



# **Diversity and Inclusivity: How Employees with a Disability Create Competitive Advantage**

May 2011

## What are diversity and inclusivity in the workplace?

Diversity can mean many things. From a wider perspective, the Canadian Government identifies Aboriginal persons, visible minorities, women, and persons with a disability as the major employment equity groups. But diversity can extend far deeper, to include identifiers such as age, language, ethnicity, cultural background, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, family responsibilities, educational level, socio-economic background, personality, or marital status.

In the workplace, it is important to cultivate an accepting environment for diversity, and to encourage and embrace people's individual differences, acknowledging the unique and valuable contributions they can make. In other words, it is important (and beneficial) to create a culture of inclusivity.

Managing diversity and nurturing inclusivity involves recognizing that there are other ways to see the world and working together to find solutions. When diversity is well managed, the working environment becomes an inclusive place, where differences are valued and each employee has the potential to develop to his or her full potential.

## Why do New Brunswick employers need to create an inclusive workplace?

It is projected that labour shortages are set to become an increasing problem. While the entire country faces demographic challenges, the problem is more acute in Atlantic Canada and will reach a critical point in this region sooner than in other parts of the country.

An aging population, a shrinking labour force, and equal opportunity legislation are just some of the contributing factors that will necessitate that organizations review their hiring practices and look to new, creative methods for recruiting people. With the workforce diminishing, employers will increasingly need to widen their net when seeking out candidates if they want to remain competitive and recruit top talent.

Atlantic Canada's population is aging faster than any other region in Canada, with the lowest fertility rates in the country, the smallest share of Canadian immigrants, and the highest out-migration rates in Canada all contributing factors.

Demographic forecasts produced by Statistics Canada clearly demonstrate the extent of New Brunswick's rapidly-aging population. It is predicted that the number of people aged 24 years or younger will decrease from approximately 211,400 (28.1%) in 2008, to 161,800 (21.8%) in 2031.<sup>1</sup> In addition, it is also predicted that New Brunswick's overall population will decrease by 9,300 over the next 23 years (2008-2031).<sup>2</sup>

An aging and diminishing workforce will put greater impetus on the need to take a more inclusive approach to recruiting and nurturing employees for New Brunswick-based organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> *Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories (Scenario 5), Catalogue No. 91-520-SCB. Statistics Canada.*

<sup>2</sup> *Labour Force Historical Review, Catalogue No. 71F0004XCB. Statistics Canada.*

## What are the benefits of inclusivity?

### Improved customer service

Diversity in the employee base of a company reflects the needs of the diverse customer, and helps provide a broader service range. A diverse collection of skills and experiences (such as languages and cultural understanding) also helps empower companies to provide superior service to customers on a global basis.

### Increased innovation

Organizations that demonstrate diversity among their workforce have the opportunity to supply a greater variety of solutions in service, sourcing, and allocation of resources. Employing people from varying backgrounds allows individual talents and experiences to come to the fore, offering greater flexibility in adapting to fluctuating markets and changing customer demands.

When a workforce is willing and able to offer a wide range of viewpoints, the pool of experiences and ideas is widened. The organization can pull from this pool in order to meet strategic and customer needs more effectively, becoming much more multidimensional in its overall approach and thinking.

### Competitive management practices

Encouraging diversity in the workplace can help inspire all the employees within a company, driving them to work and perform to the best of their own individual abilities. By encouraging its people in this way, an organization can execute company-wide strategies that can result in higher productivity, profit, and return on investment.

By looking to a more diverse pool of candidates, an organization has a better chance of recruiting top talent, while a proactive approach to supporting a diverse employee-base assists in retaining that talent. In turn, retention decreases costs related to recruitment and training. Effective diversity management also minimizes the risk of losses in personnel and productivity due to prejudice and discrimination complaints, along with potential legal actions against the organization.

## Challenges and barriers to inclusion

Perhaps the biggest barrier to inclusion in the workplace is a lack of recognition for the strategic importance of diversity and inclusiveness. Managers or supervisors may lack the skills, competencies, or insight to treat people equitably, while employees may be resistant to change, resulting in inhibited progress.

Companies are often guilty of falling short when it comes to training in Sensitivity and Diversity Planning, or they lack effective strategies to help them recruit from diverse groups. A failure to effectively communicate key objectives – including the benefits and pursuit of diversity – to all employees is another common problem. Falling short in this area will inevitably lead to confusion, a lack of teamwork, and, ultimately, lowered morale. While common, these challenges are easily overcome.

## Hiring a person with a disability

For many employers, the idea of considering a candidate with a disability can be intimidating, but it shouldn't (and doesn't need to) be this way. Just like cultural background, sex, creed, and so on, a disability is another example of the kind of diversity you will find in a healthy, successful work environment. Persons with disabilities should be included in the recruiting process in order to maximize the number of qualified applicants and provide a wider catchment for hiring. Persons with a disability can often be excellent candidates and provide another example of the kind of diversity and inclusivity that can truly enrich the workplace.

## Myths about hiring persons with a disability

There are many preconceptions regarding the hiring of person with a disability that are not accurate or helpful in a company's approach and development. Some of these myths are debunked below.

**Myth: Employees with a disability have higher absentee rates than employees without a disability.**

**Fact:** *Studies carried out by established firms, such as DuPont<sup>3</sup>, show that employees with a disability are not absent any more than employees without a disability. In fact, they suggest that, on average, individuals with a disability have better attendance rates than their non-disabled counterparts.*

**Myth: Accommodating workers with a disability comes at considerable expense to the employer.**

**Fact:** *In reality, with proper planning and knowledge, most job accommodations are simple and inexpensive. The most frequently reported accommodations include changes in job duties and modified hours of work. The majority of the time, it just takes a little creativity and flexibility on the part of management, and rarely are expensive structural modifications or specialized technology needed.*

**Myth: I can't discipline an employee with a disability, or terminate their employment.**

**Fact:** *Those with a disability neither require nor expect any kind of special dispensation due to their condition. In fact, the majority of the time the opposite is true. There are also no special procedures for disciplining, or even terminating the employment of workers with a disability. It is important to establish clear performance expectations from the start. If a performance problem does occur, follow your company's usual guidelines, typically: discuss the problem with the worker, look for solutions, document the situation and, if deemed absolutely necessary, terminate the employment agreement.*

**Myth: Hiring a person with a disability is a liability, because they are more likely to leave the position than a person**

**without a disability .Fact:** *Not only is this myth inaccurate, it actually couldn't be more wrong. Evidence suggests that a person to with a disability is more likely stay loyal to your organization that a non-disabled peer. In fact, Pizza Hut Corporation has found that proven workers with a disability have to be five times more likely to stay with their organization than those without a disability.<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons, Government of New Brunswick.

<sup>4</sup> Pizza Hut Corporation "Jobs Plus™" Program, Yum! Brands Inc.



**Myth: It doesn't matter to my customers if I address the disability issue or not.**

**Fact:** *Canadians with a disability have access to a combined annual disposable income of \$25 billion<sup>5</sup>, making this a spending group with significant clout. Beyond this, in a modern, forward-thinking society such as ours, to be seen as open to employing persons with a disability is an intrinsic positive for any organization.*

## What costs are associated with hiring employees with a disability?

In many cases, hiring a person with a disability will cost no more than hiring a person without a disability. In some instances, there may be costs associated with adjustments to facilities, workstations or work arrangements. The potential costs will vary depending on the individual being hired, and the employer will be responsible for paying for accommodation arrangements, provided they do not cause undue hardship.

Employers may be able to apply for government funding for modifications and accommodations, as well as other means of support. According to the Job Accommodation Network, 80% of accommodations cost less than \$500. In addition, the 1991 Health and Activity Limitations Survey (HALS) found that fewer than 4% of the 890,000 working Canadians with a disability required accessible washrooms, ramps or other building modifications<sup>6</sup>. There are government programs which may be able to defer some or all of the cost of the accommodations and many such modifications are tax deductible.

There are also examples of non-structural modifications that may need to be made in order to accommodate a person with a disability. Such accommodations might include things like flexible schedules, specialized software, keyboards, computer screens, telephone amplifiers, etc.

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<sup>5</sup> Conference Board of Canada (2001). *Tapping the Talents of People with Disabilities*.

<sup>6</sup> Health and Activity Limitation Survey: Institutional Component (1991). Statistics Canada.

## Next Steps

### Step 1

Contact NB Employer Support Services (NBESS). NBESS offers free consultation, information, presentations, and training to employers in New Brunswick. NBESS is funded by the Government of Canada and the Province of New Brunswick through the Canada-New Brunswick Labour Market Agreements. Visit [www.employersupport.nb.ca](http://www.employersupport.nb.ca) or call toll free at **1-888-350-2202**.

### Step 2

NBESS will work with you to help determine your needs, and offers free consultation services in the areas you need most.

### Step 3

Based on the outcome of your consultation, NBESS can offer a variety of customized solutions, including:

- Training, presentations, and workshops customized for your business. This could include topics such as the Business Case for Diversity, Diversity Planning, Sensitivity Training, and more.
- Referrals to local employment services or vocational programs in your area.
- Access to third-party support programs, services, and agencies.
- Assistance with recruitment, including help with hiring strategies and distribution of job postings to local employment-assistance service providers.
- Exploring wage subsidies for hiring persons with a disability.
- Further information or problem-solving as necessary. NBESS can conduct research and provide resources on the issue in question.

### Step 4

NBESS will follow up to conduct a final assessment, and further assistance with diversity planning activities can be arranged.

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