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Each week in BCPVPA eNews, we share tips, links and self-assessment tools that will help our members to better understand the mental health continuum, and to use the resources that are available.

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DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION:

MENTAL WELLNESS FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

By Rochelle Morandini



HOW CAN WE FOSTER A MENTALLY HEALTHY COMMUNITY?

Over the last two weeks, as we have watched with dismay the events in the U.S. and the overwhelming pain and conflict in relation to the safety and well-being of African-Americans, I find it daunting to imagine how society can move forward and turn the tide.

This tide is in a large ocean of deep currents. How can one person — one pebble dropped in the sea — and its accompanying ripple, make a difference?

“If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.”

— Dalai Lama

Canada is certainly not innocent of discrimination and questionable inclusion. From the long-standing racism against Indigenous people and Black communities, to heightened discriminatory acts towards those of Asian descent due to COVID-19, we have much to do in promoting inclusion and boosting our community's well-being.

“Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance”

— Verna Myers, diversity and inclusion expert

Many private sector employers speak of being a diverse and inclusive workforce. In my experience, I do believe that the diversity in the workplace has increased as society's composition has expanded — but I certainly do not believe that the workplaces of most organizations reflect the diversity of their communities. Furthermore, what is less prevalent in the workplace is a level of inclusion in roles of leadership, decision-making and influence.¹

You — yes little 'ol you — can have an amazing, positive impact on the mental well-being of your community by practising the tenets of diversity and inclusion. There is a direct link to an individual's well-being and whether they feel welcomed, feel that they belong, and feel that their contribution is valued. We can all make a difference - **please watch and even share this [video: 'Inclusion starts with I.](#)**



Luis Galvez - unsplash.com

THE DARK SIDE OF DISCRIMINATION

Being the odd one out in an otherwise homogeneous workforce or community can lead to feelings of isolation, and can leave someone vulnerable to abuse, harassment, and bullying. These effects, in turn, can lead to loneliness, lowered self-esteem, more serious mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, and — subsequently — an overall decrease in their quality of life.

¹ <https://www.madworldsummit.com/news/the-interplay-between-inclusion-diversity-and-well-being>

Neuroscience evidence suggests that the brain processes social/emotional feelings of pain (e.g. from ostracism), similarly in how it processes physical pain. The same area of the brain that we know to be involved in processing physically painful feelings—the *dorsal anterior cingulate cortex*—is also relatively active when people have just been excluded.²

Feeling left out significantly impairs our psychological function. Experts tell us that achieving a sense of social belonging is a fundamental psychological *need*. Ostracism alone reduces feelings of belonging, but being outright rejected can reduce one's self-esteem and sense of control.

[Watch this video](#) on the impact of ostracism on your brain.



Papaioannou Ko - unsplash.com

The costs associated with discrimination in the workplace range from negative attitudes among employees towards the organization, disruption in employee cohesion and reduced job performance, to a loss in job productivity and lowered job satisfaction. Homogeneous workforces can cause a negative ripple effect on the well-being of individual employees in the organization. Turnover is often high, environments become toxic as competition is fierce, and individuals are often pushed aside or ignored in favour of a desired persona.

In these organizations, there is an expectation to adopt a 'cultural fit'. These workplaces that promote a 'cultural fit' seek to assimilate employees to a dominant norm by rewarding desired behaviours, traits and characteristics, while penalizing deviances from the norm. In these types of situations, individuals actively mask or downplay their differences so that they can fit in and be successful.

² <http://socialpsychonline.com/2015/11/psychology-ostracism-feeling-excluded/>

Studies indicate just how demoralizing and taxing it is for employees to actively hide aspects of their identity. If you suppress who you are and try to be something you are not, it's easy to imagine the detrimental impact it could have on your well-being.³

When it comes to mental health and diversity and inclusion, research studies in the UK and U.S. demonstrate some troubling findings:⁴

- One in 25 people under the age of 24 in the UK identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. LGBTQ+ people are less satisfied with their lives and experience mental health issues at a rate that is about a third higher than non-LGBTQ+ employees
- [More than half of LGBTQ+ people have experienced depression](#) in the last year and almost half of trans people had thought about taking their life.
- [LGBTQ+ youth are four times more likely to self-harm](#) than their heterosexual peers.
- As a result of the discrimination they face, LGBTQ+ employees are less likely to seek support for mental health issues for fear of more discrimination.
- In one year, [one in three UK adults](#) experienced or witnessed [racism at work](#). Around [a third of employees](#) who have been subjected to racism at work have said they've taken a period of sick leave as a result.
- [New research](#) has revealed that racism shortens lives and hurts the health of Black people. Research found a [73% increase in suicide attempts](#) among Black teens in the U.S.
- [Almost half of Black and Latinx employees](#) in the U.S. have left a job at least partly for mental health reasons.

³ <https://www.hrzone.com/engage/employees/diversity-and-inclusion-how-to-build-more-inclusive-well-being-strategies>

⁴ <https://www.mercer.com/content/dam/mercer/attachments/global/gl-2018-diversity-in-wellness-mercer.PDF>



It has been suggested that in addition to the discrimination within healthcare systems, Black youth are less likely to seek and receive mental health treatment because the mental health stigma is more prevalent in some Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. The discussion around diversity and inclusion is about more than race, culture and gender identity. To embrace diversity is to offer support to communities facing unfair stigmas. This certainly includes the millions of us struggling with mental health problems.



Research carried out by Business in the Community for the Mental Health at *Work Report 2017*, found that employees experiencing poor mental health feel stigmatized by mental illness more than almost anything else. Those surveyed said they felt more comfortable talking about seven other diversity indicators, including their race, age, physical health, and religious beliefs.

Only one in 10 (11%) of the people surveyed said they felt they were able to disclose a mental health issue to their line managers.



THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF INCLUSION ON EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Inclusiveness is about being open to others who are not like you – perhaps a different age, [gender](#) or ethnic background. It is about adjusting the way you communicate to build relationships with people from cultures and backgrounds that are different than your own, and to speak up to challenge stereotypes and [prejudice](#).

How does an inclusive work setting positively impact employee well-being?⁵

(For more details go directly to the [source](#)).

Inclusive workplaces support positive self-concept

Our cultural and social identities (e.g. nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, health status) form an integral part of our self-concept and self-esteem. [Self-affirmation theory](#) posits that individuals are motivated to maintain the integrity of the self. Integrity refers to one's sense of 'worth' — an individual's belief that they are a 'good person'. [Self-affirming techniques](#) reduce distress and promote more adaptive responses in the face of threats to integrity. When we celebrate, encourage and value the expression of an individual's unique identity, their self-esteem and integrity are better supported.

Inclusive workplaces support professional achievement and job satisfaction

Inclusive workplaces seek to remove obstacles that can threaten the career progression of diverse talent. Workers in inclusive teams are twice as likely to receive regular career development opportunities and ten times more likely to be effective than workers in non-inclusive teams. Workers in inclusive teams are nineteen times more likely to be very satisfied with their job than workers in non-inclusive teams. [See this PDF for more information.](#)

Inclusive workplaces support work-life balance

Inclusive workplaces also foster well-being through efforts to [increase flexibility regarding when and where work is performed](#). Workplaces that endorse flexible working allow workers greater control over balancing work commitments with non-work demands. [Improved work-life balance](#) reduces stress and increases physical and mental well-being.

Inclusive workplaces promote connection with others

[Workers in inclusive settings](#) benefit from improved interpersonal interactions and connection with others. Employees will experience a [greater sense of belonging](#). Our need for social connectedness is hard-wired. Studies show that the neural networks that promote social activity are the same networks that promote the satisfaction of physical needs like food and water.

Inclusive workplaces promote pro-social behaviour

Workers in inclusive settings are [more likely to receive help](#) from their colleagues. Instrumental and emotional support from colleagues buffer work stress. Employees are also [less likely to experience prejudice, harassment, or discrimination](#) when their workplaces are inclusive. Studies show that [helping others makes us happy](#) and supports physical and mental health and well-being.⁶

⁵ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/do-something-different/201609/diversity-and-inclusiveness-is-good-your-well-being>

⁶ <https://cultureplusconsulting.com/2018/08/17/how-does-employee-well-being-link-to-diversity-and-inclusion/>



How does feeling inclusive impact an individual's work experience?

Research performed by the Diversity Council Australia suggesting that Australians working in inclusive teams are:⁷

- *Nineteen times more likely to be very satisfied with their job than workers in non-inclusive teams;*
- *Four times more likely to stay with their current employer;*
- *Two times more likely to receive regular career development opportunities; and*
- *Almost seven times less likely than workers in non-inclusive teams to have personally experienced harassment and/or discrimination in the past year*

Does being inclusive improve your own well-being?

Research performed by the University of Hertfordshire, as part of their Do Something Different program, identified a strong relationship between employee's diverse and inclusive behaviours and their own individual well-being. The researchers were interested in whether being more inclusive might have personal benefits for their own staff in terms of their well-being.

They measured well-being using a reliable scale composed of factors around coping, [happiness](#), physical health, decision-making, being valued, talking to others, having meaning in life and close relationships.

⁷ <https://theprofessionalsecurityofficer.com/the-important-links-between-well-being-diversity-and-inclusion-by-dr-alison-wakefield-fsyi/>

The results showed a strong relationship between being diverse/inclusive and well-being – the statistical tests produced highly significant effects:

- *Someone with high inclusiveness was about four times more likely to have high well-being, compared to someone with low inclusiveness.*
- *Someone with medium inclusiveness was twice as likely to have high well-being, compared to someone with low inclusiveness.*
- *Someone with high inclusiveness was very unlikely (only 3% chance) to have low well-being.*



This research tells us that being inclusive of people who are not like ourselves is actually healthy! This study showed that well-being and openness to change are strongly linked to inclusiveness - ***the more inclusive a person is, the better their well-being***. Basically, those people whose inclusiveness increased during the study experience greater improvements in well-being.⁸

HOW CAN YOU, AS A LEADER, HELP TO MAKE YOUR WORKPLACE MORE INCLUSIVE?

What can you do today to be a more inclusive leader? The following five moves are a good place to start. ⁹ [Check out this link](#) for examples and more detail.

⁸ <https://www.employee-well-beingcongress.co.uk/news/how-diversity-can-positively-impact-the-emotional-and-mental-well-being-of-a-business>

⁹ <https://open.buffer.com/7-simple-ways-to-to-be-more-inclusive-in-work-and-life/>

1. Recognize Your Unconscious Bias—and Be Humble About It

It's impossible to understand all of the values, beliefs, norms and rituals that are important to every person at work. But work to understand your own unconscious bias about what you assume about others.

2. Make the Unwritten Rules Obvious

Every group and organization has cultural norms. But if they aren't written anywhere, and are treated as understood, it can be harder for new members of [diverse groups](#) to know them. This is especially true on international teams where people from different cultures or backgrounds don't know the rules and accidentally misstep. Proactively look for ways to make sure all employees are comfortable.

3. Don't Overlook the 'Small' Stuff

When you witness someone being rude or dismissive to someone else, call it out. Don't focus on finding fault but on stating what you notice and suggesting alternatives that include everyone.

4. Understand the Advantages You're Born With

Each person's race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, culture, physical ability, and religious practices afford them different levels of access and privilege.

Inclusive leaders recognize that members of their team have different considerations. So, along with striving to be thoughtful, it's also important to be understanding if your employee approaches a situation differently.

5. Believe That People Are Created Equal, But Not the Same

Inclusive leaders are able to notice and talk about difference without making anyone feel objectified or singled-out. Leaders are [more successful](#) when they see the unique qualities of each individual on the team.

Check out these two articles:

[5 Things All Inclusive Leaders Do Every Day](#)

[7 Ways to Make People Feel Important](#)

PROGRESSING FORWARD

The topic of inclusion and diversity is broad and complex, and goes beyond the breadth of this document. Talking about inclusion can be intimidating because it's not always clear what role you can play as an individual.

Well, you do not need to tackle this alone. Consider yourself a piece of a larger puzzle and focus on what you can do to improve your work environment, neighbourhood and other spaces. By taking these small — yet incremental — steps, you can start a ripple effect to encourage diversity and inclusion in your environments. How can **you** make a difference?



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