

Managing Newcomer Diversity in the Workplace

Major Academic Report Proposal

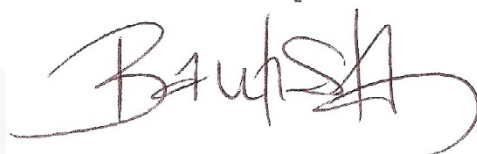
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Abstract

Canada welcomes thousands of new immigrants every year. Workplace diversity is crucial and must be managed appropriately in order for it to have a positive impact on work behaviour and the organization. Furthermore, in today's rapidly changing world, understanding and valuing workplace diversity within organizations is more important than ever before in order to meet external demands as well as continued longevity and growth. I propose to conduct a major academic report (MAR) on organizational behaviours with a focus on diversity in the workplace. Through my analysis, the opportunity for managing diversity via a workplace initiative will be explored. My approach to encourage positive change will be through employing autobiographical narrative inquiry within the critical paradigm, combined with critical literature analysis. This capstone project will be completed in relation to personal lived experiences as a newcomer to Canada and a leader managing a Canadian organization. My intent is to use the findings from the major academic report to create a tool for my organization's members to use to reflect on their practices in order to better understand the challenges faced by newcomers.

Key Words: Critical paradigm, autobiographical, narrative inquiry, newcomer, organizational behaviours, cultural diversity

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Introduction

Canada welcomes thousands of new immigrants every year; most arrive “fueled by a vision that often differs disappointingly and harshly from the realities faced upon arrival” (Li & Larsen, 2012, p. 40). About 11 years ago, I also believed that this country was a land of equal opportunity for everyone. I crossed the Canadian border under the Skilled Worker Program with a positive attitude and excitement about my new career. For me, this change meant opening a new door for a better life, creativity, and new opportunity. However, I was unaware of how strange and isolated I would feel in my new workplace and new home.

The Research Context

Personally, I was not aware of how much peoples’ cultures influenced their lifestyle and behaviour until I started to work as a Location Manager in Canada within a diverse, multicultural distribution centre. At that time, I started to pay attention to my own cultural differences. I was fascinated by other cultures and that broad contrast became visible while working with others. My team members had not only arrived in Canada from nine different countries, but most of them, including myself, were inhibited by language barriers. I remember learning about six different religions at one point. It is unbelievable how different and unique we are. Just then for the first time, I directed my attention to an organization’s behaviours that focused on managing diversity in the workplace.

About a year ago, I started working at an organization whose mission statement exhorts inclusion and listening and honouring voices of all citizens. However, I found that employees have minimal knowledge about each other’s cultural differences. This lack of awareness very often leads to conflict and tension (Martin, 2014). Moreover, as Johnson (2018) argued, the social identities of leaders influence their actions throughout their entire lives, providing the lens

through which they view and interpret the world, their experiences, and other people. I have come to recognize that the biggest challenge I have to overcome as a leader while making any decision is inside of my own mind. I acknowledge that, upon my arrival, I made certain assumptions about other people that were blurred by what I learned and wanted to believe in.

Furthermore, it seems that my co-workers have limited knowledge of Canada's Multicultural Policy. This experience reflects results from Fries and Gingrich (2010), who noted from their research that approximately 50% of interviewed newcomers "were either unaware of the policy or demonstrated little awareness" (p. 41). In contrast, Canadian-born people had little to no awareness of this policy. The paradox is that the Multiculturalism Policy was developed and mainly addressed to Government departments and agencies, like, for example, the one I work at, to encourage multicultural leadership. This lack of mutual awareness and understanding reinforces the importance of creating strategies to increase multicultural sensitivity and the need to foster a greater appreciation and awareness of Canada's cultural diversity (Fries & Gingrich, 2010).

Research Questions

Stemming from these issues and experiences mentioned above, my research inquiry will focus on newcomers to Canada in the workplace, a topic that is directly associated with my own lived experiences as a newcomer to Canada and the leader at the same time. My main research question is: How does an organization benefit from multicultural diversity in the workplace?

This question encouraged me to reflect further and develop two sub-questions:

- What challenges do newcomers to Canada face in the workplace?
 - How can leaders create culturally sensitive work environments?
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Theoretical Perspective

As stated by Malthouse, Watts, and Roffey-Barentsen (2015), self-reflective ability is also a “control system for other kinds of intelligence” (p. 84). Hence, its strength lay in its ability to enable researchers to consider different available options when translating data and evaluating outcomes. Reid, Greaves and Kirby (2017) also emphasized that researchers need to be able to recognize how their own positions and interests are intersected during the research project. Furthermore, the researcher’s ability to reflect critically on their own ontological and epistemological assumptions and awareness of their own positionality results in research transparency and credibility.

I recognize ontology and epistemology as a very complex topic. I also understand that research paradigms can be characterized through their ontology, epistemology, and methodology. I can see how ontology and epistemology create a holistic, inseparable view of how knowledge is recognized in research endeavours, as well as in me in relation to this knowledge, while I would use methodology to discover it. Saying this, I can relate to Mack’s (2010) statement emphasizing that “your ontological assumptions inform your epistemological assumptions which inform your methodology and there all give rise to your methods employed to collect data” (p . 6). As Bracken (2010) noted, it is important to be able to consciously reflect upon one’s own “ontological and epistemological perspectives and to reflect upon the ways in which these may inform the development of appropriate research paradigms”. By doing so, the researcher will more likely be able to uncover their hegemonic assumptions and learn about their own power and privileges.

I personally think that the epistemological foundations of my work/research in collaboration with methodology and methods I employ can help frame my research design and

make it truly meaningful and a powerful project. Furthermore, I personally think that awareness of ontological and epistemological assumptions will increase the quality of my research and can encourage my creativity.

Aligning with Reid et al.'s (2017) thinking, a critical paradigm for my own research inquiry includes research that is interpretive and positivist, "because it brings together many different stances on the state of knowledge and what counts as knowledge, but with a strong focus on reflection and taking action in the world" (p. 12).

Interpretivism, also known as constructivism and positivist thinking have slightly different implicit values. Critical researchers, similar to interpretivist researchers, emphasize that research is not value free. Constructivism is fundamental in the critical research paradigm. Critical researchers cannot be indifferent to the reality of peoples' lives while conducting their research. Hence, they analyze and think over their own role as researchers towards peoples' lives targeted by their research. By being critical to their own and others' practices and by applying theory into practices, they focus predominately on the research process rather than the tools. IN contrast, positivism—with its strong focus on data and rigour—does not really mention values while convinced "that the world is objectively given" (Reid et al., 2017, p. 11).

Methodology

I acknowledge that as a human being with experiences and the freedom to think, I am not—despite all efforts and best intentions—able to conduct any research fully objectively. There are always some personal beliefs that could skew objectivity and influence the data. Therefore, I found critical analysis of the literature combined with autobiographical narrative inquiry within critical paradigm to be my "equilibrium point" and thus appropriate to be used for

my intended major academic project as it values both subjective and objective stances in its approach.

Following my passion for supporting my organizational growth and becoming the employer of choice in our community, I recognize the benefits of sharing my own lived experiences as a newcomer and the leader at the same time in direct relation to my gained knowledge and the literature available on this topic. Saying this, the critical paradigm will be the methodology used to effectively answer my research inquiry and my research needs.

Furthermore, I can relate to the critical theory paradigm as I believe that it is the lens through which to actively seek solutions for positive change. Followers of critical paradigm ideology believe that values always influence the methodology; therefore, “the starting point of a critical researcher is often preconceived. Finding out is the means, change is the underlying aim” (Scotland, 2012, p. 13). This belief system encourages people to be critically aware of their situation. Furthermore, the change is realized through practices, and this action is informed by reflection. Therefore, the theory, data, research questions, and interpretation are recursively bounded (Scotland, 2012). Scotland (2012) further described a critical paradigm as anti-foundational. In other words, none of our knowledge is absolutely certain and reality is changing based on human action, because “people are not only in the world but also with it” (Crotty, 1998, p. 13).

I recognize the critical theory paradigm as a combination of theory and practice. For me, the significant strength of this paradigm is placed behind theoretical perspectives, and it really helps empower those whose world views and ideological perspectives have not found equality in social contexts. As I see a need for a change within my organization’s behaviours, my goal is to implement a research project in which I will focus on diversity in the workplace. This change is

also directly associated with improving community members' lives to be able to lead newcomers to sustainable and satisfied employment within my organization.

Narrative Inquiry

According to Riessman and Speedy (2007), the term *narrative inquiry* is directly associated with a story. For me, it is much more than only the gathering of stories. Narrative inquirers aim to find the ways in which a story is constructed and for whom and why, taking into account the cultural discourses that it draws upon.

Narrative inquiry also emphasizes ethical issues as well as shapes new theoretical understandings of people's experiences. As suggested by Connelly and Clandinin (2006), applying narrative inquiry will enable me to reflect on personal past experiences through my own story in order to better understand my own and my newcomer co-workers' behaviours based on available literature. Hence, narrative inquiry offers a particular way of caring about how knowledge is produced and how I as the researcher/practitioner can share my findings and apply it in my future practice.

Critical Autobiographical Narrative Approach

As Walker (2017) emphasized, "critical autobiographical research integrates tenets of narrative inquiry, which include examining life experiences" (p. 1902). Walker also explained how individuals' lived experiences influence the developing and changing of the leaders/practitioner identity, which informs directly their leadership practice. Critical autobiographical narrative inquiry enables the researcher to be meaningful in relation to others' experiences. I am confident that this approach will help me to consciously reflect on my own life experiences as a newcomer and what I learned in order to better understand my continuously changing nature of social identities changing social identities (Gopaldas, 2013). Through this

approach, I will be able to share my knowledge in relation to existing findings specifically associated with challenges faced by newcomers in the workplace.

Method: Critical Literature Review

According to Jesson and Lacey (2006), “critical literature reviews tell a story and help to advance our understanding of what is already known on chosen topic” (p. 139). The critical review activity encourages me as a researcher to critically reflect on why I chose such an article and what drew my attention in direct relation to my research project. It also enables me to capture and be focussed on the most important points and helped me in developing a paper that includes different viewpoints which may differ from my own and information directly associated with my research topic.

I also believe that reflecting critically on the chosen literature encourages my conscious reading which helps me to spot my biases and assumptions and further reflect on my past lived experience as a newcomer and a leader at the same time in relation to the literature. Saying this, I will use the Meta-Framework of the Seven Steps model to conduct the literature review for my proposed project as it includes “the ethical approach, multimodal texts and settings, the identity of the literature reviewer, as an original thinker, critical thinker, and reflexive literature reviewer (Onwuegbuzi & Frels, 2016, p. 55).

I intend to search academic journals and other scholarly works published in the past five years to find literature related to my research questions. I will use key word searches that include newcomer, organizational behaviours, cultural diversity, leadership. I anticipate other key words will emerge as I search more deeply into the databases and begin to review the literature. As part of my ethical responsibilities as a researcher, I will be cognizant to look for not only complementary but opposing viewpoints.

Ethical Considerations

Reid et al. (2017) emphasized that, “the moment the researcher thinks of a research focus, the fundamentals of ethical decision making need to be considered (and) discussion of ethics needs to be incorporated into the entire research process” (p. 53). According to August and Tuten (2008), there are many ethical challenges related to research and one of them is recognized in relation to the integrity of the study. They described integrity as “foundational” in the research processes and “without it, research is simply not believed and consequently discarded” (p. 83).

Researchers risk losing credibility when they violate expectations including competence, honesty, integrity, and benefit during the entire research process. According to Reid et al. (2017), the proper disciplined conduction of research with patterns of behaviours is critical to its credibility, the public’s trust in its outcome as well as the ethical integrity. Leung and Lapum (2015) emphasized that self-positionality and self-awareness of the researcher’s own standpoint is crucial in order to conduct ethical research.

Preliminary Literature Review

Canada became one of the most diverse and multicultural countries on this earth (Dean & Wilson, 2009). Through the ages and since the first British arrival in the 18th century, Canada has been recognized as a land of endless opportunities. Dean and Wilson (2009) emphasized that the ongoing inflow of immigrants from around the world was, and still is, the most important way of developing and strengthening Canada’s economy. Along the way, Canada became one of the most diverse and multicultural countries in the world, which was also associated, as described by Johnson (2018), with power, privileges, and differences. Ncube and Wasburn (2006) noted that leaders of organizations must develop new skills and compete successfully to be effective in strategic and multicultural collaboration.

In more recent research, Johns and Saks (2017) emphasized how workplace diversity is crucial and must be managed appropriately in order for it to have a positive impact on work behaviour and the organization. In today's rapidly changing world, understanding and valuing workplace diversity within organizations is more important than ever before to meet external demands as well as continue longevity and growth. Although in this era of increasing labour shortage, organizations benefit from welcoming people from around the world, there are also concerns of how to "retain, and develop skilled immigrants" (Johns & Saks, 2017, p. 106). Leaders need to increase their awareness of challenges faced by newcomers and possess an understanding of employees' unique cultural differences.

The Process of Acculturation

Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) contended that within the acculturation process, newcomers face an interaction between their culture of origin and the host culture which can result in experienced cultural and psychological changes. There is so much that makes people unique. Hence, it is very important to keep in mind when managing cross-cultural communications to avoid stereotyping (Johns & Saks, 2017). As noted by Rana (2013), asking questions is not a common practice in some cultures. Messages created by someone from one culture very often needs to be processed and interpreted by someone from another culture. Within some cultures, questioning may be seen as being critical of others or showing foolishness because a question must be asked. It not only matters what to ask but more importantly how to ask. Moreover, being new and feeling isolated or pressured by life circumstances, such as a new work environment, can greatly increase the feeling of fear of rejection that can result even in a newcomer saying "yes" without understanding.

Rollag (2015) addressed from a psychological perspective why we fear social rejection by explaining that “social rejection ‘hurts’ in much the same way that physical pain does” (p. 140). This may lead to loss of identity to the point of the newcomer starting to change in order to fit the appearance that they think other people prefer (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015). There is also the important aspect of learning about personal space and non-verbal behaviours such as facial expression, body movements, eye contact, and tone of voice (Johns & Saks, 2017).

Esteban-Guitart and Vila (2015) argued that “immigrants have always been at the boundaries of two cultures and this unquestionably determines the ways they construct identity” (p. 18). They explained that newcomers need to find balance between their family tradition and the new culture in order to become a part of their new society. This would be crucial in all aspects of the newcomers’ life; therefore, it is also important to obtain meaningful employment.

Educating leaders plays a very important role in smoothing out a newcomer’s settlement process and could help newcomers with their sense of belonging. It is so important that organizations recognize the benefits of learning about diversity and inclusion and applying into their talent management practices (Rana, 2013), thus, resulting in improving employee recruitment and retention as well as benefiting the community economic growth. Saying this, in my opinion and according to the literature I reviewed, leaders must think of how to better approach cultural diversity and be more responsive to the multi-cultural world in which we live and work.

Transformational Leadership and Diversity

According to Theoharis (2007), leaders need to develop their own critical, reflective consciousness that focuses on social justice and to become a transformative leader who facilitates moral dialogue and so can help changing organizations to be open for differences and

uniqueness. As stated by Shields (2004), “transformative leadership is deeply rooted in moral and ethical values in a social context” (p. 113) and can help changing society.

Charisma and inspiration are central elements of transformational leadership (Nahavandi, 2015). Because of the charismatic leadership relationship, transformational leaders have the ability to build a strong emotional bond within the team that resulted in loyalty and trust in the leader’s vision. The leader’s competency is very important during the process of organizational behaviour change. Likewise, Shields (2004) and Theoharis (2007) talked about the transformational leader’s ability to build relationships and create a warmer and safer climate to support and increase “understanding of ourselves and of others” (Shields, 2004, p. 119). Having a basic sense of self-assurance, allows leaders to share their strong belief that they can make a difference that would have a positive impact on people and their achievements.

As noted by Theoharis (2007) leaders need to empower, believe, and have “faith in the people and in their capacity to reflect, to create new knowledge, and to pose imaginative solutions that will inform their actions together” (p. 9). Moreover, as Johnson (2018) argued, the social identities of leaders influence their actions throughout their entire lives, providing the lens through which they view and interpret the world, their experiences, and other people.

Significance of the Study

Through my immigrant journey, I learned that Canada has been struggling to achieve the welcoming and inclusive environment it promotes. The concept of existing inclusion within Canadian society, which I was attracted to, greatly blurred my thinking and actions as the leader and the newcomer at the same time. Hence, this experience encouraged me to become more critical and self conscious about the reality of managing workplace diversity.

Today, an inclusive and safe work environment has a completely different meaning to me than it did 11 years ago. Drawing from my own lived experiences and by seeing reality through a more critical lens, I am aware that as immigrants we have to travel a long way to find our real, safe home. This is more than a geographical distance; it is also the metaphorical distance of all of the challenges associated with the process of change that immigrants experience and overcome in order to start a new life and appreciate the opportunity Canada has given to us. Viewed through the lens of my own lived experience, I recognize the importance of a commitment to multicultural leadership. Conducting this proposed project is my moral responsibility and that this is especially important in light of the numerous social problems that marginalized groups and minorities face as a result of oppression in current Canadian society.



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Appendix A: Proposed Research Timeline

| Task | Timeframe | Dates |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial telephone conversation with supervisor to develop plan and to confirm topic for inquiry | Week prior EDUC 7016 | August 26- September 1, 2019 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine resources and criteria for selecting literature and conduct preliminary literature review Draft proposal Submit proposal to supervisor for feedback Conduct revisions based on supervisor comments | Week 1-3 | September 2- 22, 2019 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit proposal to Capstone Office for approval Make necessary revisions | Week 4 | September 23-29, 2019 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to research literature for inquiry and draft literature review Analyze collected data and combine with autoethnographic narratives Submit first partial draft to supervisor for feedback | Week 5–7 | September 30– October 20, 2019 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue with writing sections based on supervisor feedback Review completed paper and conclude with reflection | Week 8–9 | October 21- November 3, 2019 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit full paper for supervisor feedback Conduct revisions based on supervisor comments and continue writing Make revisions and cross-check for accuracy in APA citations, references, and format | Week 10 | November 4–10, 2019 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit completed Major Academic Report to the Capstone Office to be sent to the 2nd reader | Week 11 | November 11–17, 2019 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wait for 2nd reader feedback Review submitted paper and cross-check writing and formatting. | Weeks 12–14 | November 18- December 8, 2019 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make revisions based on 2nd reader feedback Have supervisor sign off on revisions Send clean, final capstone paper to Capstone Office for processing towards graduation | Week 15 | December 8- 15, 2019 |