

Diversity Assessment Tools: A Comparison

Abstract:

Much has been written about how to address diversity in the human resources function (recruitment, retention, professional development etc.) but less has been written about how to develop strategies to leverage diversity in other areas. This study proposes an approach to exploring diversity through the value chain and a tool to help an organization assess its strategy. The Diversity Audit Tool (DAT) was developed from an analysis of current diversity practices in the Information Communications and Technology (ICT) Sector in Canada. This paper will review the dimensions of the tool and compare it to six other diversity lenses.

Keywords: Diversity assessment, diversity audit tool, diversity lens, “business” case for diversity.

Increasingly corporations in Canada have stressed the importance of embracing diversity and have stressed the benefits of creating inclusive work environments which:

- Promote the work of all organizational members and ensures that it is acknowledged, respected, and that employees are compensated equitably for it
- Value diversity both within the organization and outside of it
- Implement a meritocracy – rather than non-job-related ascribed characteristics – ensuring the need for equality and fairness underpins the organizational culture
- Emphasize individual accountability at all levels of the organization
- Constantly communicate the organization’s commitment to diversity both through language and through action and in a clear manner (Digh, 1998; D’Netto & Sohal, 1999; Schmidt, 2004; Beaver & Hutchings, 2005; Conference Board of Canada, 2006; Conference Board of Canada, 2008; Shen et al., 2009)

In other words, inclusive work environments do not simply recognize that differences exist among different cultural groups. Rather, increasing diversity within an organization increases both an awareness of and sensitivity to differences among different social categories.

In every industry sector, increasing diversity has been consistently identified as a key goal for Canadian companies (Conference Board of Canada, 2006).

Diversity has been defined in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this paper, we will focus on women, visible minorities, aboriginal people, persons with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people. As in other countries, women have also become a growing proportion of the Canadian workforce and equity initiatives have focused on promoting the inclusion of women for several decades. More recently growth in the Canadian workforce has been fuelled as a result of immigration, particularly from non-European countries (Statistics Canada, 2008a) and it is estimated that by 2017, one in five Canadian workers will be a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2008b). (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2007). Canada has Employment Equity legislation (1992) which establishes obligations for Federally regulated companies and federal contractors to report on and promote inclusion of visible

minorities, women, aboriginal people, and people with disabilities. Recent court decisions have led many organizations to also include sexual orientation among the characteristics they prioritize.

Diversity initiatives encompass those “policies, systems, and processes that are conducive to people of diverse backgrounds working together in a cohesive manner” (Soni, 2000, p. 396). These initiatives recognize, celebrate, value, and being sensitive to these differences within an organization by changing the culture of the workplace (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Shen et al., 2009). In other words, “working with and managing diversity is about ensuring the development of human capital (the skills, education, training, abilities, and experience possessed by individuals) of all employees” (Beaver & Hutchings, 2005).

The “Business” Case for Diversity

Cox and Blake (1991) assert that, for those organizations that fail to adapt to the increasingly diverse workforce, they will face a substantial competitive disadvantage. Some research (Robinson & Dechant, 1997) suggests that effectively leveraging diversity, results in the growth of both the business and the bottom line (see also: D’Netto & Sohal, 1999). This “business” case for diversity and has been documented in both academic and non-academic literature. Researchers have suggested that effectively leveraging diversity enables organizations to develop their work force and respond to skills shortages (Cox & Blake, 1991; Ross & Schneider, 1992; Iles, 1995; Nykiel, 1997; Robinson & Dechant, 1997; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004);

- Respond to increasingly diverse markets (Cox & Blake, 1991; Robinson & Dechant, 1997; Lee & Nathan, 2010);
- Increase innovation and creativity (Cox & Blake, 1991; Iles, 1995; Wilson, 1996; Robinson & Dechant, 1997; Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1998; Lee & Chon, 2000; Grensing-Pophal, 2001; Reinhold, 2005; Devine et al., 2007; Pomeroy, 2007);
- Increase levels of employee satisfaction, resulting in better employee performance and higher retention rates (Cox & Blake, 1991; Ross & Schneider, 1992; Kandola, 1995; Robinson & Dechant, 1997; The health costs of harassment, 2002; Tracey & Hinkin, 2008); and
- Avoid the legal costs and reputational damage that occurs as a result of a human rights complaint against it (Cox & Blake, 1991; Robinson & Dechant, 1997; Miller & Triana, 2002; Devine et al., 2007).

Diversity Audit Tool (DAT):

A diversity audit will identify “the values and norms in your organization’s culture and [determine] how diversity fits in” (Baklid et al., 2005, p. 54) to it, thus increasing the likelihood that policies and practices aimed to increase inclusiveness and representation will succeed. The breadth of diversity audits is quite extensive. Some focus solely on issues related to diversity and inclusiveness. Others attempt to “uncover bias and perceptions-of-bias among employees and managers” (Grensing-Pophal, 2001). Sources of such data can include secondary research reports and literature as well as targeted surveys and interviews. Sale (2008) identifies that one of the stated benefits of a diversity audit is that the data gathered can be used to compare the organization to others in its industry.

The Diversity Audit Tool (DAT) was developed by investigating practices in the Information Communications and Technology (ICT) Sector (Cukier, 2009). It was refined through examining other employment sectors including: financial services, police services, education, and health care. The initial tool was informed by the current state of women in the ICT sector – including barriers to and strategies aimed at increasing their participation. Interviews with organizations in the sector, along with secondary research, identified practices that had previously been successful to increase participation and advancement. These results were used to create the DAT for organizations to assess their policies and practices.

The six categories of the DAT systemically catalogue the ways in which an organization can communicate its commitment to increasing diversity and inclusiveness at a number of different levels. The six key areas of the DAT are as follows:

1. **Leadership and Governance:** This aspect demonstrates the importance of the top-down implementation of diversity practices and policies. For diversity initiatives to be successful, they must have the support and commitment of senior management who also have the power to influence change across the organization.
2. **Strong and Transparent Human Resources Practices:** These represent the changes that the organization makes to how it recruits, develops, manages, and engages with its employees. The commitment to diversity is, in other words, “reinforced by changing the organizational policies and processes” (Kreitz, 2007, p. 3) in order to attract, develop, and retain individuals from diverse groups.
3. **Quality of Life and Organizational Culture:** Improving the quality of life offered by the organization as well as improving the organizational culture so that it is more inclusive aims to reduce barriers to entry, increase the retention of employees, and create an environment where the needs of employees from diverse and underrepresented groups are met in ways that are beneficial to the organization as a whole. In other words, to create an organizational culture and quality of life for its employees that is sensitive to the needs of a diverse workforce.
4. **Measure and Track Diversity:** Unless the organization measures and tracks the results of the implementation of these policies and practices ensure that the stated commitment to diversity is translated into action. Furthermore, tracking diversity through surveys and interviews as well as publishing those results serves to reinforce the organization’s commitment to diversity. Similarly, these results can also be used as a benchmark against which an organization can measure its progress in relation to other firms in its sector or industry.
5. **Integrate or Mainstreaming Diversity across the Value Chain:** This allows the organization to clearly and actively communicate its commitment to diversity both internally and externally. This aspect of the DAT demonstrates that organizations cannot just passively enact a commitment to diversity. Rather, for these initiatives to be successful, diversity policies and practices must be extend throughout the value chain and outwards towards the external environment.
6. **Developing the Pipeline:** This section of the DAT measures the efforts of the organization to develop its resources – including efforts to proactively reach out to groups in order to attract future participants in the labour force. (Cukier, 2009)

Methodology

This table represents the comparison of the DAT – as it was developed by the Diversity Institute at Ryerson University – to other diversity lenses that were publically available online. Specific tools that were examined included:

- Advisor, Conciliation, and Arbitration Service (ACAS) monitoring form (2009): Measures ethnic group membership and gender to ensure that the organization can ensure that its policy of non-discrimination and equal opportunity is being correctly implemented.
- Canadian Bar Association equity and diversity guide (2007): Focuses on four key areas – leadership; recruitment; professional development, retention and advancement; and education and training – that reflect a well-planned and systemic approach to implementing diversity initiatives.
- Chamber of Minerals and Energy Australia (CMEWA) gender diversity audit tool (2008): Developed as part of a larger initiative to increase women’s participation in resource companies in Australia. Focuses on workplace culture; recruitment and selection; monitoring, evaluation, and response; Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) legislation requirements; work/life balance initiatives; career paths, training, and development; work environment; communication; and strategies to support Fly in, Fly out (FIFO) workers.
- London Development Agency diversity guide (2008): Provides suggestions on how to develop and implement a diversity strategy.
- Scottish Union of Supported Employment’s (SUSE) sample diversity audit (2008): Identifies key areas that should be considered when an organization seeks to implement diversity strategy.
- Vasin, Heyn and Company’s social audits diversity audit (2009): Identifies areas where barriers often exist preventing equal opportunity for all employees, customers, and suppliers in the organization (both internally and externally).

Diversity Audit Tool (DAT): Compared and Contrasted to other Diversity Assessment Tools

The results of this comparison (reproduced in Table 1 below) systemically compared the DAT to other lenses.

Table 1: Comparing the DAT (Cukier, 2009) to Other Diversity Lenses

	Chamber of Minerals & Energy Australia (CMEWA), 2008	Canadian Bar Association (CBA), 2007	Scottish Union of Supported Employment (SUSE), n.d.	London Development Agency, 2008	Vasin, Heyn, & Company, 2009	Advisory, Conciliation & Arbitration Service (ACAS), 2009
(1.) Leadership and Governance:						
Does the board consider diversity in identifying and developing candidates?						
Do senior executive pro-actively communicate the importance of diversity inside and outside the organization?	✓	✓				
Do leaders reflect the composition of the workforce?				✓		
Is there a diversity council?		✓				
Is there a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) at the Senior VP level with lines of authority?						
Has the business case for diversity been developed and widely communicated?				✓		
Are explicit diversity goals and policies in place and communicated internally and externally?	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Are there well-developed mechanisms to handle employee complaints about harassment and discrimination?			✓	✓		✓
Is performance and compensation for managers tied to meeting diversity targets?	✓					
Are there diverse leaders with profile internally and externally?	✓	✓		✓		
(2.) Strong and Transparent Human Resources Practices:						
a. Recruitment						
Are reviews of vacant positions undertaken to ensure that the qualifications required fit the demands of the job?	✓			✓	✓	✓
Does the organization consider alternative pathways to positions?	✓					
Are vacant positions posted?	✓					✓
Do recruiters specifically target underrepresented groups?	✓			✓		
Do all internship, co-op, and placement programs have diversity targets?	✓	✓				
Are selection committees representative?	✓	✓				✓
Are bias-free interviewing processes used?	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
b. Performance Management						
Is accountability for diversity targets and practices built into performance management systems?	✓					
c. Promotion						
Does succession planning take into account diversity targets?						
Are high potential employees from underrepresented groups given opportunities to take "stretch" assignments?	✓	✓		✓		
Are promotional opportunities and processes communicated openly and clearly to employees?	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Are career planning systems in place to support employees?	✓		✓	✓		
d. Education, Training and Knowledge Building						
Is diversity tracked in employee separations (retirements, dismissals, voluntary exits, layoffs)?	✓			✓		
Are exit interviews conducted and are the results acted upon?	✓			✓		
e. Training and Developing talent						
Does orientation for new employees address diversity?						✓
Do all employees receive mandatory training on diversity?	✓					
Do managers receive specialized training on diversity?		✓				

Do individuals involved in the hiring processes receive specialized training on hiring and bias-free hiring?	✓		✓			
Are high-potential employees from diverse groups given access to specialized training and professional development that would enhance their ability to succeed		✓		✓		
Are provisions available for keeping employees current during/after parental leave?	✓	✓		✓		
Are customized training programs available for high potential employees?		✓		✓		
Are formal mentoring/coaching programs (internal or external) provided?	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Are formal diversity networks supported?		✓		✓		
(3.) Quality of Life and Organizational Culture:						
Are flexible working arrangements available?	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Are family-friendly policies in place including, for example, extended parental leave and family emergency days, elder care, support for parents travelling?	✓	✓		✓		✓
Are on-site child care and emergency day care services available?	✓					
Are employee workloads and employer expectations managed?	✓	✓		✓		
Do employees have access to coaching and counselling to help manage workload and stress?	✓			✓		
(4.) Measure and Track Diversity:						
Are there metrics on the participation of employees from underrepresented groups at each management level relative to the available labour force?	✓			✓	✓	
Are there explicit diversity targets for participation and for employees from underrepresented groups in management?	✓			✓		
Are there regular employee engagement surveys with self-reported demographic data?	✓					✓
Are equal pay audits conducted to ensure equal pay for work of equal value??	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Is performance benchmarked against others in the industry?				✓		
Are these results tracked and reported with feedback loops for action?	✓		✓		✓	
(5.) Integrate Diversity Across the Value Chain:						
a. Product Development						
Is diversity considered in designing and developing products?						
b. Marketing and Customer Service						
Does the organization consider and communicate the importance of diversity in its marketing and customer service programs?		✓	✓	✓		
c. Communications						
Is the importance of diversity communicated in all its publications (internal and external)?		✓	✓			
d. Media Buys						
Is the importance of diversity considered and communicated in media buys?			✓			
e. Philanthropy						
Is the importance of diversity considered and communicated in philanthropic activities?						
f. Government Relations						
Is the importance of diversity considered in government relations?				✓		
g. Procurement						
Is the importance of diversity considered and communicated in procurement processes?		✓		✓	✓	
(6.) Develop the Pipeline						
Is outreach to schools provided regarding opportunities and incentives in this industry?	✓	✓				
Does the organization participate with associations and professional organizations in programs to promote its commitment to diversity?		✓				
Is the importance of diverse representation considered in partnerships with educational institutions (i.e. research, executive education, training and development)?		✓				
Does the organization collaborate and encourage development of re-entry and transitional programs						
Does the organization work with institutions to support programs to encourage individuals from underrepresented groups to enter these kinds of jobs (i.e. hybrid programs and double majors)?	✓					

Does the organization ensure that all of its outreach activities in cooperation with educational institutions, government, and associations consider representation?		✓				
Does the organization collaborate and support research and evaluation aimed at promoting effective diversity interventions?						

Results

As the table shows, the DAT bore a strong relationships to tools developed by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia (CMEWA, 2008), with a 56.9% similarity. However, unlike the DAT, this tool did not attempt to integrate diversity across the value chain, nor did it attempt to develop the pipeline. The second closest lens to the DAT was the one produced by the London Development Agency (2008), with a 48.28% similarity. The third closest was from the Canadian Bar Association, or CBA (2007), with a similarity of 43.1%. The three lenses least like the DAT were the ones produced by the Scottish Union of Supported Employment – or SUSE – (n.d.), with a similarity score of 22.41%; Advisory, Conciliation, and Arbitration Service, or ACAS, (2009) that scored 20.69%; and, finally, the lens produced by Vasin, Heyn, and Company (2009) was only 6.9% similar.

Of the lowest scoring lenses, there are only two instances when all three companies – SUSE (2009), Vasin, Heyn, and Company (2009), and the ACAS – unanimously agree that an action is demonstrates a commitment to diversity. Namely, in terms of setting out and communicating diversity goals internally and externally as well as completing equal pay audits to ensure that work of equal value is rewarded equally. All three companies focus on different ways of increasing and managing diversity within their own organizations. For example, SUSE’s strategy focuses on the development and promotion of diverse hires, of measuring diversity within the organization (as opposed to tracking it among other organizations in the industry) and sees the communication and integration of diversity along the value chain (communication, media buys) as a true indication of an organization’s commitment to diversity. This tool, therefore, is best suited for companies that have high levels of female recruits – either by nature or by design – but is unable to cash in on the benefits of leveraging diversity in order to elicit the most benefit from these initiatives.

The lens created by the UK’s ACAS (2009) prioritizes recruitment as key to managing diversity within a firm. Similarly, it also emphasizes that part of diversity management has to do with structuring the organizational structure to make it more accessible for diverse groups of individuals, which will result in an increase in the overall level of representation. Similar to SUSE (2009), ACAS focuses on measuring diversity rather than tracking it among others firms within the sector or industry. Finally, the audit tool prepared by Vasin, Heyn, and Company (2009), which had the lowest similarity with the DAT, identifies and encourages only the bare minimum of principles when it comes to attracting, promoting, and retaining diverse groups. For example, in terms of human resources policies, the only measure that matters is related to increasing access in terms of recruitment. In fact, this tool does not even take training/development and promotion into consideration. Furthermore, this tool indicates that changing the organizational culture to meet the needs and expectations of diverse groups – as well as improving the quality of organizational life – is immaterial to improving and promoting diversity and inclusiveness. In this sense, diversity occurs in a vacuum. Finally, unlike the other two diversity tools, this tool tracks diversity among its competitors.

Strengths, Weaknesses, and Gaps in the DAT

When compared to the other diversity lenses, the DAT seems to be a more comprehensive and inclusive measure of diversity initiatives than are the other lenses. Part of the DAT's strength as a diversity lens comes in the fact that it focuses on general initiatives at the macro-level initiatives. The flexibility of the DAT, in other words, increases both the ease of and general adaptability in its adoption and application across industries and sectors. However, at times, the DAT is too general and too comprehensive. Just as some key points of the DAT are not as applicable to a specific sector as other parts, these points may not be applicable every industry and sector but their inclusion in the audit tool demonstrates that these are important to creating a truly diverse and inclusive workplace.

The DAT's emphasis on accountability, however, did not include a specific mechanism explicitly stating that once policies have been developed and implemented, that they should be monitored until a set time (either annually or bi-annually), the results analyzed and evaluated in order to determine if, for example, the initiative needs to be updated or if it should be abandoned in favour of a new one. While this might seem as an implicit follow-up to the implementation of diversity initiatives, increasing the accountability of the organization in evaluating and adapting these initiatives after a set specific time should be included. Otherwise, this review process may not occur and the organization may not be able to get the most out of its diversity initiatives. In addition, yearly published reviews and benchmarking data – much like organizations in the financial services sector are required to complete and make public – should also be made public. As a result of publicizing the reviews and comparing them to other organizations within the sector, the organization and its managers are held accountable to its stakeholders for either meeting or missing their diversity targets and, as a result, may be replaced to ensure success. Furthermore, this information should be communicated to senior managers to give them an idea of how effective their initiatives are in increasing diversity and whether or not they are being effective.

The analysis of the CMEWA (2008) lens indicated another gap or weakness in the DAT. Human Resources should ensure that the criteria that is used in the selection process is fair to all applicants and does not give certain advantages to any group – be it mainstream or diverse. In terms of specific monitoring and tracking processes, there will be a need for any data that is collected on employees from diverse and underrepresented cultural groups need to be organized and easily accessible, especially if the goal of the program is the continuous monitoring of the organization to measure the success of the initiatives.

The DAT places a lot of emphasis on high potential candidates from diverse and underrepresented groups and developing them to become the next leaders within an organization. However, increased job training and development should be offered to everyone in the organization and not just those who have high potential. This will help to foster within these lower-level workers a sense of loyalty to the organization as well as communicating to them that there are opportunities within the organization for them to develop. It stands to reason that an employee in the bottom echelons of the organization may feel isolated – especially if the number of men outnumbers the women. Training and career development programs give these candidates the opportunity to feel valued by the organization as well as having the opportunity to learn new

skills. These skills may not give them the opportunity to move vertically within the organization, but they will be able to have the opportunity to move laterally. As a result, the costs associated with turnover are reduced as these employees become more satisfied in their jobs and lives within the organization as they no longer have to leave it in order to develop new skills or to take on a new role within that organization (CMEWA, 2008).

Finally, both CMEWA (2008) and the CBA (2007) argue that all training materials and internal communications use non-discriminatory and inclusive language because of the integral role that language plays in the construction and understanding of our experiences and society: “The use of inclusive, respectful language is critical to the equity process” (CBA, 2007, p. 8). Within language there is the potential to reproduce bias and discrimination even in language that appears to be, at first glance, innocuous. This is especially true if the bias is transmitted and reproduced within the dominant culture. For example, using the pronoun “he” to refer to the entire human race, communicates men’s privilege and men’s superiority within the dominant culture. Therefore, organizations and trainers need to be conscious of the effect that language has on reinforcing inequalities, bias, and discrimination, especially those that are hidden, unconscious, and taken for granted (CBA, 2007; CMEWA, 2008).

Conclusion

The DAT, as it is presented now, is a good tool to benchmark individual organization’s diversity initiatives against other organizations in the same sector, but, in this capacity, what could be an effective tool becomes little more than a checklist. Of course, there is no guarantee that even if an organization implemented all of the practices proposed in the DAT that it would result in better outcomes, as organizations exist within a broader cultural context. More research is needed to assess the value of the DAT in a variety of contexts and to explore, in further, detail, how to track and assess performance.

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