

A New Paradigm for Leadership Diversity



SPEAKERS

FORUM DISCUSSION

JOHN TORY, O.ONT.

Business leader, corporate director, broadcaster, Chair of CivicAction, Co-Chair of the Greater Toronto Marketing Alliance, and former MPP

PANEL MODERATOR

COURTNEY PRATT, C.M.

Chairman, Knightsbridge Human Capital Solutions

PANELISTS

JENNIFER LYNN

Chief Executive Officer
Diversity Advantage International

DR. ALAN MIDDLETON

Executive Director
Schulich Executive Education Centre, Schulich School of Business, York University

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Managing Consultant
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DR. CATHERINE CHANDLER-CRICHLOW

Executive Director, Centre of Excellence in Financial Services Education, TFSA

Thanks go out to over 30 leading diversity thought-leaders – VPs, Directors, CEOs – who responded to a call to action put forth by Diversity Advantage International, the Schulich Executive Education Centre and Knightsbridge. This aide-mémoire has been compiled as a reflection of the forum and the ideas presented.

Accelerating from Good to Great

Bringing about sustainable leadership change is complex and multifaceted. The solutions suggested for a transformative leadership diversity agenda – accelerating culturally diverse leaders into executive roles – requires shared responsibility across all employers, and especially from the leadership of Canada's major corporations.

So why this group? And why now? A leadership group sharing a deep interest and commitment to diversity and inclusion is needed to make change. The forum was designed to bring together leaders for a thought-provoking discussion to generate insights and ideas, and possible solutions and directions. Participants conceded that, for the most part, they were among the converted and that their collective commitment to action is going to require breakthrough discussions, new thinking and solutions informed by risk-taking.

As a starting point for the discussion, three critical areas were posited that must all come together to bring about a new paradigm for leadership diversity:

- Identifying what is required of leaders in order for the organization to be successful in implementing its strategy.
- Reviewing formal policies, programs, rules and aligning them with diversity goals and objectives.
- Establishing the fundamental belief systems that will advance the diversity agenda.

FORUM THEMES

Pre-forum consultations generated comments grouped into four themes which during the forum continued along these lines, providing deeper insights into each area.

- **Establishing the business case**
- **Data and metrics**
- **Targets and incentives**
- **Leadership development and training**

Establishing the business case was consistently expressed as connecting diversity to increased competitiveness and the importance of diversity in aiding innovation in thinking and approach.

Although solid research data is appealing – and should be undertaken – there’s a need to move more expediently than fulsome research can allow. Most comments related to the business case positioned it as a pitch to the corner office to invest in diversity.

John Tory put forward an economical and persuasive case and summed up his remarks with the follow provocation:

“We are making excuses. If there is no quota or metric, there is no goal. Leadership must come from the top.”

Each of the panelists put forward specific ideas on one or more of the themes.

THE FORUM’S THEMES TRANSFORMED INTO FOUR ACTION AREAS, BEST CONVEYED IN THE WORDS OF PARTICIPANTS.

Advance from WHY to HOW

“So much time is spent justifying why diversity matters, BUT we need to focus more energy on HOW. For example, how do you create inclusion by challenging our own mindset?”

“Advancing diversity leaders is complex – the interplay between people, processes and culture has to be very focused and intentional.”

“The notion of what leadership is, is changing ... and we need to have a new view of what leadership is.”

“Shape the rules for those without Canadian experience to have the opportunity to show their talent.”

Change the systems

“We need to look at cultures and systems and change the existing ones to fit the new reality.”

“What we are not doing is changing processes, and therefore the culture that we are bringing people into. We are not deliberately creating barriers, but we’re not changing in the way that we need to at the rate that we need to.”

“Policies such as hiring from within can limit diversity. Opening up the process, advertising both internally and externally for positions can open it up.”

“The leadership imperative is to shift the dialogue – the scorecard should be changes to practices and policies NOT people.”

“The rate of internal change is moving more slowly than the rate of change demanded externally.”

Movement in upper ranks

“Canada is 28th out of 54 countries in a study of spending on management and staff education. This is an area we need to spend on, involve people who are leading organizations, and move away from fear and misunderstanding to lead diversity.”

“Diversity is consistent with our values and unique to Canada and we need to sweep away obstacles at the upper levels.”

Address the unconscious bias

“When identifying high potential candidates – when the balance isn’t there – you have to go back and challenge the system. An unconscious bias is embedded in our thinking.”

“We know that you look for people like you – that act like you, demonstrate leadership in the same way.”

“I thought we’d gotten beyond Canadian experience. We know that indicators of on-the-job success are intellect, social skills, drive and energy.”

“Biggest obstacle we have at the moment is insecurity. The change taking place is scaring people – scared of losing out, the need to be more competitive, working with people who are different.”

A WAY FORWARD – RETHINK RISK

“Why doesn’t the business case take hold as it should?” was a question raised that generated considerable discussion among the participants.

“The notion of diversity is seen as altruistic (social benefit), but the truth is diversity is an essential component of competition and innovation – from human capital, to altruistic values to conversation within competitive teams”

We propose as part of a way forward that it would be valuable to collectively delve deeper into the aspects of “HOW do we calculate the cost and begin to acknowledge that the failure to take risks in hiring and promotion is a key variable in perpetuating exclusion. What risks do we need to take to inspire inclusive hiring and promotion practices at the most senior levels?”

SUMMARY

It is clear that more can be done. The converted need to come together.

Transformative change happens when we engage in an inclusive process that broadens the support base and creates collective ownership and responsibility for the leadership diversity agenda. This is essential for future prosperity.

“We are all human and we manage our relationships by building trust. In that vein, we should control what we can and be mindful of the choices we make – where we shop, who we play with, who we eat with, who we welcome into our home, matters.”

– Report compiled by Cheryl May