Intentions and Actions: progress made by Canadian publicly listed companies toward fulfilling their commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

MCM 740 Capstone Professional Project

Submitted by: Ebony Johnson

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Capstone Supervisor: Mark John Stewart

Department of Communications Studies, McMaster University

Faculty of Humanities

McMaster University

Abstract

This research paper examines the stated and actual progress of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) objectives by large Canadian organizations, with an emphasis on the experiences and perspectives of Black employees. It establishes DEI as a primary driver in changing organizational behaviors and creating meaningful initiatives for Black employees and other equity-deserving groups. In recent years, media exposure of racial injustice has revealed a greater need for action and the establishment of DEI departments and leaders. In this paper Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reports of leading Canadian companies are contrasted with interviews with Black employees who share what they are directly experiencing. The intention of this paper is to contribute to change efforts and directly serve as an educational source about the social and political dynamics for Black employees in corporate Canada. It investigates and analyzes how and to what degree select leading Canadian organizations have taken action to better support Black employees, or, conversely, reveal deficiencies in DEI initiatives and implementation. This approach is supported by a literature review including secondary sources and interviews of current Black employees. With a greater need for inclusivity in all work environments, corporations, and society, this paper offers valuable insight and strategies to support Black employees and other equity-deserving groups.

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Introduction

  Social injustice impacts not only the general public but also the experiences of equity-deserving groups functioning as employees within companies. As corporate internal diversity issues are increasingly exposed to the public through social media or news channels, the drive for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the workplace has intensified and is compelling organizations to demonstrate their commitment and to put measures in place. Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives within organizations are still in their nascent stages of defining and implementing a genuine embrace of diverse groups. The effective communication and implementation of organizational support is imperative to facilitate meaningful change and produce discernible progress in fostering a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace environment. There was visible corporate action "following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, when numerous companies (such as Microsoft, Uber, Cisco, IBM) ended their silence and joined Ben & Jerry's in issuing statements supporting the Black community" (Corrington et al., 2022, p. 700). Yet, many challenges remain in how various groups - whether marginalized or not - comprehend, endorse, and engage with the growing necessity for diversity, equity, and inclusion within the workplace.

  Black employees have faced many challenges, thus it is important to consider how they are perceiving and experiencing the actualization of the pledges of organizational support for DEI that have been proclaimed by their employers. The study of large public corporations is particularly illuminating because there is a significant amount of source material to reference, and larger organizations have both a bigger spotlight on them as well as the economies of scale and resources to lead larger change efforts. Although many organizations profess to uphold DEI principles and deliver a positive employment experience, each institution interprets DEI

differently. For example, TD Bank focuses on diversity and inclusion through their fundamental values of being committed to a barrier-free culture for everyone including customers, colleagues and communities (TD Bank, 2023). In contrast, CIBC focuses on providing an inclusive banking environment by investing in their leadership capabilities and practices of inclusive talent management (CIBC, 2023). Despite these measures, the ongoing potential for Black employees to experience what Corrington et al. (2022) calls the "concept of 'embodied threat' – apprehensions that they might personally face harm due to their identity" (p. 700), warrants examination.

In Maiorescu-Murphy's (2020) analysis, "researchers contend that by allocating resources to specific causes over others, corporations shape diversity according to their business interests, intruding upon a realm traditionally reserved for governments and elected officials". There are many corporate challenges to enacting DEI efforts, such as categorizing diverse groups and prioritizing some over others, which can undermine the authenticity of fostering an diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment, particularly when it aligns more with the organization's immediate benefits. The pivotal events surrounding George Floyd's tragic demise thrust the inclusivity of Black employees into the spotlight, yet the uncertainty surrounding enduring commitments to DEI for Black employees warrants investigating the intentions and actions of leading Canadian organizations.

In an article from The Globe and Mail, Shellene Drakes-Tull (2022) discusses the risks faced by Black employees in fully expressing themselves within their organizations. She questions the dissonance between the frequent claims of organizations providing an environment where employees can authentically be themselves, and the actuality of the situation. The

presence of such statements, for example, in job advertisements, does not always align with the realities Black employees experience. Drakes-Tull quotes Tanya Sinclair, founder of Black Human Resources Professionals of Canada, who explains that "bringing our full selves to work essentially means you are able to be yourself" without having to modify speech, accent, or appearance to conform to the predominant workplace culture (Drakes-Tull, The Globe and Mail, 2022). An article from Randstad, explains the use of code-switching still being used in corporate Canada today. Code switching "refers to a person changing their behaviour, way of speaking, appearance, or self expression, to fit in or to make others feel more comfortable" (Randstad Interm Inc., 2020). This is still prevalent behavior for some Black employees and equity-deserving groups in their current jobs. More so, "ethnic people often feel intense pressure to look and act like others in their workplace to be treated fairly and held to the same standard" such as a restaurant worker at the Art Gallery of Ontario being told her "hair could scare customers" (Francis, 2020). These instances illustrate some of the DEI issues that can persist within organizations, despite their formal declarations and policies pertaining to DEI.

This paper scrutinizes DEI initiatives within select prominent organizations in Canada, concerning the experiences of Black employees. It will seek to determine the significance, or potential lack thereof, of meaningful DEI initiatives. Additionally, an organizational analysis was conducted to discern the changes that Black employees have observed as a result of significant recent social injustice events, such as the tragic killing of George Floyd.

Research Problem

Within numerous Canadian organizations, the pursuit of diverse representation and equitable and inclusive workplaces continues to reveal disparities affecting Black employees and other equity deserving groups. These disparities arise from various intersecting factors. The concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion remain in a state of evolution within many organizations, with varying interpretations and implications depending on the context. The Black Young Professionals (BYP) Network (2023) states, "diversity and inclusion, microaggressions, and career advancements have different meanings depending on who you're speaking with."

Reported experiences of Black employees in such organizations demonstrate that the notion of "diversity and inclusion" itself is experienced differently by different people. This perspective is validated further throughout this paper in interviews with Black employees. The communication and implementation of diversity and inclusion strategies within organizations can profoundly influence the social dynamics of the workplace, yielding either positive or negative outcomes. For some, a significant turning point occurred following the "mass resignation of 2021," magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic's exacerbation of existing issues faced by Black workers (BYP Network, 2023). These existing issues can derive from the simple act of employee engagement and practices. The BYP Network reports the ongoing issue of Black employees "not having access to upward mobility in their organization" regarding professional development and mentoring (2023). Rather, for Black employees, compared to their "white counterparts, they do not have the same relationships with senior leadership" (BYP Network, 2023). However, not all organizations merely treated diversity and inclusion as obligatory tasks when awareness heightened. In certain cases, there emerged an undue burden on Black employees to symbolize

their entire race or ethnicity as a token of "change" toward inclusion. This concept is evident through organizations asking Black senior or mid-level employees to lead or actively participate in DEI initiatives, often as a responsibility over and above their primary jobs, and without commensurate compensation. This can hinder the progression of a successful deployment of DEI initiatives if Black employees do not see participation and effort from their counterparts. Furthermore, communication and information about DEI initiatives may not be disseminated or adequately followed through by every organization. Regrettably, despite many organizations vocally emphasizing the significance of these matters in their public declarations, some demonstrated only meager efforts dedicated to diversity and inclusion (BYP Network, 2022).

Certain leading Canadian organizations have initiated substantive steps such as developing extensive DEI initiatives and creating educational resources for internal stakeholders. The effective execution of these practices plays a pivotal role in fostering a collective belief among Black employees and other diverse staff that they are valued and seen as genuinely contributing to the company's success.

This research paper assesses the actions and implementations behind DEI initiatives in organizations that have impacted Black employee communities. Initiatives can either increase an organization's ability to create a healthy diverse workplace or hinder future progression. This paper evaluates distinct facets including leadership, corporate social responsibility, stakeholder theory, and other relevant aspects, to comprehensively determine whether organizations are genuinely embodying the principles they have pledged to uphold. Despite a multitude of organizations declaring their importance of diverse and inclusive efforts, progressive change across Canadian publicly listed companies is still very mixed.

Research Questions

RQ1 – How and to what extent is DEI stated as priority among leading Canadian publicly listed companies?

This question seeks to understand how organizations are expressing their DEI perspectives, the degree to which they state it matters to them, and the actions that they have taken and are intending to take to make meaningful progress toward advancing DEI.

RQ2 – How and to what extent do the actions of leading public Canadian organizations live up to their stated commitments related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in support of Black employees?

This question focuses on accountability and impact of DEI in Canadian companies. This question seeks to draw a contrast with RQ1 to understand whether the stated DEI principles and action of organizations are actually being manifested, and what the results and outcomes are of efforts that have been taken, with an emphasis on the personal perspectives of Black employees.

Research Methods

This study includes a literature review consisting of scholarly sources from a review of public relations materials published by organizations and strategic communications academic sources. The literature includes supportive information about DEI data, research, and theories spanning from 2020 to 2023. The sections cover the following topics:

- *Talent attraction, retention, outcomes, and satisfaction;*

- *Representation in leadership;*

- *DEI as part of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) and organizational activities;*

- *Perceptions of external stakeholders, and related implications;*

- *and DEI as a part of strategic communications.*

The following organizations were reviewed:

- Canadian Banks – TD Bank, RBC Bank, CIBC Bank, Scotiabank

- Canadian retail organizations – Loblaws, Canadian Tire Corporation.

- For contrast, public sector organizations – Toronto Peel District School Board and Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board.

Primary research was conducted through 8 interviews and took a qualitative approach to observe and identify different factors of DEI practices from each organization that reflected participants' experiences. This qualitative approach focuses on the "individual's experiences and perspectives at a level of depth that is highly detailed and nuanced of each participant" (Wallwey & Kajfez, 2023, p. 1). In this research, individuals were pre-evaluated as potential participants

through LinkedIn, where visual and descriptive information provided publicly by individuals on their accounts were used to determine if potential participants were Black. Potential participants were then messaged on LinkedIn and provided a brief paragraph about the study and parameters of their participation.

As sourcing participants only on LinkedIn did not reach all ideal candidates, the snowball sampling method was also used as it is "suitable to find unattainable populations," (Naderifar et al. 2017, p. 2). Using the snowball sampling method, speaking to participants before and after the interview regarding the research topic resulted in a few participants providing other professional connections as potential candidates. All snowball method referrals accepted the offer of participating in the study.

Along with a qualitative approach, mixed methods were also used as a tool to create meaningful "integrative qualitative stakeholder engagement methods with quantitative outcomes-focused approaches to promote an integrative thinking" (Ivankova, 2023, p. 1). This mixed method conducted in each interview consisted of describing to the participants in advance where the research idea originated from and how it was "shaped by unique historical developments" (Ivankova, 2023, p.1). George Floyd's murder was given as a focal point to understand how the landscape has shifted for Black employees in the corporate world. This provided an "in-depth exploration of the users' experiences and viewpoints as well as a comprehensive treatment of the problem from multiple angles and multiple perspectives" (Ivankova, 2023, p.1). This research was actioned through individual interviews and analyzed so that "the researcher may directly interact with participants to discover aspects of phenomena" (Carter et al., 2023, p. 1). Each interview was between 30-45 minutes using the McMaster University Zoom platform and recorded.

Literature Review

The literature review in this paper provides an in-depth exploration of the Black experience within the corporate landscape of Canada, shedding light on the evolution of perspectives and framing of DEI. Key themes include equal opportunities, and being surrounded by an environment that provides a healthy sense of belonging. This paper delves into the ways these social structures manifest across different organizations. A notable transformation has occurred wherein companies, driven by external pressures to engage in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and adopt an ethical approach to diversity, have begun to acknowledge societal concerns raised by minority and ethnic groups that might not traditionally represent primary stakeholder demographics (Maiorescu-Murphy, 2020, p. 6). This type of literature provides theoretical approaches ranging from common DEI practices in organizations and strategies used in stakeholder engagement. This literature also explores the leadership characteristics that drive organizational change in relations to DEI initiatives. Lastly, this literature touches on environmental, social, and governance reports (ESG) and statistics that have been provided about Black employees in Canadian organizations.

This review aims to deepen the comprehension of the efforts Canadian organizations specifically are undertaking to enhance their treatment of Black employees and other DEI areas that require further attention. Within the Canadian organizational landscape, a heightened emphasis on DEI is essential to Black employees, other equity-deserving groups, and external stakeholders that support the need to implement initiatives. Exploring DEI practices should encompass supportive leadership and an ongoing commitment to educate publics on challenges faced by equity-deserving groups. The convergence of DEI plays a pivotal role in shaping the

outcomes derived from effective leadership implementation, talent attraction, communication strategies, and stakeholder backing. This intricate relationship is explored by leveraging scholarly literature and supplementary sources.

Talent attraction, retention, outcomes, and satisfaction

Cultural effectiveness within an organization becomes evident through the visibility of diverse groups across all hierarchical levels. Another indicator lies in diverse groups exhibiting a low turnover rate within the organization, coupled with an equitable transition to different roles, especially advanced roles. As articulated by Matt Gonzales from the Society for Human Resource Management (2022), "potential new hires will browse your company's public-facing platforms and marketing materials, which should feel authentic and include inclusive imagery and culturally competent language" (Gonzales, SHRM, 2022).

While a high retention rate for Black employees and other diverse groups is a positive step for any organization, certain external events can disrupt the cultural work environment. This was clearly illustrated as the "COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the heightened trauma of racial injustice [which] impacted the physical and mental well-being of minority workers, leading individuals of color to consider leaving or resigning from their positions" (Gonzales, SHRM, 2022).

In the realm of ongoing research pertaining to outcomes for internal and external stakeholders, as well as the underrepresentation and challenges faced by minority practitioners, there remains significant work to be accomplished. Roxana D. Maiorescu-Murphy (2022) underscores that "much remains to be explored concerning the specific public relations functions that inform corporate diversity, as well as the enactment of best practices and subsequent

stakeholder reactions" (p. 1). Furthermore, the outcomes arising from corporations' DEI initiatives and practices still fall short of the ideal narrative presented for Canadian Black professionals.

Nadine Spencer, a contributor to the Toronto Star, shares her perspective on her experiences in corporate Canada. Spencer recounts that she believed each corporation to be a meritocratic ecosystem where the hardest workers who patiently waited would be rewarded with larger salaries and higher titles (Toronto Star, 2022). However, the reality she encountered brought disappointment; Spencer asserts that the "glass ceiling remains firmly in place, with visible minorities holding only 8.3 percent of CBCA (Canada Business Corporate Act) governed board seats in 2022" (Toronto Star, 2022). With such a low percentage, it becomes understandable why certain organizations persist in maintaining social barriers and lacking inclusivity at higher executive levels. Spencer exemplifies the outcomes of minor progress and change, compounded by "entrenched barriers of entry and exclusionary beliefs and practices" that persist today (Toronto Star, 2022). This disparity has driven many hopeful Black professionals and other diverse groups to explore alternative paths for economic advancement. More remarkably, "increasingly, they're realizing that entrepreneurship is no longer an unconventional path. According to a 2022 Intuit QuickBooks study, a staggering 2.2 million Canadians initiated new businesses over the past two years" (Toronto Star, 2022). This doesn't imply that all new businesses arise as reactions to corporate social barriers for diverse groups. Rather, minorities find it preferable to bypass social obstacles in corporations unwilling to evolve normalized social constructs. Despite the unfortunate outcomes for individuals like Nadine

Spencer, there is a slight yet meaningful progress in DEI initiatives, particularly with an increase in Black representation in senior roles across Canada.

Uhanthaen Ravilojan (2020), a contributor to the Toronto Star, discusses the census of Black representation in leading Canadian companies. Ravilojan details that among the 60 companies surveyed, only a few—CIBC, CP Retail, Brookfield Asset Management, CGI Inc., TD Bank, Emera Inc., and Enbridge—boasted Black leaders in their boardrooms or featured them on their executive-level leadership pages (Toronto Star, 2020). While this signifies a step towards inclusivity and the recognition of representation's value, the numbers remain disappointingly low. Wes Hall, a prominent Canadian Black businessman, observes that companies can indeed enhance diversity when they are resolute in their commitment (Ravilojan, Toronto Star, 2020). However, despite the numerous pledges by Canadian companies to bolster leadership diversity, substantial progress in terms of representation of Black executives or other minority groups is yet to be achieved. The transformation commences with leadership, rooted in core values that reflect an organization's commitment to equity and diversity across all employment levels.

Representation in leadership

Large organizations often convey their core values or pillars through their reports on environmental, social, and governance practices. This is one lens through which stakeholders can observe the consistent demonstration or lack thereof of these practices and the supporting social structures. These social structures can either cultivate positive or negative social behaviors that become the prevailing norm. Individuals in leadership positions within organizations bear the

ongoing responsibility of fostering a positive social environment for all employees. This leadership responsibility can either attract employees to flourish within the environment or prompt employees to seek other organizations with well-established initiatives for equity-deserving groups.

The establishment of social norms within an organization and effecting change can be a challenging endeavor, particularly in larger organizations. Seijts and Milani (2022) elaborate on Schneider's attraction-selection-attrition model to elucidate the ongoing struggle of organizational change. They emphasize that "changes in structure and process are unlikely to be effective. Structural and procedural changes occur when people's behaviors change, and people's behaviors change when different types of individuals are drawn to, chosen by, and retained within an organization" (p. 574). This is closely tied to the socio-political events and awareness of the socio-political upheavals in 2020. Many organizations felt compelled to reassess how their underrepresented groups were treated within their existing social structures. More specifically, "since the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, several organizations have committed to investing significant resources in racial equity initiatives, advocating for racial justice, and contributing to the eradication of systemic racism within their organizational culture, policies, and processes, as well as in society at large" (pg. 574). These socio-political considerations regarding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are not intended to entirely overhaul organizational structures, but rather to critically evaluate the current presentation and implementation of DEI efforts.

Figure 1. Common organizational DEI Pillars

The Ivey Academy diversity, equity, and inclusion in Practice (2023).

| |
|---|
| 1.) Recognize when, where, and how to intervene to lower barriers to equality and inclusion |
| 2.) Examine your social responsibility to engage in allyship and advocacy |
| 3.) Design practical approaches to bring others along and affect positive system-level changes in your organizational structure and culture |

Leadership has the authority to shape conversations and influence normative behavior. Seijts and Milani (2020) underscore the significance of leadership in an organization and its alignment with commitment. They delve deeper, stating that "commitment refers to the level of engagement with issues relevant to oneself or the organization and the willingness to make sacrifices to achieve a goal" (p. 574). However, while this commitment may reflect the perception of many organizational leaders regarding their DEI endeavors for minority stakeholders, it may not necessarily correspond to their governance principles. For instance, a Global News article by Saba Aziz (2022) highlights the limited progress observed by some Black Canadians in the corporate sector, particularly concerning diversity in senior roles. The article features Polly Watkis, a woman of color and performance consultant at Cox Automotive, who has struggled with "imposter syndrome" for years, having to justify her presence among other managers and senior personnel (Global News, 2022). This persistent need for some Black employees in leadership positions to continually prove themselves at the table runs counter to Canada's anti-racism strategy for the corporate sector.

According to Statistics Canada's anti-racism strategy, the diversity, equity, and inclusion issues in Canada stem from "the institutionalization of Canadian institutions, policies, and practices, leading to the functional normalization or invisibility of anti-Black racism to the broader white population" (Heritage, 2021). This mistreatment has significantly constrained contemporary organizations. The lack of inclusion of Black individuals within institutions has become more pronounced, manifesting through "limited opportunities, lower socio-economic status, and higher unemployment rates" (Heritage, 2021). This normalized intersectional unfairness is especially evident in online platforms where daily social interactions involving nationally relevant issues and events occur.

The presence or absence of organizations' DEI initiatives often reflects the level of stakeholder engagement they are fostering.. Leadership characteristics play a pivotal role in any organization, and as Seijts and Milani (2022) highlight, "character is connected to personal growth, and scholars are now focusing on applying character to areas such as ethical decision-making, board governance, and leading change" (p. 575). Leadership attributes can either mold an organization into a progressive environment, committed to enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, or perpetuate the normalization of judgmental behaviors originating from leadership levels to mid-level positions. Figure 2 presents distinct leadership approaches that can evolve into larger elements of commitment required to cultivate a more inclusive DEI environment for Black employees and other minority groups. Further analysis will delve into additional concepts related to this topic.

Figure 2

Leaders character dimensions in relations to DEI initiatives and drive for organizational change, Crossan et al. (2017).
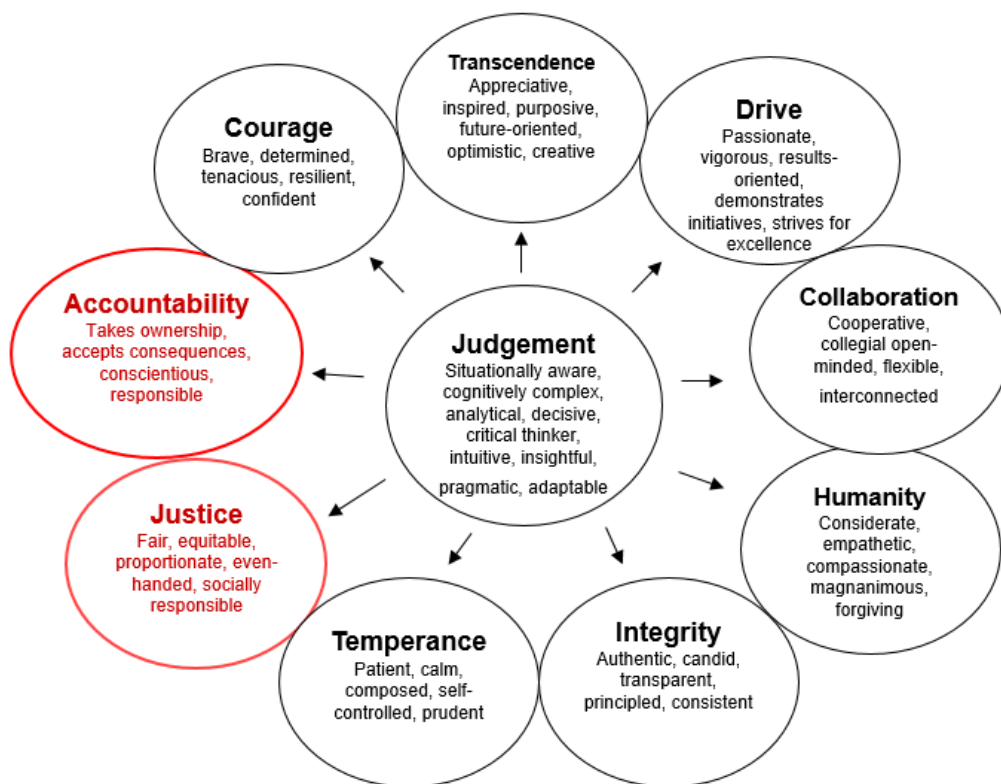
DEI as part environmental, social, and governance (ESG) and organizational activities

Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles are of utmost importance for many organizations, often encompassing three interconnected focal points: promoting health and well-being, fostering inclusive opportunities, and propelling a sustainable future (Manulife ESG Report, 2021, p.10). This deliberate interconnection facilitates the sharing of organizational goals and forecasts with both internal and external stakeholders, thereby showcasing the company's commitment to corporate social responsibility in achieving these objectives. Organizations employ the ESG information quality framework to assess their overall sustainability, spanning

innovations in products, services, community investments, and decisions related to thought leadership, advocacy, and public policy (Manulife ESG Report, 2021, p.10). To delve further, this framework can be utilized to analyze long-term trends in the communication of ESG information (Arvidsson & Dumay, 2021, p.1096). Specifically, the ESG quality framework delineates the social aspect, focusing on the organization's positioning, development, and performance, revealing the progression of initiatives, how the company outlines stakeholder engagements, and its interactions with diverse stakeholders (Arvidsson & Dumay, 2021, p.1099).

Concurrently, stakeholder theory is pivotal for understanding the intricate dynamics between stakeholder groups and organizations. Pertaining to Black employees, contemporary DEI initiatives harmonize with this theory. Black employees, regarded as a distinct unit of analysis, encompass the relationships between a business and groups or individuals who influence or are impacted by it. This stakeholder-driven perspective views businesses as networks of relationships, encompassing those with vested interests in the enterprise's activities (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001, p.309). Corporate social responsibility dictates that organizations identify and address influential social issues for their employees. An instance from Bloomberg by Ilya Banares (2020) illuminates how prominent Canadian companies, including Rogers Communication Inc. and Enbridge Inc., commit to the 3/5% target, whereas others such as Royal Bank of Canada and Sun Life Financial Inc. are reviewing the BlackNorth pledge, showcasing the nascent phase of DEI support for Black employees within top Canadian corporations (Bloomberg, 2020).

The concept of corporate initiatives benefiting the Black community within Canadian organizations emerged as a facet of corporate social responsibility in 2020. Historically,

corporate social responsibility was framed in terms of corporate social performance, encapsulating social issues pertinent to businesses (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001, p.302). Analogously, ESG is centered on the commitment to sustain, construct, and jointly realize objectives alongside an array of stakeholders. Consider Loblaws, a prominent Canadian grocery supplier, which has established an internal diversity, equity, and inclusion platform with an emphasis on training across all hierarchical levels. Loblaws underscores allyship, bias reduction, and culture building through their DEI academy. Their ESG priorities prominently spotlight representation, particularly in senior and executive positions. The organization's current diversity target, set for 2024, entails achieving 25% representation of visible minorities on the board of directors, 25% in executive positions, and 30% in management roles (Loblaws ESG Report, 2022, p.34). Furthermore, Loblaws has fortified its social priorities by providing inclusive hiring practice training to nearly 7,000 leaders (Loblaws CSR Report, 2020, p.26). By emphasizing education and training, Loblaws continually integrates DEI topics into its operations.

Social priorities also command considerable attention within top Canadian banks such as TD Canada Trust. TD commits to investing in diversity, equity, and inclusion through a resource hub facilitating the integration of these principles throughout product and service development (EquityBites, 2022). TD's ESG approach has incorporated diversity and inclusion since 2005, ensuring its alignment with business strategy (TD ESG Report, 2021, p.4). In addressing DEI concerns for Black employees, TD's initiatives encompass mentorship, equity in recruitment, and a commitment to combating unconscious bias. A mentorship program targeting the Black Experience has engaged 22 employees, with ongoing efforts slated for 2022 (TD ESG Report, 2021, p.4). The implementation of unbiased interviewing frameworks and diverse candidate pools forms the core of TD's strategy to foster equity (TD ESG Report, 2021, p.4).

Considering the Black community's corporate inclusion initiatives across diverse top Canadian organizations, it is evident that Loblaws, CIBC, RBC, and TD are taking comprehensive steps to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion. These efforts are rooted in a commitment to societal well-being and organizational growth. While challenges persist, these endeavors exemplify progress toward dismantling systemic barriers and achieving greater representation

Figure 3. *RBC's Advancing diversity and representation, (RBC ESG Report, 2022, p. 34).*
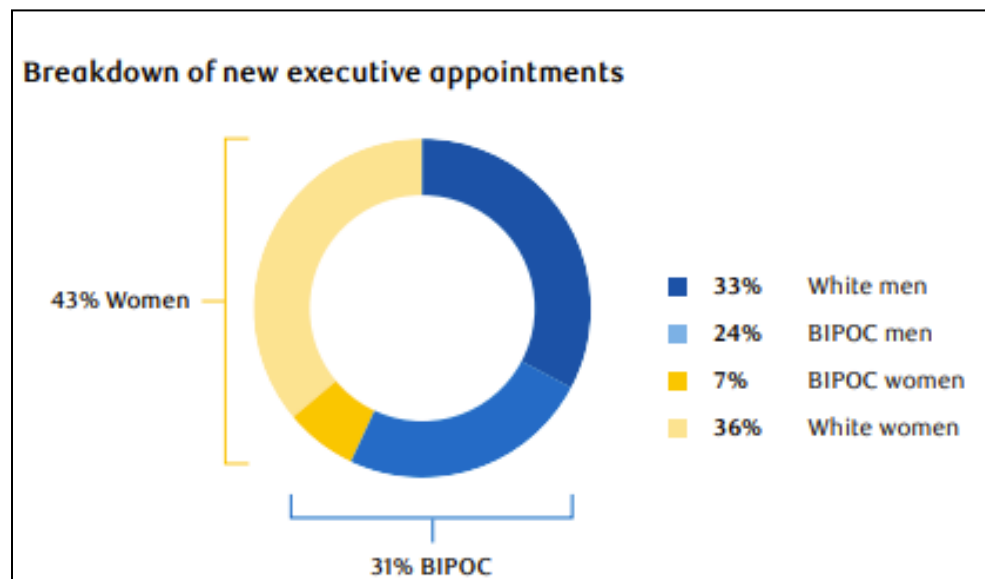
Alongside RBC, Scotiabank is a 'Canadian-headquartered bank with focus on high-quality growth markets in the Americas. Also known as a "top-five universal bank" that has excellent customer care (Scotiabank, 2023). Scotiabank's ESG report explains how their approach is about building an inclusive society, internally and externally. These actions are "embedding a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion, empowering our customers and supporting our customers" (Scotiabank ESG Report, 2022, p. 9). Scotiabank makes it their

responsibility to be what all employees are looking for in an organization. Scotiabank believes they can "promote equity in their business, share their values, provide a sense of greater purpose, and support allyship" (p. 9). This can create a work environment that will allow diverse groups to be their authentic selves. On Scotiabank's board of directors "50% of directors have self-identified as Black people, Indigenous people, LGBT+ people, people of Colour, People with Disabilities, and women" (p. 71). By 2025 Scotiabank would like their senior leadership to be 3.5% represented by Black people. As at 2022, Black people represent 2.8% of leadership roles (p. 71).

Scotiabank focuses on recruiting Black students, as they "attended campus events at several Canadian universities and partnered with Toronto Finance international to engage and attract Black students to the banking industry" (p. 71). Also, internal Black employees "participated in McKinsey's Black Executive Leadership and Management Accelerator programs to develop Black professionals and hone their leadership skills" (p. 71). This corporate social responsibility focuses on creating an environment that focuses on investing in current and future Black employees. More so, "the appropriate strategic imperative is to cultivate high-quality, long-term relationships with publics or stakeholders who are affected by organizational actions or make demands on the organization in relation to issues of importance to them" (Grunig, Chap 4, p. 291). There hasn't been any stated demand by diverse stakeholders in the ESG report, but such information presents an organization that wants to listen to what their internal stakeholders would like to create a diverse work environment they would like to remain in.

Canadian Tire Corporation is one of Canada's top go-to companies for "automotive, hardware, sports, leisure and housewares sectors" and includes operations of "Mark's, FGL sports, PartSource, and the Canadian operations of Party City" (Canadian Tire, 2023). In their

ESG report, Canadian Tire focuses on DEI framed by people and community. They have approached the topic of DEI through discussions with their employees, giving them a platforms to create long term strategies. Canadian Tire made it their corporate social responsibility "on September 30, 2021, hosting a company wide learning event to mark Canada's inaugural National Day for Truth and Reconciliation" (Canadian Tire ESG Report, 2021, p. 12). Although this is a great step in the right direction, their ESG report does not show distinct numbers and information about DEI initiatives for all diverse groups. It has become a standard approach for most organizations to have diversity numbers and progression for all minority groups within their organization.

Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is known as Canada's "largest and one of the most diverse school boards, and with approximately 235,000 students in 583 schools throughout Toronto" (TDSB, 2023). There is no official ESG report, but rather a Multi-Year Strategic Plan that focuses on aspects such as transforming students' learning, creating a culture for students and the staffs' well-being, and providing equitable access to learning opportunities for students and staff (TDSB, 2023). TDSB has subsections of diverse groups they focus on to create a stronger community in their schools. For example, TDSB collaborates with the Centre of Excellence for Black Students Achievement. Although this program is beneficial for students and the community, there is not any clear mention of staff members gaining access to the programs. Moreso, it would be beneficial if TDSB expressed the number of TDSB staff members who identify as Black employees or people of colour participating in programs and the number of members that accomplished it. TDSB has an equity policy community advisory committee for staff members but does not have a diversity committee that would be imperative in creating a social responsibility for the importance of diverse staff members' voices.

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB) has over "153 Catholic school facilities throughout Peel Region and Dufferin County in Canada and employs roughly 5,000 teachers." (DPCDSBS, 2023). Both Peel District School Board and Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board do not have ESG reports. They have identified different ways of supporting their staff members. DPCDSB staff members have full access to programs that assist with emotional support, legal guidance, wellness tools, and many more resources (DPCDSBS, 2023). Both organizations do not clearly present the goal of a long-term supportive relationship between stakeholders and their organization. Some aspects of support or lack thereof from current staff members will be explained in the results section of this paper.

The following companies that have been discussed in this section will be further examined through interview results, discussion, and limitations near the conclusion of this paper by current Black employees.

Perceptions of external stakeholders, and related implications

Through the ever-evolving world of social media and popular online news outlets, organizations are more visible to external stakeholders. The ability to comment publicly or indirectly discuss an organization's weaknesses or strengths has many implications. Lee and Tao (2020) explain how "researchers have agreed that employees' words can impact external publics' views of the organization through diverse channels" (p. 1). Employees have become organizations' greatest importance in strategic communication strategies and ongoing corporate social responsibility. Lee and Tao (2020) elaborate on how "organizational communication on CSR reinforces favorable attitudes, purchasing intentions, trust, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth among the public, including consumers' (p.1). Such external communication can

be presented in various ways to external stakeholders. For example, a 2021 Twitter sentiment note from human behavior researcher Amanda Bartley posted that "Canadian organizations are looking for their Black employees to lead Black recruitment, fix Black retention, plan Black History Month, and become anti-racism trainers, all while managing their full-time jobs" (Twitter, 2021). Although Amanda Bartley did not post about her own place of employment, there were still a fair number of reactions to her opinion. Bartley's post received over 284 retweets, 50 Quotes, 1,483 Likes, and 24 Bookmarks (Twitter, 2021). Such a high number of reactions to a post explains what Lee and Tao (2020) would define as "consumers relying on a company's employees as a credible and trustworthy source of CSR information" (p. 2).

When focusing on the aspects of Black employees, external stakeholders often might only rely on the perception of current Black employees to determine if they would like to join the organization. However, "many studies assessing diversity communication focus on websites or CSR reports, with relatively less attention to social media communication" which can possibly present gaps that employees and external stakeholders can see (Zhang, 2022, p. 1). Xiaochen Angela Zhang (2022) was able to analyze the sentiments and external stakeholder engagement on social media platform Facebook regarding internal stakeholder reviews of organizations via Glassdoor (p. 2). Companies from Amazon to waste management firms were assessed on their Facebook pages, and the amount of DEI posts and percentage of DEI engagement. Zhang's analysis "indicated that corporate IDEA (Inclusivity, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility) communication focuses primarily on gender diversity and racial ethnicity diversity, which perhaps applied to the majority type of their stakeholders" (Zhang, 2022, p.9).

Other related implications of how external stakeholders' perceptions are formulated, can derive from the actions of how crisis communication is implemented. Depending on the topic

regarding DEI or other related challenges in an organization, internal stakeholder relationships are crucial to the perception of external stakeholders. van der Meer et al. (2017), discuss the importance of organizations "adopting the principles of stakeholder theory, will lead organizations to engage more frequently in proactive and/or accommodating crisis management behavior, explaining why stakeholder relationships can help organizations prevent crisis escalation and recover more successful for them" (p. 427). When an organization has a good stakeholder relationship, unity in external sentiments that are accessible to external stakeholders are considered information rather than complaints. More so, a good stakeholder relationship diminishes uncertainty that external stakeholders may have and a "collective understanding will help minimize confusion, panic, reputational damage" for any organization (van der Meer et al., 2017, p. 427).

Although good stakeholder relationships in organizations present a beneficial conduit for the betterment of all employees, it can be difficult for organizations to measure their relationship until there is a crisis at hand. For example, George Floyd's murder highlighted the topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion for many organizations in a way that some were not prepared for. Moreover, "many organizations make positive assumptions about their stakeholders, only to find they were mistaken when hit by a crisis" or political situation (van der Meet et al., 2017, p. 427). There are different external pressures that can shape an organization's response. Figure 4 – maps out ways in which organizations may look at the type of external stakeholders, and how to navigate.

Figure 4. *Stakeholder types and different pressures (van der Meet et al. 2017, p. 428).*

Diffused Publics
(External consequences)

Crisis in news media, environmentalists, and citizens at large

Functional Publics
(Organizations input and output)

Employees unions, customers, crisis victims

Enabling Publics
(Organizations resources to exist)

Shareholders or management

DEI as part of strategic communications

Holtzhausen & Zerfass (2011), discuss the multitude of ways in which organizations

consider a successful way of strategically communicating their DEI initiatives to stakeholders.

While the concept of strategic communication continues to be refined, "it makes sense to find

common ground by accentuating the common and core attributes of professional

communication—the use of communications to reach the overarching goals of a specific

organization or social actor" (p. 813). Some organizations present their DEI initiatives in the

"meso level, which refers to theoretical analyses at the organizational level of practice," while

other organizations may present their strategic communication on the "micro level, which

addresses the application of theories to understand how communication takes place in the

strategic context" (p. 813). Strategic communication has many avenues that leads to "deliberate

and purposive communication agents enact in the public sphere on behalf of a communicative

entity to reach set goals" (p. 815). On the topic of DEI strategy, stakeholders within their

organizations may or may not have the liberty of expressing their thoughts on initiatives that are set out to supposedly support their relations with their company.

Maiorescu-Murphy (2020) explains that "today, power relations have shifted from management to well-connected online users who have the tools needed to expose current corporation practices" (p. 7). Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives can be difficult to normalize in corporations where leaders are visible at stating their intentions for change but have not implemented any actionable strategy to propel any initiatives. Social leaders such as Wes Hall, executive chairman and founder of Toronto-based Kingsdale Advisors, launched the Black North initiative to catalyze social change, starting in Canada's boardrooms. (Seijts & Milani, 2022, p. 580). This initiative was an external strategy to put words into action and a useful starting point for Canadian organizations who may not know how to navigate DEI progress and lead organizational evolution.

Interview Results and Analysis

This section presents an analysis of 8 separate Canadian organizations through the perspectives of Black employees as interviewed by the researcher. Each participant was asked 10 questions pertaining to DEI initiatives and their personal experiences. Each question is presented with information that has been anonymously answered. There is a mixed method of presenting the interview results, as some interview questions were answered more in depth than others. These interview results will offer a clearer understanding of what a small percentage of Black employees experience and also need in their current workplace.

Interview Question 1: How and to what extent does your organization prioritize DEI in the workplace?

This question allowed the participant to express their perspective of what DEI prioritization is perceived as, in contrast to what organizations are presenting to the public.

Peel Toronto District School Board makes it their priority to have training through modules online ahead of the school year and in their staff monthly meetings. The interviewee is a teacher that works for a Mimico, Ontario school, and identifies as one out of the two Black employees in the school. The principal is very aware of racial biases and the ways in which they can present themselves amongst staff members and towards kids. The Peel School Board prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion to continue to push a positive and inclusive environment forward.

In contrast, Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board is focused on their early progress regarding their equity and inclusive education policy. Dufferin-Peel Catholic Board interviewee is a Black professional working as an equity officer. The interviewee is consistently

seeing gaps in the way DPCDSB is regulating their inclusion policy that was first initiated in

1993. Moreover, the interviewee stated that today there are still so many gaps in the ways in

which the board is implementing policies. DPCDSB currently does not have an anti-racism

policy, nor has there even been an equity action plan for the board. The interviewee has plans as

an equity officer to help change this narrative with her System Equity officer and has an equity

roadmap in place for the future. DPCDSB does not have DEI structured in their plans and

initiatives happen on a one-off basis. There aren't enough resources in terms of staffing an equity

office to execute DEI as a priority. This results in gaps in execution and overall ability to

facilitate an DEI environment correctly for staff and students.

Assessing some of Canada's top banks and their Black employees, the following

results were presented for interview Q1.

Canadian Banks	DEI prioritization based on interviewee's perspective	Interviewee's experience
TD Bank Interview	- TD is vocal about internal support for DEI prioritization. - Their external support is known to be diversity driven. - TD has invested money in supporting the new TD segment. This segment is focused on financial literacy in the Black community. Not only is support for Black employees, but Black customers.	- Interviewee claimed that it is visible that TD makes it a priority for DEI initiatives compared to other organizations. Also, TD has been taking steps to prioritize specifically Black initiatives. - There has been a dramatic increase in the TD segment for the Black community in the organization and it as perceived as beneficial. - Interviewee claims that Black employees see a lot of community-based initiatives and sponsorships for the Black community.
CIBC Bank Interview	- In recent years, CIBC created groups for Black employees. Known as the CBEN (CIBC) Black Employee Network.	- Interviewee claims the CBEN recieves supports financially. - The CBEN network attends meetings in different departments.

	- CBEN facilitate mentorship programs. - Interviewee believes there are still some issues remaining. This is further explained in the interviewee's experience. - CIBC is giving opportunities to Black owned businesses to get loans at a preferential rate.	- CBEN also participates in activities that CIBC's different departments hold. - This network was created in the last 10 years - The interviewee claims there has never been a program/network like this before. - More Black employees are receiving more significant roles, managerial and VPs. - Interviewee believe CIBC is taking DEI more seriously because it has become a political subject. - Interviewee believes after the Black Lives Matter movement and COVID-19, her organization wanted to give opportunity where it wasn't exercised frequently. Moreso, in senior level roles in the past the would not been able to get in the past. - CIBC continues to have some issues depending on the department you work in.
RBC Bank Interview	- RBC has prioritized DEI efficiently in the past 2 years. They promote their drive for DEI very well.	- Interviewee has seen more changes with DEI initiatives in recent years. More than he's ever seen in his career.
Scotiabank Bank Interview	- Scotiabank does a great job with DEI prioritization and runs an active diversity and inclusion committee.	- Interviewee works in Scotiabank's capital markets and wants to get more involved with their diversity and inclusion committee. - The capital markets displays diversity in different ways, especially diversity for women. Within the last year, interviewee is seeing more employees that are Black women.

Assessing two of Canada's top retail organizations and their Black employees, the

following results were presented for interview Q1.

Canadian Retail Organizations	DEI prioritization based on interviewee's perspective	Interviewee's experience
Canadian Tire Corporation	- Canadian Tire started to create specific DEI reports within the last year. There are specific workshops Canadian Tire has for DEI. - They conduct surveys and discuss DEI initiatives.	- Interviewee has only been with Canadian Tire for a year. It is diffcult to gauge how much Canadian Tire priportizes DEI.
Loblaws	- There are many available initiatives for women.	- Interviewee believes Loblaws is making a conscious decision to prioritize DEI initiatives.

	- There are Black employee resource groups, but these groups are new to the organization. - Loblaws connects Black History Month with their Black Technology professional group. They have had lunch and learns, and guest speakers.	

The second interview question *Q2 – asked how and to what extent are DEI initiatives specifically pertaining to Black employees, as stated focus for your organization?* This question sought a more detailed answer about what each organization is doing for Black employees specifically.

For the Peel Toronto District School Board, the interviewee discussed celebrating Black History Month as her organization's primary initiative for Black employees. Although many organizations recognize or celebrate Black History Month to some extent, PTDSB also integrates Black History into teaching lessons for the students. There have been times when the interviewee has participated in meetings with other staff members brainstorming other ways to integrate Black History month. Unfortunately, there is no clear policy or regulation on when and how Black History Month or Black topics are introduced in the classroom. There is still the need for Black employees to present their own history and integrate initiatives into their own teaching. The interviewee and another Black colleague put together a Black History Month Museum in the library so that kids, family, and staff can learn and celebrate Black culture. The principal in the interviewee's school, tries to bring the topic of racism forward to the staff members. For example, the interviewee claimed that last year the principal gave all staff members a book about anti-racism and requested them to read it individually. Additionally, the book was used to help staff members bring the topic of anti-racism into the classroom.

In contrast, Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board does not specifically focus on DEI initiatives pertaining to Black employees, according to the interviewee. The school board has had a hard time naming anti-Black racism and putting it into words to describe what that experience is. The interviewee adds that the school board has a hard time responding to it as well. The only time DEI pertaining to Black employees are focused is through other employees from other racialized backgrounds. The Board does not have employee support groups for Black employees. Black employees must create those spaces by finding support within other Black employees that understand social barriers or other issues that may happen in the workplace.

In terms of the four Canadian Banks, there are similarities as TD Bank, CIBC, RBC, and Scotiabank have some sort of prioritization for DEI initiatives for Black employees. TD Bank has taken steps to prioritize specifically Black initiatives, especially supporting new segments such as financial literacy for the Black community, Black colleagues, and Black customers. For CIBC, the interviewee explained how powerful it is to have the Black Employee Network that can bring issues to the forefront for Black employees. The fact that it is just for Black employees, but anyone can join makes it open. CIBC also has their own webpage dedicated to DEI initiatives for Black people. Like CIBC, RBC has a Black professionals' network. The group of Black employees support each other with career aspirations and help with promotions. Before COVID-19 there was an RBC program that was similar to the Black professional network, but it was more focused towards all visible minorities. The interviewee said there was no direction with this program until RBC decided to produce the Black professionals' network. Lastly, at Scotiabank unfortunately there aren't many initiatives outside of Black History Month which are communicated to Black employees. Sometimes, there may be an internal webcast for Black History Month, but that is the most focus Scotiabank has for Black employee DEI initiatives.

Leading Canadian retailer Canadian Tire Corporation has an employee resource group for Black employees. The group leads their own initiatives outside of Black History Month. Outside of surveys that may be conducted internally for the organization to understand how their Black employees feel, there are no formal initiatives being actioned. Lastly, similarly to Canadian Tire Corporation, Loblaws presents a February Black History Month initiative. Loblaws does not action any DEI initiatives outside of February pertaining to Black employees in their organization.

This section highlights interview responses to DEI initiatives and the hiring/promoting process for Black employees within their organization.

Q3 – *As a result of DEI initiatives, what are some positive outcomes you have seen in your organization?*

Q4 – *How and to what extent has there been progression in hiring and promoting Black employees across job levels?*

Organization	Positive outcomes of DEI initiatives (Q3)	Progression in hiring and promoting Black employees (Q4)
CIBC Bank	- In the last few years CIBC paid more attention to the interviewee. This included an increase in pay, how they speak to Black employees and other diverse groups. - There has also been a shift in how CIBC talks through certain issues that arise. - Majority of employees are learning and being educated on racial issues or other social barriers for diverse groups.	- There has been a significant increase of Black people in high positions. For example, CIBC's law department employed an executive level Black woman. Such actions would have not happened 10 years ago. - There has been an increase of Black employees that are senior level executive directors.
RBC Bank	- Question 3 was a tough question to answer for the interviewee. More so, he got his promotion before it was prevalent to identify the need for diversity.	- There are not too many Black employees at the senior level. It all depends on the level - commercial or community managers are more diverse.

	- Interviewee received a leadership position back in 2010 and was the only Black leader. - When these DEI initiatives came into fruition, he stepped down as being a leader - There was additional responsibility that required too much.	- There are only two Black employees as regional vice president and higher - Interviewee claims any role higher than VP usually does not have any sign of Black employees or any other diverse groups.
TD Bank	- There has been more attention to underrepresented communities. - Moreso all of TD's DEI initiatives for each mnority group are prioritzed especially in marginalized community. - Having more employees interested in working for TD based on TDs branding for initiatives internally and externally	- The interviewee sees progress in hiring Black employees. - The interviewee just hired a Black employee, as his department was looking for a level 9 business analyst. In fact, the new hire originally applied for level 8, but interviewee said that the candidate was fitting for level 9. - TD has an appetite for hiring Black talent. And managers do not have any push backs when it comes to diversity in talent recruitment.
Scotiabank	- Scotiabank made a pledge that 2.5% of all hires should be Black professionals.	- Interviewee has seen a lot of Black employees in mid and junior roles - There is only one Black employee that they know of that is at an executive level. - When Scotiabank talks about diversity, it can be perceived as geared towards women in leadership.
Peel Toronto District School Board	- PTDSB focuses more on investing in how they can help students learn about equity rather than the staff members. - Interviewee discusses the use of equity bins that are used in each classroom to promote books to address racism.	- There are many Black principals and teachers in the PTDSB, but it is very neighborhood based. Ex. South of Mimico the population has majority White people, so there aren't a lot of Black staff members or principals.
Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board	- DPCDSB focuses on their Black student based rather than Black staff members. - 2023 is the first year of the school board providing Black graduation coaches.	- There has been extremely limited progress on the hiring and promoting of Black employees. DPCDSB is currently waiting for results of a Ministry of Education mandated demographic survey for staff. - There are many racialized staff members that are over-qualified. They might be

	- Serving the needs of Black students and supporting those who struggle with social barriers. - There is a student-led professional development training program that had 12 Black students volunteer in developing an anti-Black racism session. - The School Board had mandatory anti-Black racism training for all principals, all VPs and approximately over 80 senior administrators participated.	staff members but they're not administrators, senior admin, or other managerial roles.
Loblaws	- Loblaws partnered with the Black Technology Professional group and had speakers express their experience in those sessions.	- There is a small amount of Black employees in the interviewees department - In terms of leadership, there are no senior or executive level Black employees.
Canadian Tire Corporation	- The interviewee does not see any initiatives to create positive outcomes. Even after the 2020 George Floyd situation, the interviewee claimed it's been the same workplace environment.	- Canadian Tire Corporation is trying to hire more diversely but the interviewee does not see much of this. - The organization hired a small portion but it's not a regular action being implemented. Moreso, most promotions in recent 6 to 8 months have been non-Black promotions.

Interview Q5 focuses on the gap between how an organization speaks about DEI as a priority and the interviewees' experience.

Q5 – *Do you perceive that there is a gap between how your organization speaks about DEI as a priority and your actual experience as an employee?*

In the Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board, there are a lot of gaps when it comes to DEI priorities. The interviewee can name a list of examples stemming from the lack of public acknowledgment about the overpopulation of one diverse group in comparison to the others. Schools are supposed to be welcoming to all, but the interviewee believes there needs to be a balance. They were concerned about the absence of an equity plan from the board. Setting the

tone from the top is important. If this gap in DEI priorities and communication continues, staff members are left to their own interpretation.

Unfortunately, this gap will continue to make other staff members do what they feel most comfortable doing or not, because there is nothing tying them to do anything. Similarly, Peel Toronto District School Board has a lot of ideas and concepts but does not provide their staff members with the correct tools to execute with their colleagues and their students. This leaves room for their own agenda or absence of focusing on DEI initiatives and how they are interpreted. The interviewee believes the gap is inevitable.

Regarding the four banks, Scotiabank has made DEI initiatives a priority. There obviously will be some aspects where there is unfair treatment and those who are meant to get promoted might not. It all depends on who you're dealing with in the bank. The interviewee from RBC could agree with the dependability of who you're working with. The interviewee explained this question was hard to answer, as he was privileged to be the Black employee to fit the box for over the last 15 years. More so, the tokenized employee that fit the diversity bubble for his department. He believes RBC is still doing a lot of things for self-serving reasons, and at the end of the day they must keep their people happy. TD on the other hand, has introduced a new pillar completely – a segment called the Black Experience Pillar. It supports Black businesses and financial literacy. This is just one of the few examples of TD putting their money where their mouth is. TD interviewee feels completely supported by TD DEI initiatives. In contract, Scotiabank is perceived to have a big gap in their DEI priorities according to the interviewee. Scotiabank may send emails publicly but internally the interviewee does not see much of the work to make DEI a priority.

Loblaws, according to the interviewee, doesn't have a gap for DEI priorities but rather nothing at all. As an organization they've never come out to communicate to their stakeholders internally or externally that they have a target to hire a certain demographic or specific diverse group. When it pertains to Black History Month, a speaker may say their goal is to hire Black employees, but the interviewee has never seen their words become solid actions. Lastly, this interview question was skipped for the Canadian Tire Corporation employee because there were no DEI initiatives to begin with regarding diverse groups and Black employees.

Interview Q8 assesses what aspects of DEI leading Canadian organizations need to focus on as their corporate social responsibility for a better environment that diverse employees, specifically for Black professionals need. These are the answers from each interviewee.

Q8 – *What do you believe your employer needs to do differently to create a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive workplace, especially for Black employees?*

Organization	What do you believe your employer needs to do differently to create a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive workplace especially for Black employees? (Q8)
Canadian Tire Corporation	1. Hiring more Black professionals. a. Especially hiring Black professionals from co-op programs or campus recruitment. 2. Building programs that cater to diverse groups internally. 3. Creating leadership programs for minority groups. 4. Canadian Tire Corporation having their own Black employee network. 5. Having C-suite and senior executives participate in conversations and demonstrate that they care. 6. Senior leaders taking accountability and ownership on specific goals when it comes to DEI. 7. Allowing Black professionals to have equitable access to higher positions.
Loblaws	1. Crafting a viable path for more Black professional senior leadership or executives roles. 2. Creating mentorship programs to chat with colleagues that have the same diverse backgrounds.
Scotiabank	1. Unfortunately, Scotiabank does not have specific DEI initiatives for Black professionals the way they have specific DEI initiatives for indigenous groups and women. It is all lumped together.

	2. Scotiabank needs to be more vocal about what the organization is doing for marginalized groups. 3. It would be great to have someone in a senior position that is a Black employee and is able to give advise on how to navigate career development and support. 4. Scotiabank does not have any networking events geared to Black professionals internally.
TD Bank	This question was skipped
RBC	This question was skipped
CIBC	1. CIBC needs celebrate everyone and make it known not just for Black History Month. 2. CIBC should have courses to learn about Black history and the issues they went through. 3. CIBC made it a priority to do a 6-part course to learn about the indigenous history and all employees had to pass that course – it should be the same for Black history.

Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board	1. DPCDSB should start preparing their environment for Black people and Black voices.
	2. DPCDB should stop excusing behavior that should be addressed regarding non-Black staff members.
	    a. Furthermore, being intentional about offensiveness through others either saying or indirectly doing something that may be offensive to Black staff members and or students.
	3. DPCDSB should find ways to make the environment welcoming to current and future Black employees.
	4. Adding accountability and embedding it in staff members performance review.
	    a. For example, auditing staff for reasons such as how much or how little are they contributing to DEI in the workplace.
	5. DPCDSB creating coaching sessions for staff members that may have handled a situation regarding diversity poorly.

Peel Toronto District School Board	1. PTDSB should follow up more often to see what each staff member is doing in their classroom. a. This is also important on a personal level. PTDSB puttings interest understanding the perspectives of staff members regarding anti-racism and diversity. 2. PTDSB addressing racism and following through with the 0-tolerance policy where either a student is suspended and or a staff member is spoken to. 3. Offering opportunities to Black teachers in any school's neighborhood.

Q9 – *Professional development can be seen as a way of supporting Black employees and other visible minorities. How and to what extent are you receiving support in your professional career?* Interview Q9 was asked to assess if the interviewees feel supported in their professional career.

Organizations	Professional development can be seen as a way of supporting Black employees and other visible minorities. How and to what extent are you receiving support in your professional career (Q9)
Canadian Tire Corporation	1. The interviewee feels like they are receiving enough support. She has not felt left behind. Although because there was so many changes happening in the past few years, professional development support was precvieved as filling in a check box. 2. Canadian Tire Corporation frequently lacks communication and change in their social structure to give space for Black voices.
Loblaws	1. Interviewee believes she has to figure out her career on her own. There is no internal support where leadership can guide her in the right direction. Interviewee must reach out and network.
Scotiabank	1. Interviewee's team is very supportive. 2. Interviewee believes Scotiabank invests in courses for career advancements that the interviewee attends. Scotiabank also covers the cost. They believe helping their employees professional growth will benefit the bank.
TD Bank	1. TD Bank support their Black employees in a multitude of ways, from quarterly check-ins, weekly phone calls, and 1:1s with direct managers. 2. TD Bank's quarterly check-ins are also to identify what the interviewee's career development goals are.
RBC	This question was skipped
CIBC	1. CIBC has a mentorship program, known as the CIBC Black Employee Network program. Through this program, Black employees are able to get mentored by their peers.
Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board	1. DPCDSB has nothing specific in supporting Black employees and other equity-deserving groups. 2. DPCDSB receives professional development through the ministry and its usually delivered by staff members that are in senior admin positions.
Peel Toronto District School Board	1. PTDSB veteran teachers have been the most supportive in regards to professional development. a. The veteran teachers always offer resources and have an open-door policy. These colleagues are willing to collaborate. 2. The interviewee's principal is attentive and available for support. In the past, previous principals were not involved at all.

Discussion

Many Black employees are highly educated and suitably qualified for the positions they are currently in, however they continue to face challenges in thriving and feeling highly valued. Much work remains to be done in employment settings where Black voices are not being heard and Black spaces are not being created, as an interviewee from Canadian Tire Corporation expressed in their desire for a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace. Canadian Tire Corporation has yet to create a distinct space or group for Black employees. DEI programmes should be a core element of every organization, and should not simply be just a box to tick off the corporate to-do list. There will remain barriers to talent attraction and development of Black employees if emerging talent does not have role models to emulate at higher levels. This statement was reiterated through interviewing a current Black employee of Loblaws that noted that their department did not have many Black employees in mid, senior, or executive levels.

It should not have taken the trigger of George Floyd's murder for corporations to recognise and act upon the systematic discrimination that occurs for Black employees. Unfortunately, as the public discourse has continued to evolve, many companies have now digressed back to their 'normal' operations and commitment to stated intentions has waned.

Some organizations, such as TD Bank, invest into their Black employees and external stakeholders to build connections and relationships in the Black community. Their goal is to create diverse working environments that continue to find new ways of creating inclusivity in all levels of employment. There was notable alignment between the publicly presented intentions of TD and the experience of the participating Black employee. Some organizations, such as CIBC, created an internal Black Employee Network to encourage connection and resources for current and future Black employees. There are also many external resources that companies have used to

enhance DEI initiatives such as the BlackNorth Initiative. This Canadian organization's initiatives are committed to ending "anti-Black systemic racism throughout all aspects of our lives by utilizing a business first mindset" (BlackNorth Initiative, 2023). Resources such as the BlackNorth playbook helps organizations navigate DEI actions and implementation correctly, and offer programs that provide connections in the Black community.

I believe there is always room for improvement in any organization, even if the organization has successfully implemented DEI initiatives, established networks, and offered direct support to Black employees. As a Black employee myself, I feel that communication is key, including being precise about what an organization's intentions are to support Black employees and equity-deserving groups. Most importantly, employers must follow through with actions and initiatives that are sincere and consistent, and they cannot be just a part of leadership's to-do list. Such actions will improve retention rates, and increase talent attraction. In addition, visibility is key and Black employees want to see that there are a fair amount of Black employees that work across all levels of an organization.

In this paper, the interview analysis and results have presented somewhat surprising and disappointing results about well-established Canadian organization's DEI initiatives, or lack thereof, especially for Black employees. However, I believe many organizations, such as TD Canada Trust and CIBC, are pushing the importance of providing Black employee networks and mentorship programs, as part of their corporate social responsibility to invest in their employees. In return, investing in Black employees and equity-deserving groups helps create a successful business, but an organization's external and internal reputation is positive. The reputation of a company can either continue to hinder progress towards diversity, equity, and inclusion, or open

doors to other opportunities with potential external stakeholders that see a company that values all employees.

Recommendations

Senior managers need to be committed to the need to change the dynamics of visible representation in all levels of employment. Leadership and strong communication about the intentions and execution for equity-deserving groups is imperative and a corporate social responsibility. There needs to be effective execution of DEI plans that results in obvious change that Black employees and other diverse groups can see. Having a diverse workforce gives diverse perspectives. Many large Canadian companies operate in a global market, where we're marketing nationally, internationally, and locally. It is beneficial to any organization that strives to be successful, to have a diverse workforce offering a breadth of perspectives and many other benefits. Organizations that may not know how to navigate DEI initiatives or even start to drive change in their organization can access many online professional tool kits that can help educate leadership in the correct way. A first step would be creating a toolkit similar to Harvard University. They have developed an online accessible "diversity, inclusion, belonging and equity (DIB&E) toolkit used as a resource for executive organization effectiveness (EOE) consultants, HR consultants, HR Directors, business partners, diversity inclusion & belonging leadership council, school and unit leaders and managers across Harvard University" (Harvard University, 2023). Such toolkits are designed to "reinforce common definitions and language of DIB&E, develop and implement best DIB&E practices within organizations, and determine strategies to nurture sustained individual and organizational growth" (Harvard University, 2023).

I believe an important step for any organization is to execute DEI initiatives for different equity-deserving groups separately. DEI initiatives should not be communicated or actioned together in a manner that presumes all groups are the same or have the same needs. Equity-deserving groups need their own distinct platforms and communication to internal and external stakeholders. In the interview process, I discovered that Scotiabank, CIBC, and Loblaws tend to have this orientation, where the interviewees felt unseen as a result of being lumped in with all equity-deserving groups.

Lastly, organizations need to start showing there are no social barriers in professional development and promotions for Black employees and equity-deserving groups. A great step would be promoting and hiring qualified Black employees in all levels of employment. I believe if I see more Black employees in senior and executive levels, I can strive and work hard to arrive there in the future in my organizations. It helps to get that support through a strong internal Black employee network to help navigate my future professional career. It should be noted that this concept will require effort. The current state of affairs is delivering the current results. Companies who aspire to be good corporate leaders need to commit to a longer term process of engaging with Black prospective talent early in their career journeys, even while they are in school, to be part of building a strong and diverse talent pipeline.

Limitations

The research and discussions presented here have several limitations. The perspectives of each interviewee is only one out of many individual aspects and thus represents a limited sampling of possible perspectives. Additionally, while the same interview questions were asked to all participants, some declined to answer some questions because it was not applicable to their

organization or their experience. For example, the interviewee employed by RBC could not answer the question about what their employer could do differently to create a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive workplace. The interviewee struggled because he was employed during a time where initiatives for Black people weren't really a topic of discussion. In addition, he has not seen any significant changes over the years and has become apathetic to the idea of seeing any real changes coming into fruition in his organization.

Black employees can either be busy with personal or work related tasks and may not have the time to be interviewed. The process of getting respondents was challenging, I was able to get 8 out of 10 targeted respondents. The two organizations that were identified I did not get to interview were Enbridge and Sobeys Corporation.

As the interview and research process was conducted by myself, as a Black employee, it is possible that the dynamics of the interviews and the interpretation of the literature reviewed were impacted by my presence or perspective.

The scope of companies studied offered many important and valuable insights which were compared and contrasted through this paper. However, the number of companies assessed was not sufficient to derive meaningful statistically significant insights.

Conclusion

DEI perspectives and initiatives continue to evolve in workplaces. There is not a perfect way to execute these initiatives, and organizations are still learning how to create work environments that acknowledges all of the complex dynamics and needs of diverse groups and in particular how to implement effective strategies to support their Black employees. Communication and execution are key focal areas for organizations to strengthen their DEI initiatives, and there needs to be a shift in how DEI initiatives are delivered in organizations in order to achieve an equitable environment for all employees. A Forbes article contributed by Michelle Penelope King explains that "workers feel exhausted, frustrated, and skeptical that their DEI efforts will result in tangible outcomes" (King, Forbes, 2023). Ultimately, leaders have the authority and resources to drive and effect change. Leaders need to acknowledge inequalities and "companies need to engage all stakeholders in DEI efforts. Plan for it to take a while and sustain the cadence of DEI work. If it matters to your business then give DEI the funding it requires" – as suggested by Lily Zheng, Author of DEI Deconstructed (King, Forbes, 2023). Organizations should strive to consistently evolve their DEI initiatives. If organizations blindly assume they are successful in their intentions and actions in DEI initiatives, they are not properly communicating with Black employees and other equity-deserving groups. As a progressive nation, Canada and its leading companies have an opportunity to be true role models and drive internal change that contributes to the strengthening of the broader fabric of our society through thoughtful, sincere, and impactful DEI intentions and actions.

Appendix A
Interview Questions

1. How and to what extent does your organization prioritize DEI in the workplace?

2. How and to what extent are DEI initiatives specifically pertaining to Black employees a stated focus for your organization?

3. As a result of DEI initiatives, what are some positive outcomes you have seen in your organization?

4. How and to what extent has there been progression in hiring and promoting Black employees across job levels?

5. Do you perceive that there is a gap between how your organization speaks about DEI as a priority and your actual experience as an employee?

6. Do you feel your employer has made significant progress to building a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive workplace, especially for Black employees?

7. If you feel that there is a lack of progress, why do feel that this is the case?

8. What do you believe your employer needs to do differently to create a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive workplace, especially for Black employees?

9. Professional development can be seen as a way of supporting Black employees and other visible minorities. How and to what extent are you receiving support in your professional career?

10. If you could give the CEO of your organization any advice to implement a better diverse and supportive workplace for Black employees, what would it be and why?

Appendix B

Additional Interview Questions for specific participants based on their organization's ESG and DEI information

1. According to Loblaws, only 3% of Black colleagues are represented in the workforce. What initiatives do you believe Loblaws could do to increase this percentage?

2. Sobeys is known to have quarterly meetings with executives and the council of DE&I. Do you believe that the cadence is enough, or should there be more meetings, and why?

3. Do you have current knowledge of the DE&I teams, councils' committees, and executive leadership teams of Enbridge? Do you feel support from any groups, why or why not?

4. Within CIBC what are some DE&I challenges you believe are still evident? What can improve from their inclusion team for Black employees?

5. Spotify claims their DE&I stands on allyship and empathy for all employees. How and to what extent has your organization displayed this promise in the workplace?

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