



CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN CORPORATE CANADA:  
A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ Workplace Fit and Stereotyping

## ABOUT CATALYST

Founded in 1962, Catalyst is the leading nonprofit membership organization working globally with businesses and the professions to build inclusive workplaces and expand opportunities for women and business. With offices in the United States, Canada, and Europe, and the support of more than 370 member organizations, Catalyst is the premier resource for research, information, and trusted advice about women at work. Catalyst annually honors exemplary organizational initiatives that promote women's advancement with the Catalyst Award.

# CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN CORPORATE CANADA:

A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ Workplace Fit and Stereotyping

**Katherine Giscombe**

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Catalyst Publication Code D78; ISBN# 0-89584-280-7

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In the current globally competitive marketplace, organizations cannot afford to underutilize any segment of the talent pool. Demographic shifts and globalization are exerting pressures on both the workforce and the marketplace. A growing proportion of Canada's labour force consists of visible minorities, many of whom are immigrants, and these talented, hard-working women and men will be critical to the performance of Canadian companies and firms in the decades to come. Yet, until now, little has been known about the experiences of visible minorities employed in Canada's largest businesses—the place where skills and opportunity come together most directly.

Catalyst has embarked on a series of reports about visible minorities to identify factors in the work environments of Canadian business organizations that contribute to or impede the retention, development, and/or advancement of these employees.<sup>1</sup> The first and second reports in this series, co-authored with The Diversity Institute in Management & Technology at Ryerson University, were based on data obtained from the single largest national survey ever done focusing on the careers of visible minority managers, professionals, and executives working in corporate Canada. The first two reports included data about employees' levels of commitment and career satisfaction, and their perceptions about career advancement. The third report looked at the critical relationships that visible minorities formed—or did not form—in the workplace, and which they felt affected their career advancement.

This fourth report in Catalyst's visible minorities series provides a more complete picture of issues affecting career advancement. We examine crucial aspects of career success—how well visible minorities felt they fit into the work environment, whether and how they perceived being stereotyped by others in the workplace, and how they felt others perceived them as potential leaders. We also present the perspectives of white/Caucasians.

### Job Categories Defined

This report contains findings across three professional job categories: managers, professionals, and executives.

**Managers** are individuals in levels/grades/bands who are seen as being in the "pipeline" for senior management or senior leadership roles. In a professional service firm, they are individuals in administrative roles within the firm, such as Director of Human Resources or Manager of Associates.

**Professionals** are predominantly individuals working in professional service firms. However, our sample also included professionals in companies (i.e., individuals who provide a particular skill or expertise, but who do not have direct reports).

**Executives** are those who hold the most senior positions in the organization, including the CEO and those who report directly to the CEO. Executives are responsible for the organization's policy and strategic planning and for directing and controlling the functions of the organization.

<sup>1</sup> The series of reports consists of the following titles: Catalyst and The Diversity Institute In Management & Technology at Ryerson University, *Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ An Early Preview* (2007); Catalyst and the Diversity Institute in Management & Technology at Ryerson University, *Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ Survey Findings* (2007); and Christine Silva, Monica Dyer, and Lilly Whitham, *Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ Critical Relationships* (Catalyst, 2007).

## THE IMPORTANCE OF VISIBLE MINORITY TALENT TO CANADA

The source of labour in Canada is becoming increasingly diverse over time. Visible minorities represent a large and growing part of this diverse talent pool:<sup>2</sup>

- According to the 2006 Canadian Census, one-fifth of Canadians were born outside the country—the highest number of foreign-born Canadians in the previous 75 years. Some 19.8 percent of Canada’s population is foreign-born.<sup>3</sup>
- Between 2001 and 2006, most immigrants to Canada (58.3 percent) came from Asia (including the Middle East); 16.1 percent came from Europe.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2006, more than two-thirds (70.2 percent) of those living in Canada who were foreign-born spoke a language at home other than English or French. Among this group, the most common languages spoken at home were Chinese languages such as Mandarin and Cantonese (18.6 percent).<sup>5</sup>
- It is expected that by 2011, immigration will account for 100 percent of Canada’s net labour force growth.<sup>6</sup> Currently, three out of four people immigrating to Canada belong to visible minority groups.<sup>7</sup>

In remarks delivered in 2006, Gordon Nixon, President and CEO of RBC, emphasized the importance of welcoming immigrants to Canada, supporting a business case in favour of diversity:

*If we succeed at leveraging the diversity of our current and future workforce, we will have unrivalled advantage. But if we fail, we will pay a heavy opportunity cost for our citizens and will face an uphill battle to maintain, let alone enhance, our quality of life...Diversity can and should be Canada’s competitive advantage. Canada’s economic advantage is not defined by our rich base of natural resources or by capital like plants, equipment and machinery. It includes our ability to tap human potential... Right now, Canada-wide, we welcome about 220,000 immigrants a year. At this level, with our aging workforce and low birth rate, our labour force will stop growing in about ten years. Clearly, if we are going to compete, we must increase the number of immigrants we welcome to Canada each year.<sup>8</sup>*

## PRIOR WORK

Our first reports (*Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ An Early Preview* and *Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ Survey Findings*) presented data from our survey of more than 17,000 managers, professionals, and executives working in corporate Canada. These groundbreaking reports showed that, compared to their white/Caucasian counterparts, visible minorities were less satisfied with their careers, less likely to report positive experiences and perceptions regarding their workplaces, and more likely to perceive workplace barriers.

<sup>2</sup> Frank T. Denton and Byron G. Spencer, “Population Change and Economic Growth: The Long-Term Outlook,” *QSEP Research Report*, no. 383 (July 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, “2006 Census: Immigration, Citizenship, Language, Mobility and Migration” (December 4, 2007). <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/071204/d071204a.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada, “2006 Census: Immigration, Citizenship, Language, Mobility and Migration” (December 4, 2007). <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/071204/d071204a.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada, “2006 Census: Immigration, Citizenship, Language, Mobility and Migration” (December 4, 2007). <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/071204/d071204a.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Barbara A. Mitchell, “Canada’s Growing Visible Minority Population: Generational Challenges: Opportunities and Federal Policy Considerations” (2005). [http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/canada20177\\_e.cfm](http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/multi/canada20177_e.cfm)

<sup>7</sup> Denton and Spencer.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon Nixon, “Canada’s Diversity Imperative: 2010 and Beyond” (May 10, 2006). [http://www.rbc.com/newsroom/20060510nixon\\_1.html](http://www.rbc.com/newsroom/20060510nixon_1.html)

The next report in the series (*Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ Critical Relationships*) explored an important aspect of career advancement: the development of relationships in the workplace. This report revealed that visible minority managers, professionals, and executives felt they were at a disadvantage in forming and developing connections that could help them advance their careers. More specifically, visible minorities, especially women, said they felt excluded from informal networking opportunities. Visible minorities also reported that it was difficult for them to develop mentoring relationships and acquire the sponsorship of a “champion” in the workplace, considered to be instrumental in career advancement.<sup>9</sup>

## THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKPLACE FIT

Previous Catalyst research suggests that an important aspect of career advancement is how well employees feel they fit into their organizations. This “workplace fit” is defined as the correspondence between an employee’s beliefs, perceptions, and/or personality and the culture of the employing organization.<sup>10, 11</sup> A good fit between employees and employers has been linked to low turnover, high satisfaction, and high productivity.<sup>12</sup>

While all new employees are expected to adjust to the norms of their employing organizations, those from underrepresented groups (including those from ethnic/racial minorities), may have more difficulty doing so. According to previous Catalyst studies, women from ethnic/racial minorities consistently reported feeling the need to adjust their behaviour in order to fit into their organizations. This included adopting a more “acceptable” behavioural style, such as acting more assertively or being less outspoken than they normally would.<sup>13</sup>

### Social Stereotyping May Undermine “Fit” for Visible Minorities

Another aspect of fit for professional employees seeking advancement is whether or not they match the prevailing image of a leader held by others in the organization. Members of underrepresented groups may adopt specific strategies to better match the image of a senior person—for example, they may downplay aspects of their background that might be perceived as low status or in some way incongruent with being a leader.

Social stereotypes are generalizations that some people make to differentiate categories or groups of people;<sup>14</sup> social stereotypes of underrepresented groups may be negative and undermine the credibility of both the group and of individuals within that group. For example, research shows that women are often stereotyped as being somehow unfit for leadership roles.<sup>15</sup> Such negative stereotyping may hinder the matching process mentioned above (i.e., that to advance to a certain level, an employee must match the prevailing image of a leader).

In this report, we explore issues of workplace fit and perceptions of stereotyping among visible minority managers, professionals, and executives working in corporate Canada.

<sup>9</sup> Christine Silva, Monica Dyer, and Lilly Whitham, *Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ Critical Relationships* (Catalyst, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Arne L. Kalleberg, “The Mismatched Worker: When People Don’t Fit Their Jobs,” *Academy of Management Perspectives*, vol. 22, no.1 (February 2008): p. 24-40.

<sup>11</sup> “Organizational culture” can be defined as: a pattern of basic assumptions, invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore is to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. Edgar E. Schein, “Organizational Culture,” *American Psychologist*, vol. 45, no. 2 (1990): p. 111.

<sup>12</sup> Charles A. O’Reilly III, Jennifer Chatman and David F. Caldwell, “People And Organizational Culture: A Profile Comparison Approach to Assessing Person-Organization Fit,” *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 34, no. 3 (September 1991): p. 487–516.

<sup>13</sup> Catalyst, *Advancing African-American Women in the Workplace: What Managers Need to Know* (2004); Catalyst, *Advancing Asian Women in the Workplace: What Managers Need to Know* (2003).

<sup>14</sup> Catalyst, *Women “Take Care,” Men “Take Charge:” Stereotyping of U.S. Business Leaders Exposed* (2005).

<sup>15</sup> Catalyst, *The Double-Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership: Damned if You Do, Doomed if You Don’t* (2007).



## METHODOLOGY

In total, 19 focus groups were assembled at companies and firms across Canada that participated in the 2007 Catalyst survey. Focus group participants were female and male managers, professionals, and executives employed in Canadian business organizations who identified themselves as being part of the most predominant visible minority groupings according to the survey data—South Asian, East Asian, and black. A number of white/Caucasians also took part. The focus groups were conducted separately by ethnicity/race and by gender. Most of the data in this report were derived from these focus groups; however, additional analyses of data from the initial survey have been included when pertinent.

### STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

Like organizations in other countries, Canadian businesses appear to be suffering from “imperfect execution” of diversity and inclusion policies.<sup>16</sup> Visible minority managers, professionals, and executives appear to be at a disadvantage in terms of their career advancement:

- Some visible minorities said they experienced a lack of “fit” within their employing organizations because of their ethnic/racial and language background. Many respondents, particularly those of East Asian and South Asian heritage, said they felt a need to conform to a “Canadian” identity in order to succeed.
- Some visible minorities, especially East Asians and South Asians who perceived themselves as “Canadian first” (rather than primarily self-identifying as members of a visible minority group), reported that they fit well within Canadian business organizations.
- Some visible minorities reported experiencing negative stereotyping at work. For example:
  - Some East Asians felt they were seen as “hard-working but not sociable.”
  - Some South Asians reported being stereotyped as “outsiders” and treated as “foreigners,” even though many of them were born in Canada.
- Black respondents reported more negative stereotyping than East Asians and South Asians. For example, they felt they were sometimes perceived as lacking in skill or motivation to work. Unlike respondents of Asian background, black respondents did not mention acculturation as a strategy for fitting into their organizations.
- Black respondents felt isolated within their organizations, saying that a lack of role models made it difficult for them to advance. Some also felt they encountered double standards in whether they received opportunities for advancement (i.e., feeling they performed as well as white/Caucasians but did not advance as quickly).
- Some visible minorities reported not being fully accepted by the white/Caucasian majority in their organizations.
- Certain norms in Canadian business organizations regarding communication, specifically politeness and “political correctness,” may make it difficult for organizational members to address tensions arising in multicultural workplaces; this has the potential to impede career advancement for visible minorities.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Deepali Bagati, *Retaining People of Color: What Accounting Firms Need to Know* (Catalyst, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Political correctness includes the avoidance of sensitive topics or actions out of concern that those from socially disadvantaged groups might be offended. Robin J. Ely, Debra E. Meyerson and Martin N. Davidson, “Rethinking Political Correctness,” *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 84, no.9 (September 2006): p.79-87.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the major findings which emerged from our research, Catalyst makes the following recommendations, which we hope will be useful to Canadian business organizations and to the individuals employed there:

- **Create a truly inclusive organization.** This would address the need expressed by visible minorities to “fit in” without sacrificing their identities and gain support for inclusion initiatives among the white/Caucasian majority.
- **Recognize and deal with negative stereotyping in the workplace.** This would address the stereotyping perceived by visible minorities, which is particularly problematic among visible minority women and black employees.
- **Discuss organizational norms of political correctness and how they might inhibit true inclusiveness.** This would lead to better communication among employees from diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds and encourage merit-based advancement for all.
- **Visible minority employees should inform themselves as much as possible about diversity and inclusion as well as politics within their organizations.** Employees would develop greater astuteness in “reading” their organizations and then navigating them appropriately, even before these workplaces have achieved greater inclusivity.



## CHAPTER 2: MULTICULTURAL CANADA

Canada enjoys a reputation as a multicultural nation, where immigrants and non-white/Caucasian Canadians are encouraged to participate in the larger society without necessarily giving up aspects of their cultural identity such as language.<sup>18</sup> Over the past few decades, various federal governments have stated that multiculturalism is a cornerstone of Canada's national identity. For example:

*Canadian multiculturalism is fundamental to our belief that all citizens are equal. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging. Acceptance gives Canadians a feeling of security and self-confidence, making them more open to, and accepting of, diverse cultures. The Canadian experience has shown that multiculturalism encourages racial and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural understanding, and discourages ghettoization, hatred, discrimination and violence.<sup>19</sup>*

Recent surveys suggest that Canadians believe multiculturalism is an intrinsically Canadian value.<sup>20</sup> For example, in one survey, three-quarters of people agreed with the statement, "Other cultures have a lot to teach us (and)... contact with them is enriching us."<sup>21</sup>

Canada's historical roots and immigration patterns explain this reputation to some extent. Unlike many other developed countries, including the United States, Canada has had to manage several major aspects of diversity. These include the presence of indigenous peoples, the constant arrival of immigrants,<sup>22</sup> and the fact that Canada was founded by two distinct groups who spoke different languages (English and French).

Given our focus on the "fit" of visible minorities in their work environments, one question which is relevant to this report might be: How well have Canadian businesses done in creating inclusive workplaces that reflect the national ideals of multiculturalism?

### IMMIGRATION PATTERNS AND RECENT TRENDS

At the end of the 19th century and the start of the 20th century, Canada's immigration policy was primarily in place to help supply the country with much-needed workers. This labour pool was first intended for the purposes of settlement and agriculture and then, later on, for industrialization.<sup>23</sup> There are some suggestions that Canada initially expected immigrants to assimilate; however, this stance started changing in the 1950's and was formalized with the 1962 revision of Canada's Immigration Act.

This revision introduced a point system that allowed immigrants to enter the country based on criteria that were "race-neutral."<sup>24</sup> The current point system is based on six selection factors: level of education, language capabilities (English and/or French), work experience, age, any arranged employment in Canada, and adaptability and financial ability (i.e., whether the applicant is capable of supporting himself/herself and any dependents after arriving in Canada).<sup>25</sup> Because of this revision, more immigrants were—and currently are—available to fill the country's need for skilled workers.

<sup>18</sup> Canadian Heritage, "Canadian Diversity: Respecting our Differences" (January 4, 2004). [http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/multi/respect\\_e.cfm?nav=2](http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/multi/respect_e.cfm?nav=2)

<sup>19</sup> Canadian Heritage, "Canadian Multiculturalism: An Inclusive Citizenship" (May 23, 2007). [http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/multi/inclusive\\_e.cfm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/multi/inclusive_e.cfm)

<sup>20</sup> Michael Adams with Amy Langstaff, *Unlikely Utopia: The Surprising Triumph of Canadian Pluralism* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Adams with Langstaff, p. 38.

<sup>22</sup> Will Kymlicka, "Being Canadian," *Government & Opposition*, vol. 38, no. 3 (July 2003): p. 357-385.

<sup>23</sup> Canadian Heritage (2004).

<sup>24</sup> Kymlicka.

<sup>25</sup> Citizenship and Immigration Canada, "Immigrating to Canada: Skilled Workers and Professionals: Who Can Apply" (March 31, 2007). <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/skilled/apply-who.asp>

## THE IDEALS OF A MULTICULTURAL CANADA – AND THE CHALLENGES

Despite Canada's history as a nation of immigrants, many Canadians would prefer to see immigrants acculturate to their new home. The concept of "reasonable accommodation" refers to the practice of requiring governments, individuals, and corporations to adjust their standards, practices, and policies according to the particular needs of specific groups, including visible minorities.<sup>26</sup> Some recent findings suggest a growing tension within Canada concerning reasonable accommodation:

- In 2006, 65 percent of Canadians surveyed agreed with the statement that "Too many immigrants do not adopt Canadian values." This reflects an increase from the previous year, when 58 percent of those surveyed agreed with that statement.<sup>27</sup>
- According to a recent study by the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP), 53 percent of Canadians surveyed felt immigrants should fully adapt to the culture in Canada; 45 percent felt that there should be no accommodation in the workplace; and 4 percent felt there should be full accommodation.<sup>28</sup>
- The IRPP survey also found that 37 percent of Canadians felt that there should be no accommodation at all for religious and cultural minorities in public places such as schools, hospitals, and government buildings; only 6 percent said there should be full accommodation in such locations. By contrast, 18 percent felt it was reasonable to accommodate religious and cultural minorities.<sup>29</sup>

## HOW CAN CANADIAN BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS REFLECT MULTICULTURAL IDEALS?

The emphasis on multiculturalism within the larger Canadian society fits well with the desire among many Canadian business organizations to better leverage their talent in the competitive global marketplace.

The ideal of an "inclusive" organization (often aspired to by human resources professionals and business strategists) might be described as follows:

*"[T]he diversity of knowledge and perspectives that members of different groups bring to the organization has shaped its strategy, its work, its management and operating systems, and its core values and norms for success. Furthermore, in multicultural, inclusive organizations, members of all groups are treated fairly, feel included and actually are included, have equal opportunities, and are represented at all organizational levels and functions."<sup>30</sup>*

<sup>26</sup> Pierre Bosset, "Reflections on the Scope and Limits of the Duty of Reasonable Accommodation in the Field of Religion," Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, revised at 502nd meeting under resolution COM-502-5.1.5 (February 4, 2005): p. 1-14.

<sup>27</sup> Adams, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> L. Ian MacDonald, "SES-Policy Options Exclusive Poll: The Limits of Reasonable Accommodation: Poll Results" *Policy Options* (September 2007). <http://irpp.org/newsroom/index.htm>

<sup>29</sup> L. Ian MacDonald, "SES-Policy Options Exclusive Poll: The Limits of Reasonable Accommodation: Poll Results" *Policy Options* (September 2007). <http://irpp.org/newsroom/index.htm>

<sup>30</sup> Evangelina Holvino, Bernardo M. Ferdman and Deborah Merrill-Sands, "Creating and Sustaining Diversity and Inclusion in Organizations: Strategies and Approaches," in Margaret S. Stockdale and Faye J. Crosby, ed., *The Psychology and Management of Workplace Diversity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004): p. 249.



It is likely that few organizations, in Canada or elsewhere, have met this ideal of full inclusion. Indeed, as we have noted, many Canadians express mixed feelings about the acculturation of immigrants, especially in the workplace. So it is not surprising that many organizations are not leveraging the talent in their workplaces as well as they could. Many Canadian companies say that they overlook immigrants in their human resources planning; don't hire immigrants at the level at which they were trained; and have difficulty integrating recent immigrants into the workforce.<sup>31</sup>

In the next few chapters, we explore the perceptions about workplace "fit" and stereotyping among specific sub-groups of visible minority managers, professionals, and executives working in corporate Canada, and also among white/Caucasians in the same workplaces. We pay special attention to how such issues could affect the ability of visible minority employees to advance within Canadian business organizations.

<sup>31</sup> Public Policy Forum, "Bringing Employees into the Immigration Debate: Survey and Conference" (November 2004): p.i. [http://www.ppforum.ca/common/assets/publications/en/bringing\\_employers\\_into\\_the\\_immigration\\_debate.pdf](http://www.ppforum.ca/common/assets/publications/en/bringing_employers_into_the_immigration_debate.pdf)



### WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- Some East Asian and South Asian managers, professionals, and executives who took part in our focus groups—particularly those raised outside Canada—said they believed many of their white/ Caucasian colleagues expected them to “Canadianize.” They also perceived that only visible minorities who had acculturated to Canada were accepted and promoted.
- Some East Asians and South Asians reported facing challenges in “Canadianizing.” Some said it was difficult to “Canadianize” yet still hold on to their identities.
  - Even some of those who described themselves as being acculturated reported feeling a lack of acceptance.
- Some East Asian and South Asian respondents who said they had no identifiable accent and whose families had been in Canada for generations personally identified as Canadian rather than as members of their visible minority group.

People who join organizations must adhere to the norms of that organization in order to remain employed. An important aspect of employee socialization in business organizations is learning how to navigate an organization; in doing so, employees sometimes alter behaviour to conform with expectations.

Employees from traditionally underrepresented groups may have more difficulty conforming than those from more entrenched groups. For example, corporate culture within large companies may promote a reserved approach to interpersonal communication; such a reserved interpersonal style might not be familiar to employees from certain ethnic/racial heritages.<sup>32</sup>

How well did the visible minority managers, professionals, and executives across Canada who took part in the Catalyst focus groups feel they “fit” within their business organizations? What implications did any perceived lack of fit have on their potential for career advancement? In this chapter, we examine these issues from the perspective of East Asian and South Asian participants.

<sup>32</sup> Martin N. Davidson, “Know Thine Adversary: The Impact of Race on Styles of Dealing With Conflict,” *Sex Roles*, vol. 45, no. 5/6 (September 2001): p. 259-276.

## HOW EAST ASIAN AND SOUTH ASIAN PARTICIPANTS PERCEIVED THEMSELVES

Our focus groups revealed wide variations in how East Asians and South Asians viewed themselves within their employing organizations. Some—South Asians in particular—viewed themselves as being not all that different from white/Caucasian Canadians. Those South Asians and East Asians whose families had been in Canada for several generations, who spoke English as their primary language, and who had no identifiable accent were especially likely to view themselves primarily as “Canadian.”

### Some South Asians And East Asians Did Not See Themselves as “Different” From The Majority

While some East Asians and South Asians reported perceiving a distinct cultural identity for their ethnic/racial groups, others said they did not regard themselves as being any type of “visible minority” or as being different from white/Caucasian Canadians.

*In my personal experience...I've never even thought of it, being a VM [visible minority]. It didn't even occur to me, until I got your email, that I was one...I never thought of myself as a minority with [the organization].*

—South Asian woman

*I actually, personally, take great offence to being told that I'm a visible minority.*

—South Asian woman

*I don't feel like a visible minority... I'm not one to judge people on race and culture.*

—East Asian woman

Similarly, some East Asians and South Asians perceived that their visible minority status was irrelevant to how well they fit into the organizational culture. Their comments suggested that anyone with the requisite skills—regardless of his or her ethnic/racial background—would fit in.

*I don't think it's so much about being a visible minority or not, it's about...whether or not you fit in with the culture of [this organization], being a very people-oriented organization. Some leaders don't fit in well because they may be performance-driven but don't realize how...their drive impacts the people.*

—East Asian woman

In contrast, some East Asians and South Asians who took part in the focus groups, including the East Asian woman quoted below, felt that visible minority employees did not have an equal chance at being promoted to leadership positions—largely because current leaders were unfamiliar with their backgrounds and cultures.

*A leader who chooses those leaders will try to find...someone that can fit into their value system and their culture system. And it's really difficult to choose somebody who comes from something that they don't understand and they haven't taken time to understand.*

—East Asian woman



### The Role of Generational Status

Findings from the focus groups suggest that generational status—that is, whether visible minority employees were born in Canada or how old they were when their families immigrated to Canada—played a role in whether participants identified themselves as Canadian first.

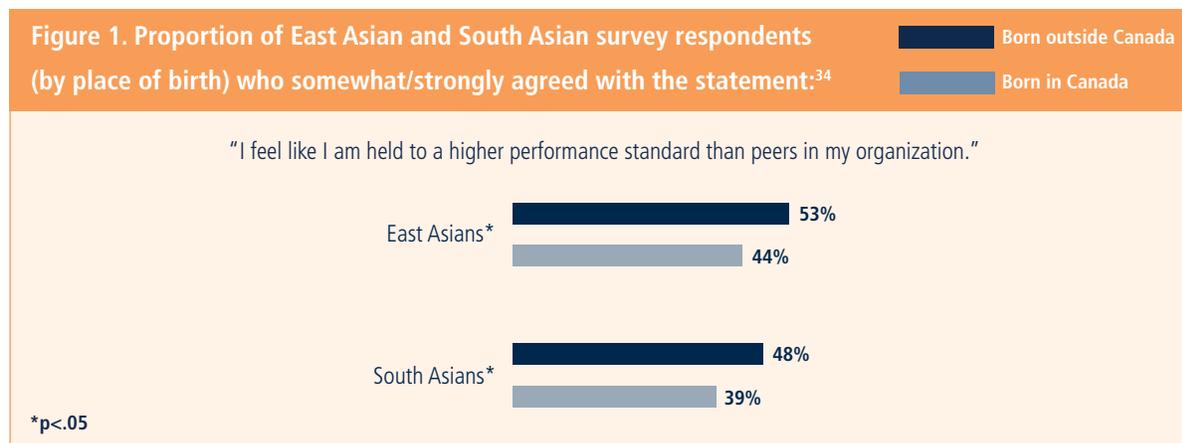
*I haven't experienced any [stereotypes]. I'm third-generation Canadian, so I have a Canadian accent. So I'm quite comfortable.*

—East Asian woman

*I think [visible minorities] are treated really differently depending on if you're born here or you've grown up through the system, and [your] accent...is similar to what everybody's used to.*

—South Asian man

Data from the Catalyst survey revealed that East Asians and South Asians born outside Canada were more likely to perceive disadvantages than those born in Canada. For example, South Asians and East Asians born outside Canada were more likely to feel they were held to higher performance standards in the workplace than those who were born in Canada.<sup>33</sup>



<sup>33</sup> See the Technical Appendix for details regarding data analyses for the Catalyst 2007 Visible Minority Survey and the focus groups.

<sup>34</sup> A z-test of proportion was employed to ascertain that the difference between East Asian and South Asian respondents who were and were not born in Canada is significant at p<.05.



## The Role of Accent

Not surprisingly, visible minorities who are recent immigrants often speak English or French with an accent. According to our focus groups, speaking with an accent was seen as a barrier to visible minorities' advancement, especially if their jobs required them to interact verbally with their colleagues and/or with the public.

*If your primary function is to spend 80 to 90 percent of your role on the telephone communicating, and if that is the one area where you have [an opportunity for development], then we are setting you up for failure.*

—White/Caucasian woman

Respondents to our survey were asked to choose what they felt were their three "top barriers" to advancement from a pre-set list. This list included organizational processes related to career advancement, relationships with others in the workplace, skill levels, and personal qualities.<sup>35</sup>

East Asian and South Asian survey participants who cited "having an accent" as one of their top three barriers were less likely to perceive that their colleagues treated them with respect than East and South Asians who did not choose accent as a top barrier.<sup>36</sup>



<sup>35</sup> See Technical Appendix for wording of survey questions regarding "top barriers" to advancement.

<sup>36</sup> Logistic regressions were performed to determine if the difference between visible minorities and white/Caucasians, or among visible minority groups, still held after taking into consideration the following: *human capital characteristics* including educational attainment, foreign educational credentials, and tenure with the organization; job characteristics including whether the respondent was a manager/professional or executive, whether the respondent was in a staff/line role or both, annual income, region of work, and industry; and *demographic characteristics* including age, marital status, whether the respondent identified as a person with disability, whether he or she identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT), and whether the respondent was born in Canada. The differences were statistically significant at p<.05 for the two South Asian groups (based on choice of top barrier), but not for East Asians, possibly due to small sample sizes.

<sup>37</sup> A z-test of proportion was employed to ascertain that the difference between East Asian and South Asian respondents who did and did not select accent as a top barrier is significant at p<.05. This did not hold for black respondents.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING CANADIAN CULTURE

Communication in a business context involves more than simply using proper syntax and grammar and not speaking with an accent strong enough to hinder expression and understanding. According to our focus groups, visible minority managers, professionals, and executives who felt they lacked familiarity with idiomatic Canadian expressions were often at a disadvantage in the workplace.

*If there isn't any bit of a language barrier at all...even with an East Indian who's very well spoken... there's still...cultural uses of phrases that don't always line up.*

—White/Caucasian man

In contrast, some East Asians and South Asians who felt they understood Canadian idioms and were familiar with Canadian culture were comfortable with how they fit within Canadian business organizations.

*I was born here and so I know the culture and I know how to get-up-and-go...It's the Canadian culture that I'm used to.*

—East Asian man

*It's safe to say that there's no racial discrimination...If you speak the same language, have the same interests, that's it, you're set.*

—South Asian man

In establishing rapport with colleagues within the organization, as well as with customers and clients outside the organization, it is important that managers, professionals, and executives are able to share a common discourse. This discourse may involve contextual knowledge of Canadian culture, as illustrated by a comment from one manager who took part in the focus groups:

*Our staff in Mumbai, some of them speak very good English...but you can't teach them how to be Canadian, so you can't teach them all the things that are happening in Canada that someone may want to converse [about] while you're servicing them. You can't teach people...all the little Canadianisms that we have.*

—White/Caucasian woman



## SOME EAST ASIANS AND SOUTH ASIANS “CANADIANIZE” THEMSELVES

Some foreign-born South Asians and East Asians who took part in our focus groups said they had made efforts to “Canadianize” themselves since coming to Canada. This was especially true among those who were raised in foreign countries. “Canadianization” can be understood as a type of acculturation.<sup>38</sup>

*In order to progress, I guess you have to make certain concessions. I came to Canada six years ago, so basically I have strong roots where I come from, and if you look at my [cubicle] I’m so Asian you’d think I’m an interior designer...I just like to feel at home, so I’m holding onto it, but I feel that for me to be able to communicate, to be accepted as well, I have to sort of Canadianize myself.*

—East Asian woman

*After four, five, six years...you tend to start Canadianizing yourself.*

—South Asian man

Some East Asian and South Asian focus group participants said the desire to Canadianize themselves stemmed from a specific observation. They perceived that visible minorities in their organizations who looked, behaved, dressed, and spoke like their white/Caucasian colleagues were more likely to be successful than those who did not make these efforts.

*Every female or...visible minority exec seems very Canadian. I think you have to be Canadian to get up to that level.*

—East Asian woman

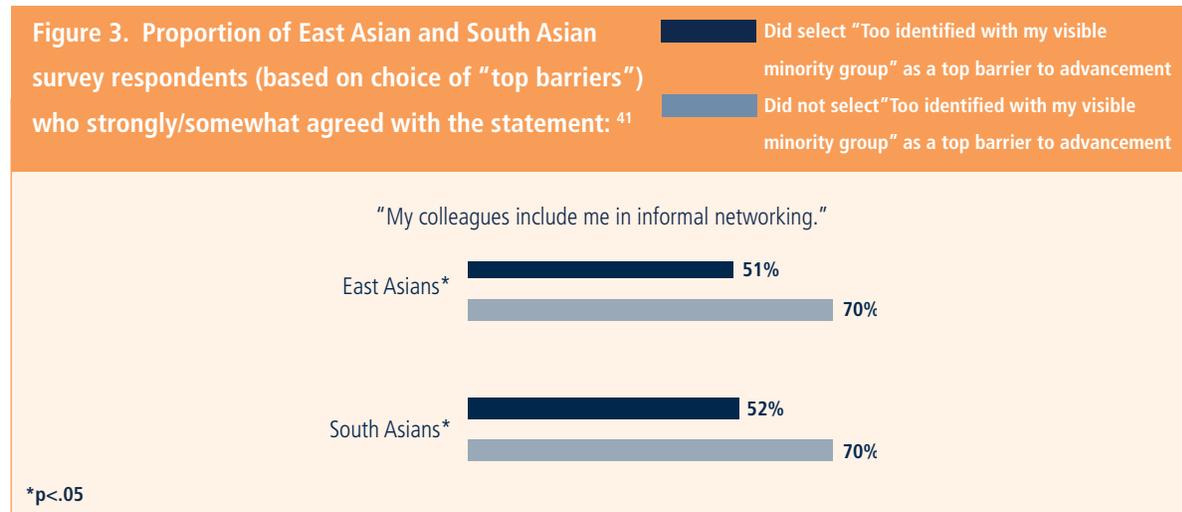
These findings are consistent with other Catalyst research on Asian women. Previous U.S. research looked at Asian women who fit a profile of being “highly acculturated” (i.e., they spoke English at home and had either been born in the United States or had immigrated there as young children). These women reported feeling more comfortable in the workplace in terms of their relationships with colleagues and their satisfaction with career advancement than Asian women who were less acculturated.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Asians (both female and male) who participated in our focus groups and who reported being more acculturated to Canadian society were more likely to report a better fit within their workplaces.

<sup>38</sup> “Acculturation” is defined as the adoption of the behaviour patterns of the surrounding culture. George A. Miller, “Acculturation,” *Word Net* (2006). <http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn>.

<sup>39</sup> Catalyst, *Advancing Asian Women in the Workplace: What Managers Need to Know* (2003).



Acculturation seems to play a role in successful networking, which is known to be a factor in career advancement. East Asian and South Asian survey respondents who chose “being too identified with my visible minority group” as a top barrier to advancement were less likely to report having access to networks of colleagues than respondents who did not cite this as a top barrier.<sup>40</sup>



### Some Drawbacks to “Canadianization”

Some South Asian and East Asian focus group participants reported finding the process of Canadianization difficult. More specifically, some said that the process had been or continued to be difficult for them—possibly because they were past a certain point in their development when they immigrated.

*When you get past a certain age...even if you come in your 20s, I think there [are] certain things which are inherent in your behaviour and how you were brought up. I don't think you can Canadianize yourself; you can get used to how Canadians do things, how they refer to things...the nuances and differences, but to be Canadianized is very hard...you'll never be...truly Canadianized.*

—South Asian man

<sup>40</sup> Logistic regressions demonstrated that the groups (based on choice of top barriers) were still significantly different at p<.05 after taking into account human capital, job, and demographic characteristics. See Technical Appendix for details on these characteristics.

<sup>41</sup> A z-test of proportion was employed to ascertain that the difference between East Asians and South Asians who did and did not select “too identified with my visible minority group” as a top barrier is significant at p<.05.



Other East Asians and South Asians perceived that Canadianization did not ensure success. As mentioned earlier in this report, acculturation may be easier and more successful for visible minorities who speak English or French and for those who are second- or third-generation Canadians.<sup>42</sup> However, some East Asian and South Asian focus group participants said they believed that even those who have been in the country for many generations will still encounter a lack of acceptance.

*It will be interesting to see how many years we and our offspring will be asked “Where are you from?”  
...You could be born here, but if you’ve got brown skin you’ll be asked forever and a day, “Where are you from?”*

—South Asian woman

*I do feel that I have to work a little extra harder, even though I was born here in Canada, just because I [am]...a visible minority [and] female...I feel that there’s this extra effort that I just have to put in to  
...try and be looked [at] on the same wavelength.*

—East Asian woman

### **Balancing Canadianization with Maintaining Cultural Roots**

Some East Asian and South Asian managers, professionals, and executives who took part in our focus groups said they found it challenging to maintain a degree of ethnic/racial identity while still acculturating themselves sufficiently so they could succeed in the context of Canadian business culture. For example, some East Asians and South Asians said they had chosen to become “Canadian” in public life, while retaining their cultures-of-origin at home. However, other research indicates that such an approach can be difficult to maintain.<sup>43</sup>

Some East Asian and South Asian participants said the challenge of fitting in was even more complex if others within their organizations did not make reciprocal efforts to accommodate visible minority colleagues.

*You embrace the Canadian culture as much as you can, but at the same time you don’t want to let go of your own values. But you’re trying to change yourself and you’re reaching out, trying to integrate... I think the same kind of effort is not coming from the other party, other class, I think they really want you to totally Canadianize yourself.*

—South Asian man

<sup>42</sup> Brooke S. Pigott and Madeline A. Kalbach, “Language Effects on Ethnic Identity in Canada,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2005): p. 3-18.

<sup>43</sup> Ella L.J. Edmundson Bell and Stella M. Nkomo, *Our Separate Ways: Black and White Women and the Struggle for Professional Identity* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press; 2001): p. 230–233.



### WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- Some black managers, professionals, and executives who took part in our focus groups reported persistent double standards and underrepresentation in the workplace that seemed to undermine their own efforts to “fit” into their organizations. Some viewed the lack of role models (i.e., other successful black employees) as a signal that their career advancement opportunities were limited.
- Unlike East Asians and South Asians, black employees did not mention “Canadianization” or efforts to acculturate. They were more likely to see themselves as ethnic/racial minorities than were East Asian and South Asian participants.
- Black participants were also more likely than East Asians and South Asians to report encountering difficulties in advancing that they perceived were related to their race. More specifically, they were more likely than East Asians and South Asians to select “being too identified with my visible minority group” as a top barrier to advancement.

### HOW BLACK PARTICIPANTS PERCEIVED THEMSELVES

Most black Canadians in our focus groups viewed themselves as members of an ethnic/racial minority. This was in contrast to South Asians and East Asians who were more likely to perceive themselves as being similar to those in the majority group (i.e., white/Caucasians).

*Actually, I think I was the only black person in the organization when I first started...I never really felt like anybody looked at me because I am black. And I didn't feel black. But I knew I was.*

—Black woman

Some black participants described themselves as being very aware of their history and having to strive harder than non-blacks in order to achieve.

*I think I've always worked a little bit harder...Because I walked in with that thing on my back, because of my parents and where I came from. [You have to] work harder, be the best, stay a little bit later, don't leave at five, leave at 5:45...Black women, sometimes we put so much on our backs and no manager's ever told me that I had to do that. That's just maybe some kind of crutch I'm carrying for whatever reason, culturally.*

—Black woman

### Black Individuals Less Likely to Mention Acculturation than East Asians or South Asians

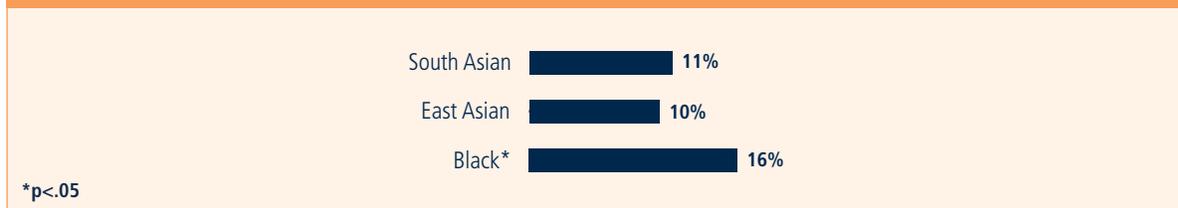
Unlike East Asian and South Asian participants, people who took part in the black focus groups tended not to discuss efforts to acculturate. Indeed, not a single person in these groups ever used the term “Canadianize.” In fact, many of the comments involved how important it was for black people to hold on to their culture rather than make efforts towards acculturation within Canada.

*So, you need to keep that culture and identity without trying to blend in and be somebody else.*  
—Black man

Fewer black survey respondents (58 percent) were born outside Canada than South Asian respondents (69 percent) or East Asians (67 percent). The proportion of foreign-born participants in the focus groups was similar. Perhaps a greater familiarity with Canada allowed Canadian-born black employees to feel that acculturation was not necessary. However, few black focus group participants, including those born in Canada and those born outside the country, reported feeling very similar to other Canadians.

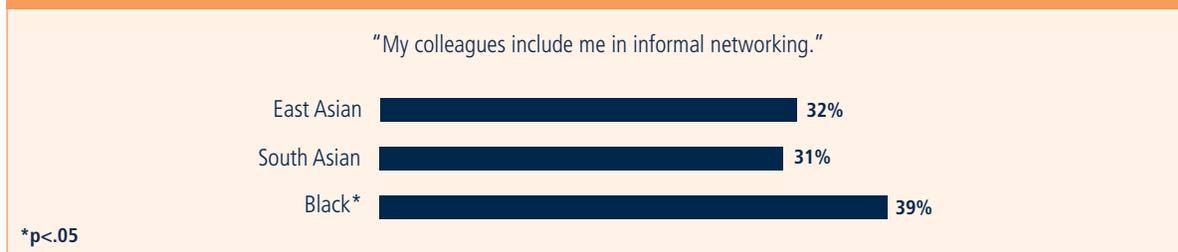
Black survey respondents were significantly more likely than East Asians and South Asians to feel that being too identified with their visible minority group was a top barrier to their career advancement.

Figure 4. Proportion of East Asian, South Asian, and black survey respondents who chose being “Too identified with my visible minority group” as a top barrier to advancement <sup>44</sup>



Black employees were also more likely than East Asians and South Asians to believe that colleagues did not include them in networking.

Figure 5. Proportion of East Asian, South Asian, and black survey respondents who somewhat/strongly disagreed with or had neutral feelings about the statement:<sup>45</sup>

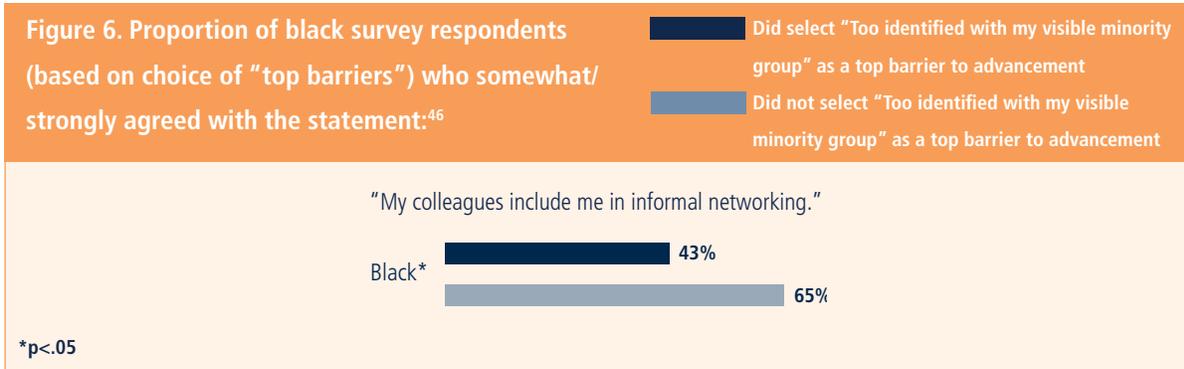


<sup>44</sup> A z-test of proportion was employed to ascertain that black respondents were significantly more likely than East Asians and South Asians to select this barrier at  $p < .05$ .

<sup>45</sup> A z-test of proportion was employed to ascertain that black respondents were significantly more likely to be neutral or to disagree with this statement than East Asians and South Asians at  $p < .05$ .



Black respondents who selected being “too identified” with their visible minority group as a top barrier to advancement were less likely to feel included in networks than black respondents who did not choose this as a top barrier.



### Understanding the Importance of Fitting In

Some black focus group participants said that fitting into their workplaces had yielded benefits in terms of their ability to access networks within their organizations.

*It wasn't until a couple of years into the business that I started to understand the advantages of networking and things like that and how important it is to try to fit in...To try to fit in with your team and to build...support nets around you.*

—Black woman

However, an “overall” good fit within one’s organization did not guarantee access to networks on all levels.

*I don't have a problem with how I feel fitting into the culture....probably because my manager where I work right now [is part of] a younger generation. I find the problem with some of the professionals... that are late 40s, late 50s, white men...I mean, networking was important and you need to network, to network...but sometimes you get to the point where you just can't mesh.*

—Black woman

### Perceived Double Standards an Issue for Black Participants

Comments about persistent double standards concerning performance and advancement were heard more frequently in the black focus groups than in the East Asian and South Asian groups.

*[Your] different experience...helps to make you stronger...You have to work harder because [you're] black...You get frustrated, because...you have to work twice as hard...You have to do all this other stuff, but the other people don't have to do it.*

—Black man

<sup>46</sup> A z-test of proportion was employed to ascertain that the difference between black respondents who did and did not select “too identified with my visible minority group” as a top barrier is significant at p<.05.



*It's not good enough to be just as good as the other person. Because the white boy's going to get promoted before you do, or the white girl's going to get promoted before you do. So I find still to this day, I think that's frustrating, but I think I've come to terms with it so it's just the way it is. It's the way the game is played.*

—Black woman

These findings are supported by a 2003 Statistics Canada study that found that 32 percent of black Canadians reported being discriminated against at work or receiving unfair treatment, compared to 21 percent of those with South Asian roots and 18 percent of those of who identified their background as Chinese.<sup>47</sup>

### **Very Low Representation in the Workplace an Issue for Black Participants**

Black focus group participants were often keenly aware that their organizations employed very few people from their ethnic/racial groups.

*There [aren't] enough professional black women and black men [in] high-banded jobs where you are offered the ability to move ahead...When I look to my left and I look to the right and I want to talk to a fellow sister or a fellow brother or get their analysis on something, there isn't one, and that's the reality of the [company] fabric and the culture.*

—Black woman

Black focus group participants who worked in geographic areas where the local talent pool was not racially or ethnically diverse reported a particular lack of role models.

*If you attend a corporate meeting in Ontario, around the table you will see so many visible minorities right up the ladder who come in as leaders. But [that's] very, very, very rare [here].*

—Black man

Some black participants also stated that diversity and inclusion programs at their organizations had not been effective in increasing representation among black employees, especially in management positions.

*My only issue is, as large as we are, and despite the fact that we do focus on diversity every chance we get through galas, through emails, through committees, it is rare that I see in Canada black women in management roles.*

—Black woman

<sup>47</sup> Statistics Canada, "Ethnic Diversity Survey: Portrait of a Multicultural Society" (2003): p. 18. <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-593-XIE/89-593-XIE2003001.pdf>.



### WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- East Asian, South Asian, and black individuals were more likely than white/Caucasians to report that their colleagues expected them to represent the point of view of their ethnic/racial groups.
- Consistent with this survey finding, our focus group participants reported encountering ethnic/racial stereotypes (e.g., “lazy,” “quiet,” “foreign,” or “not sociable”) in the workplace. Black respondents, in particular, reported being stereotyped as lacking in basic skills. According to participants, these generalizations were not only inaccurate, but served to undermine their credibility in the workplace.
- Visible minority women reported unique and compounded challenges associated with being women from a particular visible minority group.
- Many visible minority participants talked about the challenge of working with colleagues who tended to express negative ethnic/racial stereotypes. They said they had to work harder to prove themselves, and expressed frustration around the impact of such stereotyping on their chances for career advancement.

Social stereotypes are generalizations that individuals make to differentiate categories or groups of people; such stereotypes may play a role in how we anticipate and respond to others.<sup>48</sup> Stereotypes of traditionally underrepresented groups may be negative, can undermine credibility, and can keep underrepresented groups from “fitting the image” of an organizational leader. As such, stereotyping—especially negative stereotyping—can be a major barrier to advancement for these groups as a whole and for individuals within them. In previous Catalyst research, nearly one-half (46 percent) of executive women who were surveyed cited gender-based stereotypes as a barrier to their advancement.<sup>49</sup>

While some participants in the visible minority focus groups did not perceive stereotyping as a problem, others did, and we present their perspectives in this chapter.

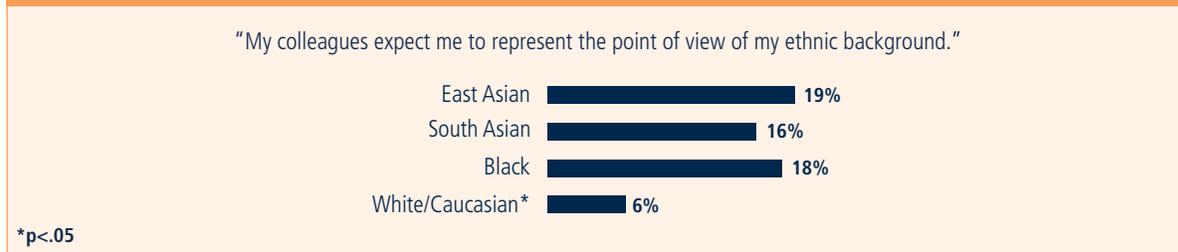
<sup>48</sup> Catalyst, *Women “Take Care,” Men “Take Charge:” Stereotyping of U.S. Business Leaders Exposed* (2005).

<sup>49</sup> Catalyst, *Women and Men in U.S. Corporate Leadership: Same Workplace, Different Realities?* (2004).

## STEREOTYPES OF VISIBLE MINORITIES

The visible minority managers, professionals, and executives we surveyed were more likely than white/Caucasians to feel that, as individuals, they were “expected to represent the point of view” of their ethnic/racial group. While some organizations see it as good business to utilize employees’ diverse cultural knowledge (i.e., regarding new markets and opportunities), if this is not handled carefully, such expectations may cause visible minority employees to feel that they are being stereotyped.

**Figure 7. Proportion of survey respondents, by ethnic/racial group, who somewhat/strongly agreed<sup>50</sup> with the statement:<sup>51</sup>**



Focus group participants of East Asian origin reported being stereotyped as passive, quiet, and hard-working, but not particularly sociable.

*Being Chinese, you’re [seen as] very good with numbers and things like that. Very hard-working, put in more hours. But...we’re not [seen] as open or as sociable...more of an uptight type of a group.*  
—East Asian woman

Both East Asian and South Asian participants reported being stereotyped as having accent or language difficulties, even when they themselves did not perceive this to be the case.

*You know how funny it is when people actually meet me for the first time and they say to me, “You don’t sound Asian.”*  
—East Asian woman

South Asian participants also spoke about being stereotyped as “outsiders”; even though many were born in Canada, they reported being treated as “foreigners” in the workplace.

*Even if you had a [certain credential] from India...doesn’t matter whether you’re considered a professional there. When you come here, it’s not valued whether it would be the same or not, people don’t value it the same...And even if you go to the Canadian system...people are like “nah”...They put you in a different bucket. In their mind, whatever it is they just treat you differently. And I’ve seen it and I’ve confronted...a bunch of people about it, and... I think that behind closed doors people admit it.*  
—South Asian man

<sup>50</sup> Logistic regressions demonstrated that all visible minority groups were significantly different from white/Caucasians at p<.05 after taking into account human capital, job, and demographic characteristics.

<sup>51</sup> A z-test of proportion was employed to ascertain that all visible minorities were significantly more likely to agree with this statement than white/Caucasians at p<.05.



Black participants reported encountering credibility-based stereotypes—that they were not hard-working by nature and that they lacked vital skills.

*If you ask me to do something, “Can you do this for me in maybe an hour?” If I do it in two hours, then it’s like, “Oh, black people are lazy, and this confirms what we thought.”*

—Black man

In focus groups that took place in areas with very low visible minority representation, black participants reported that white/Caucasians—in both the workplace and the surrounding locality—demonstrated more prejudice than those in more diverse areas.

*One thing about [this city]...they’re very quick to point out any differences...and one thing I find for the visible minorities is that will be one of the first things that they will pick on...they’re always pointing out differences and looking for differences. And even in jokes, and I don’t know if it’s because I’m biracial and light skinned that they feel that they can make black jokes easier with me...*

—Black man

## STEREOTYPES OF VISIBLE MINORITY WOMEN

Stereotypes about ethnicity/race may combine with gender stereotypes to present even greater challenges for visible minority women in business settings (as compared to those faced by visible minority men or by white/Caucasian women).<sup>52</sup> This is a reflection of the “double-outsider” status of women who are from ethnic/racial minorities—they are different from white/Caucasian men, typically the most powerful demographic in North American business organizations, on account of both their ethnicity/race and their gender.

Visible minority women who took part in our focus groups reported being stereotyped differently than their male counterparts. For example, East Asian women were more likely than East Asian men to feel stereotyped as “passive and quiet.” A few South Asian women reported receiving stereotypic treatment from their male South Asian counterparts.

*To me that was one of my worst experiences, where Indian males [were] stereotyping me as an Indian woman and telling me where my place is.*

—South Asian woman

Black women who took part in the focus groups discussed credibility-based stereotypes more often than black men. Some black women specifically mentioned being both black and female; black men tended not to mention their gender.

*I’m a black female, and no matter what, people will never view me or see me as I truly am. They will always perceive something first, and then they will say, “Oh, you’re not like that.” And many times they come back once they get to know you, and [say], “I didn’t realize you were such a strong worker.”*

—Black woman

<sup>52</sup> Katherine Giscombe, *Women of Color in Accounting* (Catalyst, 2008).



*Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ Critical Relationships* found that visible minority women had more difficulty than visible minority men in gaining access to informal networks and acquiring powerful mentors. It found that networking often occurred in “gendered spaces” within workplaces. In many organizations, networking events focused around stereotypically masculine activities such as going to a bar after work or watching or playing sports.<sup>53</sup> The difficulties that visible minority women have in gaining such access to networks could be compounded by negative stereotyping directed against them.

## COUNTERING NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes can lead people to make inappropriate generalizations. Because most of us are probably unaware of how our thinking and behaviour are automatically influenced by stereotypes, we conclude that our perceptions about an individual or group are based on objective observations.<sup>54</sup> Focus group participants talked about the challenge of working with colleagues who tended to express negative stereotypes.

*I struggle with my...manager...He was so engrossed in his perception, his image, of me, that I don't think he really was listening to what I was saying.*

—East Asian woman

A number of discussions in the focus groups revolved around the need to counter negative stereotypes.

*The biggest thing that we as East Asian women have to do is learn how to break the deceptions of what East Asian women are, or [how they] should behave...People have this misconception that we are more passive, we're more quiet, we're more likely to say, "Sorry, thank you"...It's finding a way to break through that and demonstrate that we are leaders as well, and try to find ways to increase visibility in the upper management.*

—East Asian woman

Visible minority participants said they have to work harder to prove themselves than white/Caucasians. This is consistent with the Catalyst survey finding that 47 percent of visible minorities said they felt held to higher performance standards than their peers, compared to 34 percent of the white/Caucasian survey respondents who felt the same way.

*They are...saying, "I know this person is capable...but because so-and-so is a minority, how will the others perceive them?" And hence they are not willing to take the step. Whereas if it is a man, white male, then they have no problem in helping that person, even though [he doesn't] have half the skills of this minority person.*

—South Asian woman

<sup>53</sup> Christine Silva, Monica Dyer, and Lilly Whitham, *Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ Critical Relationships* (Catalyst, 2007).

<sup>54</sup> Catalyst, *Women "Take Care," Men "Take Charge:" Stereotyping of U.S. Business Leaders Exposed* (2005).



## **ASK YOURSELF: “Do I Stereotype Others?”**

If you are white/Caucasian, ask yourself whether you have ever made or continue to make assumptions about colleagues that are based on negative stereotypes.

If you are from a visible minority group, ask yourself whether you have ever stereotyped a white/Caucasian colleague or colleagues belonging to a visible minority group different from your own.

**Do your expectations for the performance of visible minority colleagues vary from your expectations for other colleagues?**

**Do you assume competence when a colleague has cultural knowledge, speech, and behavioural style similar to your own?**

**How aware are you of the status and privilege that comes with your own particular background?**

**Do you consider successful visible minority colleagues as “exceptions”?**

If you are male (either white/Caucasian or visible minority), ask yourself whether you have ever stereotyped a female colleague.

*See chapter 7 for suggestions on countering negative stereotyping.*



### WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- Our focus groups found that white/Caucasians were more optimistic than their visible minority colleagues about progress toward inclusion in their own organizations. Such a perception gap might make it difficult for organizations with specific diversity and inclusion strategies to be more aggressive in addressing concerns over career advancement for visible minorities.
- Some white/Caucasians expressed a certain amount of resentment toward company efforts made on behalf of visible minorities, possibly indicating some backlash within the organization. Some of these employees expressed fears that by supporting career advancement for visible minority employees, they might end up being overlooked or losing their own status in the workplace.
- Norms concerning “political correctness” and politeness in organizations may be barriers to the full inclusion of diverse groups and may play a role in hindering career advancement of visible minorities.
  - For example, political correctness might cause a manager to hesitate in giving full performance review feedback to a visible minority employee for fear that any negative comments might be perceived as coming from ethnic/racial bias. Such inhibition and/or lack of honesty could negatively affect visible minorities’ ability to improve their skills, which in turn could limit their advancement prospects.
  - Some visible minority employees said they felt that such political correctness in the workplace reflected only surface-level adherence to stated ideals of inclusion and diversity, rather than a deep commitment.

Gaps in perception often exist between those in traditionally dominant groups and those in traditionally marginalized groups. For example, 72 percent of executive women surveyed for a previous Catalyst study cited gender-based stereotypes as a barrier to women’s advancement; however, 44 percent of men mentioned this as a reason why women might be less likely to advance in their careers.<sup>55</sup>

It is possible that those in traditionally dominant groups may feel uncomfortable admitting that they are in a privileged position. To do so would mean recognizing that one’s organization or setting is not meritocratic (i.e., people succeed based on factors other than merit).<sup>56</sup> In this chapter we examine the perceptions of white/Caucasian managers, professionals, and executives regarding visible minorities in Canadian business organizations.

<sup>55</sup> Catalyst, *Women and Men in Corporate Leadership: Same Workplace, Different Realities?* (2004).

<sup>56</sup> Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women’s Studies,” *Wellesley Centers for Women’s Publications* (1988).

## PERCEPTION GAPS BETWEEN WHITE/CAUCASIANS AND VISIBLE MINORITIES

White/Caucasian focus group participants were generally more optimistic than visible minority participants about organizational inclusiveness. Some white/Caucasians reported that such inclusiveness would “just happen,” given the diverse demographics of Canada’s labour pool.

*We have enough...multicultures within Canada...If you just let [diversity in the organization] happen naturally, I think it just will be there.*

—White/Caucasian woman

There was a range of responses from white/Caucasians about the extent to which they believed they accommodated visible minorities in their organizations. Some said they were accommodating, while others said they felt “business-related limitations” prevented them from being more obliging about things such as holidays:

*We have a lot of people from different backgrounds, and I think we do adapt a lot. I do. I know a couple of people that have come from overseas...The working environment there, you follow their calendar.*

—White/Caucasian man

*I think if you attempt to try to accommodate everyone...you’ll crash. [There are] too many different denominations, sects, that you just couldn’t accommodate everyone.*

—White/Caucasian man

Managers who are responsible for hiring do not always have the resources they need to understand the equivalencies of foreign education and/or credentials. While accreditation services that can advise businesses on this issue exist, they may not be consulted on a routine basis. According to our focus groups, some companies and hiring managers may be unaware that such services exist.

*The validation of it is very difficult for us...We have a process whereby [with] new hires to our organization, there is a security, there is a follow-up. And I’ve found that external accreditations, they never get validated.*

—White/Caucasian man



According to our survey, white/Caucasian managers, professionals, and executives were more likely to believe that senior management in their organizations demonstrated a commitment to cultural diversity (60 percent) than visible minorities were (48 percent). Some visible minorities also perceived that cultural inclusion of visible minority individuals had created a backlash among some white/Caucasians.

*With new immigrants and all of those kind of things, I have come across a few people—and these are the white Canadians—who are feeling very strongly that the pendulum swung to the other side now and that they have become the minorities...There is so much emphasis and so much focus and so much investment in promoting the minorities...When you look around, [the white Canadians] are now the minorities, and they're feeling left out.*

—South Asian woman

## CULTURAL “FIT,” DISCOMFORT, AND DISTRUST

Some white/Caucasian focus group participants suggested that they experienced discomfort with, and even distrust of, their colleagues’ intentions and capabilities when certain characteristics exhibited by these colleagues—such as language, dress, or behaviour—did not “fit” with their own culture.

For example, several white/Caucasian focus group participants expressed mistrust or frustration when colleagues spoke languages other than English in the workplace.

*They speak their own language. When you walk by, you don't know if they're calling you a bad name or anything.*

—White/Caucasian man

*You can exclude people by speaking [a] language [that they do not understand], or turning your back on them.*

—White/Caucasian man

*I have three team members on my team that consistently talk their language. But I can't do [anything] about it, right?*

—White/Caucasian man

Some white/Caucasian focus group participants who made judgments about their visible minority colleagues tended to make negative evaluations based on cultural differences. For example, one man felt his colleague did not “look the part” of someone with a Masters’ degree in Business Administration (MBA):

*I think if I walk in and say hey, I have my MBA from York [University in Toronto], you're right away sizing me up, going, “Okay, he said he has an MBA. Is he articulate? Is he knowledgeable? If I ask him questions does he respond?”...In the couple of instances I've seen that, I'm measuring the person how they're sitting, how they're dressed, how they're talking to me, and I'm not getting the [feeling], “Yeah, that lines up.”*

—White/Caucasian man



## SOME VISIBLE MINORITY EMPLOYEES CAN MAKE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS

Some visible minority managers, professionals, and executives who took part in our focus groups said they felt they possessed certain unique strengths in business settings—for example, fluency in another language and cultural knowledge of certain markets—which were not recognized by their white/Caucasian counterparts.

*Many of our customers are now people in VP and Director roles and CIO roles that are from South Asia, are female, and so suddenly I actually have an advantage over the technical white male stereotype because I can relate to them at a very direct level.*

—South Asian woman

*I think when you can connect with staff culturally, in their own language, they'll open up a lot more. When I think of some of my staff...it's just the usual relationship that you have...but if you open up the cultural door and you're able to connect on that level, it goes instantly deeper.*

—East Asian man

## POLITENESS AND POLITICAL CORRECTNESS AS BARRIERS TO INCLUSION

Some focus group participants—both visible minorities and white/Caucasians—reported a level of “politeness” within their workplaces that suggested to them that frank discussion about sensitive topics was not the norm in Canadian business organizations. (“Politeness” in this context refers to the practice of formalized and indirect communication styles. Such behaviour can make it easier to avoid sensitive issues, but this also makes it more difficult for meaningful dialogues about ethnicity/race to occur.)

*I find the Caucasian managers, even if there's an issue with your work...they kind of dress it up or fluff it up so much [that] some of them miss the message that there's something wrong. So, they don't hurt your feelings but it doesn't get the point [across].*

—South Asian woman

Some white/Caucasian participants felt this politeness indicated a surface adherence to Canadian multiculturalism along with an unwillingness to address sensitive issues. They suggested this might explain a strong negative reaction to change (“backlash”) among some white/Caucasians caused by feeling that their own cultural norms were being challenged.

*From a white standpoint, you kind of give up your culture a little bit. I know we now refer to it as a holiday party, not a Christmas party...and some stuff like that you feel you're giving up a little bit, and it seems a little unfair, like Halloween, do we call it orange and black or do we not even participate? Well, no. I want to celebrate everybody's culture. I don't want to squash everybody's culture but...sometimes I feel like we're over-polite when it comes to that.*

—White/Caucasian woman



Comments about such surface politeness in the workplace suggest that people and organizations lack the basic language needed to discuss sensitive topics, including issues of ethnicity/race and gender.

*We're so polite that we know that we can't say things like that because we're going to offend somebody.*

—White/Caucasian woman

Several focus group participants also mentioned “political correctness” as a factor in relationships between white/Caucasians and visible minorities in the workplace. (Political correctness in this context might be viewed as an extension of politeness. As the term was used by focus group participants, it also includes an unwillingness to dig below the surface when dealing with topics of race, ethnicity, and inclusion.)

In a workplace governed by political correctness, unspoken standards of politeness guide behaviour in social interaction—particularly among people of different races, genders, religions, and other “charged” social identity groups.<sup>57</sup>

Some visible minority participants said they believed their colleagues offered only minimal acceptance of cultural differences, which reflected a deeper lack of commitment to those ideals.

*I feel my boss, to some extent, does the politically correct thing. He does the coaching thing. But if you just dig deeper you know he's not really all there, in terms of he doesn't really believe in diversity... He's got certain opinions of what women become after they have babies...I've heard about that from other people, so I just know that if I ever become pregnant, I'm going to quit that job and move out, because he would not support me.*

—South Asian woman

Political correctness could be linked to the multicultural norms espoused by Canadian society. The coexistence of political correctness and multiculturalism echoes the paradoxical results from a previous Catalyst report on workplace stereotyping in some European countries. Ironically, people living in nations such as Sweden and Norway, which have a high degree of legal and social gender egalitarianism, actually reported higher—not lower—rates of gender stereotyping in the workplace. One explanation for this could be that in countries where gender equality is valued, more individuals are likely to be motivated, due to cultural pressures, to appear unbiased and not guilty of negative stereotyping, and will therefore actively suppress stereotypical thinking.<sup>58</sup> Some psychological research suggests that trying to suppress privately held stereotypes can actually increase people's stereotypic thinking.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Robin J. Ely, Debra E. Meyerson and Martin N. Davidson, “Rethinking Political Correctness,” *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 84, no. 9 (September 2006): p. 79–87.

<sup>58</sup> Catalyst, *Different Cultures, Similar Perceptions: Stereotyping of Western European Business Leaders* (2006).

<sup>59</sup> Margo J. Monteith, Jeffrey W. Sherman and Patricia G. Devine, “Suppression as a Stereotype Control Strategy,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1998): p. 63-82.



The following exchange, which occurred in a focus group of white/Caucasian women, directly links the concept of multiculturalism as a Canadian value with the need to be politically correct:

*I think that's overall our Canadian culture...We're all...raised with this multicultural society and you take everybody and everybody's one big happy family.*

*It is something that we're being brought up with, and we have to teach our kids. I don't know that as many people are as accepting of it...It's just as [she] said, we're so polite that we know that we can't say things like that because we're going to offend somebody.*

—White/Caucasian women



## CHAPTER 7: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ Survey Findings* found that satisfaction regarding career advancement was lower among visible minority managers, professionals, and executives in Canadian business organizations than it was among their white/Caucasian colleagues. We wondered why this was the case, and whether we could “dig deeper” to learn more.

For this report, we looked at data from our survey and supplemented it with findings from a series of focus groups. We explored crucial aspects of the workplace experience that might affect satisfaction with career advancement—specifically, how well visible minorities felt they fit into the work environment, and whether and how they experienced stereotyping.

Despite the emphasis placed on multiculturalism in the broader Canadian society and a corresponding interest among Canadian business organizations to create inclusive workplaces, we conclude that the inclusion of visible minorities has thus far been “imperfectly executed.”<sup>60</sup> This is not surprising; it may take many years for business organizations to fully put multicultural ideals into practice within work environments. Indeed, research on diversity has shown that systemic change is typically a lengthy process.<sup>61</sup>

The survey found that those belonging to the current majority or dominant group (white/Caucasian men) were most likely to believe that inclusion and diversity goals were being met. But what does the evidence suggest? If inclusion has already been largely achieved in Canadian business settings, then our study would have found the following:

- East Asian and South Asian visible minorities would not report feeling the need to conform to a “Canadian” identity in order to succeed at work; nor would they feel a need to make major adjustments in order to “fit in.”
- Visible minorities would feel more comfortable acknowledging their customs in the workplace, instead of staying culturally “closeted.”
- Black employees would not report feelings of isolation and the lack of role models within their organizations.
- Visible minorities, particularly visible minority women and black employees, would not report experiencing negative stereotyping.
- Visible minorities would feel accepted by the white/Caucasian majority in their organizations.
- Open communication on issues relevant to career advancement—including sensitive areas related to ethnicity/race and gender—would take place, free from any organizational norms of “political correctness” or politeness.

<sup>60</sup> Deepali Bagati, *Retaining People of Color: What Accounting Firms Need to Know* (Catalyst, 2007).

<sup>61</sup> Parshotam Dass and Barbara Parker, “Strategies for Managing Human Resource Diversity: From Resistance to Learning,” *Academy of Management Executive*, vol. 13, no. 2 (May 1999): p. 68–80.

Some visible minority managers, professionals, and executives who participated in our focus groups—particularly South Asians and East Asians who had been in Canada for generations and reported not speaking with an accent—said they felt comfortable in Canadian business settings. But other South Asians and East Asians, particularly those born and raised outside Canada, said that they felt the need to acculturate (“Canadianize”) themselves. Canadianization, as described by focus group participants, referred to a lessening of attachments with one’s ethnic/racial group, combined with picking up the mannerisms, idiomatic expressions and other features of the so-called Canadian “mainstream.”

However, the success of this approach seems to be limited. Some East Asians and South Asians who mentioned Canadianization said they felt pressure to balance maintaining their own culture with the need to fit in at work. Others said they did not believe that acculturation would ensure their success on the job.

Black managers, professionals, and executives who took part in our focus groups were keenly aware of their relative isolation. The fact that they had few, if any, black colleagues at their own hierarchical level within their organizations was cited as a disadvantage in and of itself. Participants said this situation signalled a lack of support for their career advancement.

Some black participants also reported encountering persistent double standards and extreme underrepresentation in the workplace that served to undermine ease of fit within their organizations. They were also more likely than other visible minorities to mention being the focus of negative stereotypes concerning skill and motivation. Unlike South Asians and East Asians, black employees did not mention attempting to Canadianize or acculturate. This might imply a perception that the degree of racism and negative stereotyping they experienced would not yield to any efforts on their part to acculturate (more specifically, it would not lead white/Caucasians to view them as successfully acculturated).

Based on our findings, it appears that white/Caucasian managers, professionals, and executives in Canadian business organizations do not always fully accept visible minorities at work. White/Caucasians may not easily perceive visible minorities as fitting the “image” of organizational leaders.

It is possible that existing norms of politeness and political correctness in the business setting might make it difficult to address tensions that exist in multicultural workplaces; this reticence about “getting real” could serve to hinder career advancement for visible minorities. For example, if full discussions about career advancement cannot be held because a manager feels inhibited about introducing sensitive topics concerning a visible minority employee, that person’s career prospects could be compromised. Similarly, if a visible minority employee is reluctant to raise issues of possible discrimination because she is afraid she will be stigmatized, her opportunities for career advancement may also be in jeopardy.



To address the major findings which emerged from our research, Catalyst makes the following recommendations, which we hope will be useful to Canadian business organizations and to the individuals employed there:

- **Create a truly inclusive organization.** This would address the need expressed by visible minorities to “fit in” without sacrificing their identities and gain support for inclusion initiatives among the white/Caucasian majority.
- **Recognize and deal with negative stereotyping in the workplace.** This would address the stereotyping perceived by visible minorities, which is particularly problematic among visible minority women and black employees.
- **Discuss organizational norms of political correctness and how they might inhibit true inclusiveness.** This would lead to better communication among employees from diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds and encourage merit-based advancement for all.
- **Visible minority employees should inform themselves as much as possible about diversity and inclusion as well as politics within their organizations.** Employees would develop greater astuteness in “reading” their organizations and then navigating them appropriately, even before these workplaces have achieved greater inclusivity.

## HOW TO CREATE A MORE INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATION

Most recommendations in this chapter are targeted toward organizational leaders, since they have the power to create more inclusive business environments. Some suggestions about how visible minority managers, professionals, and executives themselves can help increase organizational inclusiveness are offered later in the chapter.

As we have already stated, an inclusive organization is characterized by a diversity of knowledge and perspectives that comes directly from the people who comprise that organization. This diversity affects and can be recognized in many aspects of an organization, including its management, strategy, and operating systems. An inclusive organization is one where all groups are treated fairly and are included at all organizational levels and functions.<sup>62</sup>

### Build a Strong Business Case<sup>63</sup>

A first step that Canadian organizations can take to promote optimal inclusion of visible minorities is to emphasize the economic benefits of having a diverse workforce. Organizational leadership can start by educating their workforce about the demographic changes that have occurred and that affect the labour pool (see Chapter 1). Leaders should be able to clearly articulate why the retention and advancement of qualified visible minorities is critical to the bottom line of the organization. They should also understand and explain why leveraging the talents of visible minorities is fundamental to the organization’s success (i.e., given its unique mix of employees, goods or services, and given the current highly competitive business environment).

The classic business model lays out two fundamental drivers of profitability: controlling costs and increasing revenues. Promoting diversity can help a business organization increase revenues by attracting new customers, finding new markets, building customer loyalty, retaining existing customers, improving success in cross-cultural negotiations, eliminating differential turnover across demographic groups, minimizing litigation costs, and controlling relocation costs.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Holvino, Ferdman and Merrill-Sands, p. 249.

<sup>63</sup> Catalyst, *Making Change: Creating a Business Case for Diversity* (2002).

<sup>64</sup> Catalyst, *Making Change: Creating a Business Case for Diversity* (2002): p. 6-13.



Leaders may be able to increase productivity by tapping into the company's top talent (which includes hiring from a diversity of sources), maximizing productivity through flexibility, motivating all employees to do their personal best, and maximizing the value of diverse teams through innovation, creativity, and quality.

## MAKING THE BUSINESS CASE FOR INCLUSION

Companies and firms interested in creating or sharpening a business case for fuller inclusion of visible minorities should take the following steps.

- 1) **Articulate your organization's business objectives.**
- 2) **Agree on drivers for the desired results.**
- 3) **Brainstorm the potential links between diversity and business results.**
- 4) **Synthesize and prioritize the business case.**
- 5) **Test hypotheses through internal data analysis and external benchmarking.**<sup>65</sup>

### Address the Concerns of Majority Groups

In previous chapters we provided several examples of white/Caucasian focus group participants who expressed some discomfort with the emphasis already placed on visible minorities within their own organizations. In encouraging greater inclusivity, Canadian business leaders should not overlook any obvious or hidden concerns among majority groups within the organization (typically those who are white/Caucasian and male). Some individuals may be fully supportive of inclusivity efforts; others may be confused about inclusivity efforts yet still support them once policies have been explained; and some individuals may be completely opposed.

As they frame the business case for inclusion, leaders should be sensitive to issues of personal loss that might be triggered among the dominant group. Other research suggests that some white/Caucasians are more likely than minority groups to perceive that progress towards equality/inclusion has already been made. Some tend to believe that gains made by minorities represent losses for their own ethnic/racial group. This is because people tend to notice losses more than they notice gains and to think in "zero-sum" terms even when reality is not zero-sum.<sup>66</sup> ("Zero-sum" is defined as a situation or interaction in which one participant's gains result only from another's equivalent losses.)

Our qualitative data also showed that some white/Caucasian managers, professionals, and executives in Canadian business organizations felt their workplaces were committed to diversity and that they themselves had already made considerable concessions for the sake of multiculturalism. However, visible minority participants did not generally feel the same way. This difference in perception is an important issue; it likely underlies any backlash related to diversity efforts that occurs within the majority group.

<sup>65</sup> Catalyst, *Making Change: Creating a Business Case for Diversity* (2002), p. 13-18.

<sup>66</sup> Richard P. Eibach and Thomas Keegan, "Free at Last? Social Dominance, Loss Aversion, and White and Black Americans' Differing Assessments of Racial Progress," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 90, no.3 (2006): p. 453 – 467.



We believe it is vital for Canadian firms and businesses to understand and to begin addressing these differences. For example, if some white/Caucasian employees express fear that promoting qualified visible minority colleagues means a lower chance for their own advancement, organizational leadership might demonstrate how the company's greater profitability over time has expanded the number of promotions in certain segments of the business.

### **Ensure That Leadership Competencies are Clear and Allow for a Variety of Styles**

Workplace cultures that embrace a variety of styles and do not have rigid behavioural norms are particularly welcoming to traditionally marginalized groups.<sup>67</sup> A truly inclusive organization allows people from diverse backgrounds to bring their unique perspectives, styles, and skills to work. Therefore, acculturation of visible minorities or others from traditionally marginalized groups should not be a goal of business organizations if they desire to gain the richness that comes from diverse frames of reference. Visible minority employees should not be expected to "fit in" at work to the point where they lose certain unique perspectives brought from their countries of origin and/or gained via socialization in another culture.

If organizations have not done so yet, they should clearly identify leadership competencies; they should also teach managers that particular competencies can be demonstrated using a broad array of styles. For example, if a team manager fulfills his or her role in a collaborative and quiet way rather than in a more autocratic manner, and if the team achieves its goals, then that leader should be credited with effective team management.

Managers must be trained to evaluate job performance with a focus on outcomes, rather than on how an employee does the job; they should avoid dictating, or rewarding, only narrow styles. Nor should they allow their overall assessment of an employee's performance to be driven by how similar the person is to the manager in his or her style and background.

Finally, competencies required for promotion at each level should be clearly explained to all employees. Ideally, employees should also be equipped with the knowledge of what is expected of them, and they should be encouraged to communicate with their superiors on career development and advancement issues.

### **TAKE STEPS TO COUNTER NEGATIVE STEREOTYPING**

Because negative stereotyping can prevent visible minority employees from being seen as leaders (and from feeling they can realistically aspire to leadership), organizations must take steps to prevent or diminish such attitudes. This can be achieved via the use of objective performance evaluation and succession planning processes, by educating managers about stereotyping, and by showcasing the successes of employees from traditionally marginalized groups, especially in occupations where they have not been well represented.<sup>68</sup>

Managers evaluating workers may be responding to unconscious stereotypes when they selectively attend to different kinds of information, depending on the extent to which the person being evaluated resembles them (i.e., in terms of race/ethnicity, but also in terms of gender and even age.) The result may be different performance standards that are unintentionally applied to one group and not to another.

<sup>67</sup> Catalyst, *Women of Color in Corporate Management: Three Years Later* (2002).

<sup>68</sup> Catalyst, *Women "Take Care," Men "Take Charge:" Stereotyping of U.S. Business Leaders Exposed* (2005).



To guard against this, performance criteria should be as objective as possible. Objective performance evaluations include clearly defined and communicated performance evaluation criteria, explicit decision rules about how evaluation criteria are weighted, and a system of checks and balances to safeguard against bias caused by stereotyping.<sup>69</sup>

Education about stereotyping can be included in diversity training. Such training should show participants how to overcome automatic tendencies to use stereotypes, how to recognize conditions that place them at risk for stereotyping, and how they can “practice” interacting with people who are different from themselves.<sup>70</sup>

People may be less likely to stereotype others if they are exposed to information that contradicts their built-in beliefs about ethnicity/race and gender. Canadian business organizations can do their part by highlighting the achievements of visible minorities in key performance areas. This can serve to broaden everyone’s ideas about who might fit the image of an organizational leader. Recognizing these achievements can also provide role models for those in underrepresented groups.

## MOVE PAST POTENTIALLY HARMFUL “POLITICAL CORRECTNESS”

Findings from our survey and focus groups suggest that existing norms of politeness and political correctness make full dialogue about career advancement difficult, if not impossible, in some workplaces. If sensitive issues affecting visible minorities—for example, the negative effects of stereotyping—cannot be discussed openly and honestly because these topics are routinely avoided, this could negatively impact career advancement for visible minority managers, professionals, and executives in Canadian business organizations.

In cultures governed by political correctness, people often feel judged. They are concerned about how others view them, especially if they are seen by others—particularly by white/Caucasian men who are still dominant in corporate settings—as representatives of their groups.<sup>71</sup>

Both majority and minority groups may feel extremely cautious about addressing issues directly.<sup>72</sup> Here are some examples that come directly from focus group participants quoted in earlier chapters:

- A white/Caucasian man might be overly careful about giving a visible minority employee constructive performance feedback because he is afraid he will appear bigoted (as reported by a South Asian woman in Chapter 5).
- A white/Caucasian manager might be upset that his staff members are conversing with one another in a language he does not understand. He feels that he “can’t do anything” about it for fear that mentioning this will label him as prejudiced (as reported by a white/Caucasian man in Chapter 6).
- A visible minority employee might feel her manager is not helpful to her because he is negatively stereotyping her; however she is afraid to mention this to him, worrying that she will be labeled as overly sensitive (as reported by an East Asian woman in Chapter 5).

<sup>69</sup> Catalyst, *Women “Take Care,” Men “Take Charge:” Stereotyping of U.S. Business Leaders Exposed* (2005).

<sup>70</sup> Catalyst, *Women “Take Care,” Men “Take Charge:” Stereotyping of U.S. Business Leaders Exposed* (2005).

<sup>71</sup> Ely, Meyerson and Davidson, p.80

<sup>72</sup> Ely, Meyerson and Davidson, p. 79–80.



When these tensions arise, people's natural tendency is to defend themselves, usually by insisting that their behaviour is correct. However, when people replace their defensiveness with a desire to learn, the possibilities for constructive cross-cultural interactions increase. Learning requires people to acknowledge their limitations and to suspend their need to be right or to prove their competence.

Here are some suggestions for addressing difficult cross-cultural interactions when they arise:<sup>73</sup>

- Take a few moments to identify your feelings and consider your possible responses before reacting.
- Connect with others in ways that affirm the importance of relationships. One way might be to focus on goals that are larger than you are, such as striving to achieve your organization's mission. Having meaningful goals gives us a positive reason to engage with others.
- Question yourself to help identify what makes you defensive—for example, ask yourself what you might be missing in how you view a situation.
- Get authentic support from a trusted colleague or mentor—support that does not necessarily validate your point of view but instead helps you gain a broader perspective.
- Rather than assuming the other person in a conflict needs to change his or her behaviour, consider changing your own behaviour instead, or changing it first.

### Advice for Leaders About Role Modelling Effective Cross-Cultural Communication

Leaders who follow the above-mentioned principles for engagement and who demonstrate personal resilience in the face of challenges can be effective role models for others. Company leaders can support and encourage positive behaviours directly and constructively by taking the following steps.<sup>74</sup>

- **Create safety.** Leaders should acknowledge their own shortcomings in cross-cultural interactions and describe their own learning.
- **Model self-reflection.** Leaders who question themselves and learn from others have received positive feedback that they demonstrate strength (and questioning oneself is necessary in developing non-defensive reactions to difficult cross-cultural interactions).
- **Learn from the experiences of others.** By developing a deeper understanding of those who are different (e.g., in gender, ethnicity/race), leaders can anticipate how employees are likely to perceive and respond to various situations.

## ADVICE FOR VISIBLE MINORITIES

Catalyst generally focuses on organizational change. If companies truly wish to reap the benefits of diversity, (e.g., enhanced decision-making and problem-solving gained via diverse perspectives among team members)<sup>75</sup> diversity should be authentically valued by the organization. Catalyst takes this opportunity to again call on corporate Canada to create more inclusive working environments—not only because this is the right thing to do, but so that visible minority employees do not have to spend valuable time and energy strategizing about how to overcome stereotypes and bias where these exist.

<sup>73</sup> Ely, Meyerson and Davidson, p.82.

<sup>74</sup> Ely, Meyerson and Davidson, p. 86-87.

<sup>75</sup> Lu Hong and Scott E. Page, "Groups of Diverse Problem Solvers Can Outperform Groups of High-Ability Problem Solvers," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), vol. 101, no. 46 (November 16, 2004): p.16385–16389.



As already stated, most recommendations in this chapter are targeted to organizational leaders, since they are the ones with the power to create more inclusive business environments. However, the fact is that organizations are composed of individuals; it is the responsibility of all individuals in a workplace to ensure that bias and stereotyping do not undermine either business or personal goals.

We feel that visible minority employees can and should take charge of their careers, which may include working in a less-than-perfect workplace environment. We should also point out that changing an organization is a long-term activity, and realistically, many visible minority managers, professionals, and executives will find themselves employed in business organizations that are less than fully inclusive.

Some tactics and tools that they might consider in addressing some of the challenges discussed in this report include the following. Of course, not every strategy can be successfully applied to every individual or workplace situation, but at least they present some options:

**Choose your employer with care.** If you are at the job-hunting stage, look carefully at the culture and values of each potential employer. This includes whether the employer demonstrates a commitment to the advancement of visible minorities, women, and other traditionally marginalized groups. Find out about the representation of women and ethnic/racial minorities in corporate officer positions. Or, if you are seeking employment in a firm, research the representation of women and ethnic/racial minority partners. If possible, speak with women and men already employed there (or previous hires) to learn whether the organization’s culture supports inclusion, not just in writing but on a daily basis.

**Develop political astuteness and learn the norms of your organization.** Many successful women interviewed by Catalyst for previous studies said they needed a considerable degree of political astuteness to successfully navigate traditional corporate cultures.<sup>76</sup> Individuals from visible minority groups who wish to have fulfilling careers in corporate Canada likewise need to understand the varied dynamics that exist within their workplaces.

You can sharpen your own workplace political skills by carefully watching those around you. This will help you discern the norms or standards of personal and professional behaviour and performance in your organization. As we have already stated, in general, individuals must adapt to organizational norms in order to be successful.

For those in underrepresented groups—including visible minorities—political astuteness also involves knowing when and how to resolve job-related conflicts, such as feeling that they have been a target for discrimination. In such situations, employees must learn how to carefully balance these immediate interpersonal conflicts with long-term aspirations for career advancement.

**Address assumptions and biases through behaviour that “fits” your organization.** Sometimes the biases of managers and/or colleagues are fairly overt and become evident through inappropriate jokes, hostile confrontations, or open discrimination. However, underlying stereotypes, assumptions, and biases may be revealed in the form of subtle, sometimes unspoken, messages. As you navigate your organization and learn its unwritten rules, you will begin to recognize whether stereotyping of visible minorities exists, and if so whether it is subtle or more overt.

<sup>76</sup> Catalyst, *Women of Color Executives: Their Voices, Their Journeys* (2001).



You should develop a plan for handling workplace incidents where you perceive yourself to be a target for discrimination or stereotyping, whether it is conscious or unconscious. This can be very difficult if your organization is not “inclusive” enough to support you.

In responding to such incidents, always use effective communication to foster cooperation, and resist the temptation to show animosity. Take some time to decide how best to respond. This includes deciding what you are most comfortable with as well as what seems best politically within your organization: responding immediately or at a later time, responding in public, or privately speaking with someone in your human resources department.

**Develop emotional resilience in overcoming bias.** Those from traditionally marginalized groups who have reached senior levels in an organization typically possess a high degree of emotional resilience or toughness.<sup>77</sup> This resilience allows them to feel confident taking risks and to achieve outstanding results without internalizing biased attitudes within the work environment that might serve to exclude them. Such emotional resilience can include leveraging (i.e., taking advantage of) stereotypes or some initially adverse circumstance into positive learning experiences. One example would be turning around a challenging assignment that others expected you would fail, based on their negative stereotyping of you.

## NEXT STEPS

Catalyst research suggests that one potential and significant barrier to greater inclusion of visible minority managers, professionals, and executives within Canadian business organizations is the lack of organizational practices related to inclusion. According to a Corporate Diversity Assessment report from the Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario (HRPAO) and G-FORCE (a human resources agency), 70 percent of companies surveyed reported having vision statements about diversity in the workplace. But 74 percent of all companies said they had not hired any staff to work on diversity issues.<sup>78</sup>

Clearly, much needs to be done to address these complex issues—both at the institutional level within Canadian business organizations and at the individual level by managers, professionals, and executives themselves.

Our next and final report in Catalyst’s series on visible minorities will address what organizations can do to implement and strengthen diversity and inclusion practices. It will provide concrete examples of organizational practices that address many of the recommendations and findings that we have discussed in this series so far. It will also include new data about organizational practices from Catalyst’s survey of Canadian employers and over 17,000 Canadian managers, professionals, and executives.

<sup>77</sup> Catalyst, *Women of Color Executives: Their Voices, Their Journeys* (2001).

<sup>78</sup> Kavita Gosyne, “Diversity Is Key to Good Workplace,” *Metro News* (November 27, 2007). <http://www.metronews.ca/Toronto/comment/article/16173>.



Beginning in July 2006, Catalyst invited FP800 companies and firms, the top 20 Canadian law firms, and Catalyst Canada member organizations to participate in a survey of employees via an email invitation introducing the research and requesting their time to complete an online survey.

The 43 organizations that agreed to participate in the Employee Survey were asked to provide email addresses for more than 60,000 managers, professionals, and executives. The Employee Survey comprised 39 questions and included three open-ended questions. The survey was organized into four themes: Work Environment; Career Advancement and Development; Organizational Practices; and Demographics.

Data collection took place between October 11, 2006, and February 23, 2007. A total of 17,908 individuals responded to the survey, a response rate of 29 percent. Of these 17,908 individuals, 17,468 were full-time employees. A total of 16,464 respondents (94 percent) self-identified either as a member of a visible minority group or as white/Caucasian.

Results from this survey were presented in the Catalyst report, *Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ Survey Findings*. Following the release of this report, a subset of the 43 organizations originally contacted was contacted again. The choice of companies within the subset was based on an examination of the number of visible minority and white/Caucasian survey respondents. Organizations with higher numbers of visible minority respondents were selected for focus group recruitment, as were organizations with a combination of both white/Caucasian and visible minority respondents. Selection was also based on recruiting an equal number of women and men within focus groups and on ensuring representation from different regions of Canada and from a number of industries.

White/Caucasian focus groups were recruited in order to observe whether there were any differences between visible minorities and their white/Caucasian counterparts on specific topics; they were also important in providing a general understanding of white/Caucasian perspectives on issues relating to visible minorities in their organizations.

Organizations were asked to participate in focus group recruitment through emails and follow-up phone calls. Participating organizations were provided with text to help them communicate with and recruit focus group participants. Requirements for organizations included having between three and eight individuals in the same visible minority group, who were of the same gender, and who had been with their organizations for at least six months. People in current superior-subordinate relationships were excluded, as were human resources representatives (to preserve the confidentiality of participants).

Focus groups were conducted on-site in a private conference room. Moderators were matched to each focus group by visible minority status and gender to enhance the level of participant comfort and openness. Each focus group meeting lasted approximately two hours and was digitally recorded for transcription purposes. Confidentiality was ensured to all participants, and no individual participant was identified by name or any other key identifier. Table 1 summarizes the demographics of focus group participants.

Table 1: Demographics of Focus Group Participants					
	Visible Minority Women	Visible Minority Men	White/ Caucasian Women	White/ Caucasian Men	Overall
AVERAGE AGE (YEARS)	38.6	37.5	44.7	36.7	39.1
AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS EMPLOYED FULL-TIME	15.6	12.9	23.2	17.0	16.2
AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS EMPLOYED FULL-TIME IN CANADA	14.4	11.1	20.3	17.1	14.5
AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS IN CURRENT ORGANIZATION	9.2	6.2	12.3	10.3	8.9
% WITH GRADUATE LEVEL EDUCATION	28.0	44.4	5.3	20.0	28.7
% WITH FOREIGN EDUCATION	22.0	33.3	15.8	0.0	22.6
% MANAGERS	53.5	62.9	78.9	66.7	62.3
% PROFESSIONALS	34.9	37.1	15.8	11.1	30.2
% EXECUTIVES	4.7	0.0	0.0	22.2	3.8
% OTHER POSITIONS	7.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	3.8

The backgrounds of focus group participants varied considerably.

- White/Caucasian male focus group participants had reached the highest hierarchical levels in their workplaces, with more than one in five holding executive jobs.
- Visible minority men and women were employed mainly at professional and managerial levels.
- White/Caucasian women were the oldest by age and were also the longest-tenured group among the participants.
- Visible minority men were most likely to have completed graduate work.
- Visible minority men and women had more foreign education and foreign work experience than white/Caucasian participants.



## WHO IS A “VISIBLE MINORITY”?

In Canada, the term “visible minority” refers to a person who is not an Aboriginal person, who is non-Caucasian in race or who is “non-white” in colour, as defined under the Employment Equity Act. We use the term “visible minority” in our research as it is widely understood within the Canadian context and as it is now firmly entrenched in Canadian legislation. Visible minority status was based solely on self-report (i.e., individuals assigned themselves to one or more groups on a list).

The following population groups comprised the total visible minority group in this study: Arab, black (which according to the Canadian Census includes African, Haitian, Jamaican, Somali as examples),<sup>79</sup> East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean), Filipino, Latin American, Middle Eastern, South Asian, Southeast Asian, West Indian, and “multiple visible minority.”

## FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

The following topic areas/issues were covered in all focus groups.

- Current position and career history.
- Workplace environment (including culture, cultural fit, stereotypes).
- Relationships with colleagues.
- Relationship with manager.
- Career advancement.
- Diversity and inclusion.
- Employee recommendations for employer organizations and for colleagues.

### Survey Question on Barriers

The exact wording of the question asking what people saw as their “top barriers” to career advancement follows.

**Please indicate what you think the most/second most/third most significant barrier is that you have faced in advancing your career, based on the options (a-q):** (Drop down menu)

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| a. Lack of education credentials/technical skills.    | g. Lack of informal networking with influential colleagues.                      | m. Other : _____   |
| b. Lack of participation on high-visibility projects. | h. Not having an acceptable communication style.                                 | n. Fulfilling family responsibilities.   |
| c. Not enough time in this position.                  | i. Taking a paid or unpaid leave (e.g. maternity/parental); or working part-time | o. My written language skills are not up to par.   |
| d. Not exceeding performance expectations.            | j. Being too identified with my visible minority group.                          | p. Business development practices that do not accord with my cultural practices/observances. |
| e. Lack of line experience                            | k. Speaking with an accent.  | q. None of the above.  |
| f. Not having an influential mentor or sponsor        | l. Not understanding organizational politics.                                    |  |

<sup>79</sup> Statistics Canada, “Race Classification” (September 7, 2006). <http://www.statcan.ca/english/concepts/definitions/ethnicity01.htm>



## DATA ANALYSES

In total, 19 focus groups were conducted. Focus group participants were female and male employees who identified themselves as being part of the most predominant visible minority groups according to the survey data—South Asian, East Asian, and black. A number of white/Caucasians also took part.

The focus groups were conducted separately by ethnicity/race and gender. Most of the data in this report were derived from these focus groups; however, additional analyses of data from the initial survey have been included when pertinent.

### Qualitative Data Analysis

To analyze the qualitative data that emerged from the focus groups, the research team first developed a list of relevant themes informed by issues that had already emerged from the original survey, as well as by a review of previous Catalyst qualitative research on the experiences of women of colour in the United States.

A codebook for analyzing focus group transcripts was created based on these themes. Two raters first worked together, coding transcripts from two focus group sessions; this joint coding was done so the coders could establish decision rules. Each of the two coders then independently coded the remaining focus group transcripts. After this initial coding was complete, two other team members reviewed the coding to ensure accuracy and consistency.

If the content of these transcripts did not align with one of the previously established codes, the two coders were given the opportunity to identify new themes. Research team members also listened to full audio recordings of two focus group sessions, taking note of any additional recurring topics in need of coding.

All coding and analysis of focus group transcripts were conducted using NVIVO 7, qualitative data analyses software that allows researchers to identify patterns, uncover themes, and develop meaningful conclusions based on qualitative data.

The research team analyzed patterns in the frequency of discussions of specific topics by participants' gender and visible minority group. Patterns were identified based on similarities and differences in what was discussed during the focus groups. The team also looked for nuances in responses by each of these groups. The major trends and themes were then drawn out into the emergent storyline.

Findings from these focus groups were also used to generate new hypotheses to test using the existing survey data. These new findings are presented in this report.



## Quantitative Data Analysis

The additional quantitative survey analyses presented in this report primarily used z-tests of proportion to determine if white/Caucasians and visible minorities responded to certain survey items differently, or if visible minority subgroups (black, East Asian, and South Asian respondents) responded to certain survey items differently. Significant differences were reported at the  $p < .05$  level.

Group comparisons were then further analyzed using logistic regressions to determine whether significant differences were maintained when control variables were introduced into the analyses. More specifically, logistic regressions were performed to determine if between group differences still held after taking into consideration the following:

- *Human capital characteristics*, including educational attainment, whether the respondent possessed any foreign educational credentials, and tenure with the organization.
- *Job characteristics*, including whether the respondent was a manager, professional, or executive, whether the respondent was in a staff or line role, his/her annual income, geographic location of workplace, and industry type.
- *Demographic characteristics*, including gender, age, marital status, whether the respondent identified as a person with disability, whether the respondent identified as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender), and whether the respondent was born in Canada.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Catalyst research team is grateful for the continued guidance and insight provided by the Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities Research Advisory Board. A special thanks to all who reviewed the storyline document and the draft report.

We are grateful to Catalyst President Ilene H. Lang for her leadership as the project developed. Thanks to Deborah Gillis, Vice President, North America, and Nancy Carter, Ph.D., Vice President, Research, for providing support and guidance at all stages of this project.

Katherine Giscombe, Ph.D., Vice President, Women of Color Research, Catalyst, directed the research and authored the report. Emily Pomeroy, Associate, Catalyst Canada, managed all aspects of logistics pertaining to this report and along with Alicia Sullivan, Research Assistant, Catalyst Canada, coordinated the focus groups. Christine Silva, Senior Associate, Catalyst Canada, Emily Pomeroy, and Alicia Sullivan led and conducted the qualitative analysis. Christine Silva designed and conducted the survey data analysis.

The report was reviewed by Debbie Soon, Vice President, Marketing, Catalyst, Deborah Gillis, Nancy Carter, Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, Ph.D., Vice President, Advisory Services, Christine Silva, Laura Jenner, Senior Associate, Catalyst Canada, Alicia Sullivan, Emily Pomeroy, Sujaya Dhanvantari, Research Associate, Catalyst, and Jan Combopiano, Chief Knowledge Officer, Catalyst. It was fact-checked by Deepali Bagati, Ph.D., Director, Research, and Cheryl Yanek, Associate Librarian, and edited by Evelyne Michaels, Professional Writing & Editing Services, and Joy Ohm, Senior Associate Editor, Catalyst. Sonia Nikolic, Graphic Designer, Catalyst, provided assistance with the design of the report. Editorial work was overseen by Liz Roman Gallese, Publisher, Catalyst.

The Catalyst research team would like to extend special thanks to Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, Emma Sabin, Senior Director, Advisory Services, Jeanine Prime, Ph.D., Senior Director, Research, Heather Foust-Cummings, Ph.D., Director, Research, Anika Warren, Ph.D., Director, Research, Deepali Bagati, Director, Research and Sarah Dinolfo, Senior Associate, Research, for their insights and recommendations. Special thanks also to Ulrike Balke, Art Director, Ulrike Balke Art & Design, who completed the design and layout of the report; to Charmain Emerson, Building Blocks, and Susan Nierenberg, Vice President, Media Relations, Catalyst, for their continued work to publicize the series and for their strategic advice on media dissemination; and Jan Combopiano for coordinating the production of this report.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to all focus group participants and to the 17,908 respondents to our survey, whose participation was truly invaluable.

The Catalyst research team thanks the following organizations for sponsoring this study:

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The following organizations participated in *Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities ~ Survey Findings* and a subset of these organizations were contacted to participate in focus groups based on a rigorous analysis of their visible minority numbers.

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