consultation, advocacy, and dialogue to help eliminate workplace discrimination in Canada.

In 2022, we are conducting a survey to explore and understand the employment inequities that may have been heightened during the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey's focus is to examine potential disparities between different demographic groups.

**We request that you please take a few minutes to complete the survey by visiting our website:**

[www.winscanada.com](http://www.winscanada.com)

**Your response will help us explore the varied impacts of the pandemic.**

Showcasing Diverse Voices  
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<sup>3</sup> “More Exposed And Less Protected In Canada: Systemic Racism And COVID-19.”  
[https://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/ourwork/backgrounders/more\\_exposed\\_and\\_less\\_protected\\_in\\_canada\\_systemic\\_racism\\_and\\_covid19/](https://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/ourwork/backgrounders/more_exposed_and_less_protected_in_canada_systemic_racism_and_covid19/)