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Diversity in the Workplace

Major Academic Report

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirement for

Master of Education in Educational Leadership

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YORKVILLE

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Bautista', written over a horizontal line.

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May 3, 2020

### **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 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 is explored. For methodology, I employ a Critical Autobiographical Narrative Approach defined as aspects of autobiographical and narrative inquiry within the critical paradigm. This is further combined with critical literature analysis and personal narratives of my memories that thread-line my work. This capstone project is completed in relation to my lived experiences as a newcomer to Canada and a leader managing a Canadian organization. My intent is to use my findings to create a tool for my organization's members so as to reflect on their practices in order to better understand the challenges faced by Canadian newcomers.

*Keywords:* 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 in their new country with excitement; they look for a new career opportunity and a better future for themselves and their families. Very often, however, their perception differs from the reality of navigating challenges upon arrival (Li & Larsen, 2012). 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.

*October 2, 2008 will stay in my memory forever. My 16-year-old daughter and I arrived to the home I had rented online; we sat on the stairs very close to each other looking around and not saying anything. The dead silence was interrupted by my daughter's loud cry. Through the tears, she asked me: "Mom, can we go back home?". "This is going to be our new home", I answered; and I repeated it again: "This is going to be our first real home". I am unsure of who I tried to convince more, her or myself? Hoping, that everything I learned and believed about this country was the truth. (A. Wojewoda, personal reflection, March 2020)*

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## 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, incorporated, distribution centre. My role included recruiting, developing, and mentoring a strong focused and creatively diverse team. I provided advice and actively participated in developing a variety of organizational strategies, management, financial controls,

marketing, communication and policy and procedures development. Furthermore, I learned that true leaders can greatly enhance one's potential for success by providing support and guidance for team members in all of their achievements. The role also involved the ability to identify the strengths and interests of each of my team members and maximize their talents and skills in a way that keeps my team engaged in work

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 not only arrived in Canada from nine different countries, but most of them, including myself, were inhibited by language barriers. I remembered learning about six different religions at one point. It is unbelievable how different and unique we were. 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 Community Living- Huntsville, non-profit organization, whose mission statement promoted inclusion. Listening, and honouring voices of all citizens. However, I found that employees had 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 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 the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and Multicultural Policy, which was developed to "protect the

cultural heritage of Canadians, reduce discrimination and encourage the implementation of multicultural programs and activities within institutions and organizations” (Burnet & Driedger, 2014). On account of growing concerns associated with ethnic diversity, discrimination, education, employment and housing, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act with its good intentions of promoting inclusion promised “to acknowledged multiculturalism as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society with an integral role in shaping Canada’s future” (Burnet & Driedger, 2014).

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Fries and Gingrich (2010) noted that approximately 50% of interviewed newcomers to Canada had no knowledge or minimal awareness about this policy. In contrast, Canadian-born people had little to no awareness of this policy. The paradox is that multicultural policy was developed and mainly addressed to government departments and agencies; for example, my place of employment 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 inquiry focuses on newcomers to Canada in the workplace, a topic that is directly associated with my own lived experiences as a newcomer. 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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### **Significance of the Study**

In recent years, I have learned that Canada has been struggling to achieve a welcoming and inclusive environment. The concept of existing policy of inclusion within Canadian society, which I was attracted to, greatly blurred my thinking and actions as someone who was a leader and a newcomer concurrently. 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 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 project is my moral responsibility and 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. Furthermore, as I see a need for change within my organization's behaviours, my goal is to develop a tool for my organization's members to use to reflect on their practices in order to better understand the challenges faced by newcomers. 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.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

As stated by Malthouse et al. (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 very complex. 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 my relation to this knowledge. From here, I relate to Mack's (2010) statement emphasizing that researchers ontological and epistemological assumptions directly influence each other, and impact chosen methodology then resulting in methods for data collecting. As Bracken (2010) noted, it is important to be able to consciously reflect upon one's own ontological and epistemological standpoint to create suitable research paradigms. By doing so, the researcher is more likely be able to uncover their hegemonic assumptions and learn about their own power and privilege.

I personally think that the epistemological foundations of my work/research in collaboration with methodology and methods I employ helps frame my research design making it truly meaningful and a powerful project. Furthermore, I personally think that awareness of ontological and epistemological assumptions increases 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, as it combines varied viewpoints

about what knowledge means, with the center of attention being on reflection and action, leading to a change in the world.

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 practice, 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 may skew objectivity and influence the data. Therefore, I found critical analysis of the literature combined with aspects of autobiography and 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 contributes

to the methodology used to effectively explore my research inquiry and research needs.

Furthermore, I 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, as explained by Scotland (2012) usually a critical researcher is intentionally tendentious from the beginning of their research with focus on finding which aim to a change. 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 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 that have not found equality in social contexts.

### **Narrative Inquiry Influences**

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; the narratives take into account the cultural discourses that it draws upon. Furthermore, this methodology inspired me and marked the beginning of my learning journey into personal narratives.

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 aspects of narrative inquiry enables 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 to my future practice.

### **Critical Autobiographical Narrative Approach**

As Walker (2017) emphasized, critical autobiographical research combines narrative inquiry's principles with focus on analyzing one's life experiences. 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 enables the researcher to be meaningful in relation to others' experiences. I am confident that this approach supports me as I consciously reflect on my own life experiences as a newcomer and what I learned in order to better understand my continuously changing nature of changing social identities (Gopaldas, 2013). Through this approach, I am able to share my knowledge in relation to existing findings specifically associated with challenges faced by newcomers in the workplace.

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### **Methods: Critical Literature Review and Personal Narratives**

According to Jesson and Lacey (2006), by employing critical literature reviews researcher has opportunity to present a story to increase reader's better understanding of existing findings on chosen topic. 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 and narratively 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 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).

Additionally, I enrich my MAR by including my personal narratives of certain relative memories. By doing so, I emphasize inseparable connections of my past lived experiences and its impact on shaping my current social identities. The italicization of my memories I used as a tool to showcase my words and to highlight meaningful personal experiences.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Reid et al. (2017) emphasized that, the researcher must focus on ethical considerations at the very beginning to the end of the research project. 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” (p. 83) in the research processes.

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. As part of my ethical research responsibilities, I looked for both complementary and opposing viewpoints.

### **Literature Review**

Through the ages and since the first British arrival in the 18th century, Canada has been recognized as a land of endless opportunities (Dean & Wilson, 2009). Akbari and Haider (2017), emphasized that the ongoing inflow of immigrants from around the world had, and still has, a positive impact on 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 maintain retention and support professional growth and development of skilled immigrants (Johns & Saks, 2017). 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 et al. (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. Drawing from my own newcomer experience, the immigration process is associated with embracing very complex, almost endless change. These include starting from living in a new place with new people around, experiencing a new culture and language, a new career and the most important, finding a new personal identity.

According to Strauss (1969) identity is subjected to constant processes of change. As much as my change was a planned transition, my new home and work culture took me a long time to adjust to and I am still unable to see a finish line. As addressed by Thompson (2014) who identified five categories (innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, laggards) of adopters to change, I believe I belong to the innovators group. Saying this, personally, I am a risk taker who likes new ideas for the sake of change and the adrenaline associated with the unknown. I am unsure of where this comes from, but I assume that my constantly changing life contributed to this. As a child I moved six times and attended four different elementary schools and my grandmother—who always supports me with adapting to new and very often unexpected life circumstances—helped me to develop the resilience necessary to cope with this.

Even though I consider myself to be a person who welcomes new opportunity, I still think of countless challenges I faced almost every day as a newcomer which were stressful. Therefore, going through the acculturation process must be much more difficult for those who are late majority or laggards, who like my husband, adopt to change with a high degree of scepticism and only after most of the community has accepted the idea.

During my transition process, I learnt that the language barrier for me as a newcomer to Canada was and is still the biggest challenge and obstacle of my life. I passed the Canadian border unaware of how basic my English communication abilities were at the time.

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*Previous to my entry to Canada, I spent over 7 years in the United States. In order to find my first live-in care-giver job, I registered at a staffing agency. The agent spoke fluently in my language of origin, therefore there was no communication barrier. She taught me how to introduce myself in English, and then she practiced with me a few common interview questions and answers. I think you are ready- she said. In the next few days, I met my new future employer- a very nice 98-year-old lady and her family. I introduced myself word for word as I was taught but then they started asking me questions. I tried to translate quickly the few familiar words that I really thought I understood. Very quickly, I got completely confused and realized that I was not able to keep up with this merciless avalanche of unfamiliar words. Overwhelmed, embarrassed and afraid of being rejected I tried to pretend that I understood everything with a smile on my face. (A. Wojewoda, personal reflection, March 2020)*

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Rana (2013) addressed the importance of addressing language barriers in the workplace, explaining how easily communication between co-workers can be misconstrued and pointing out similar behaviours that I experienced as a newcomer. According to Rana, employees might pretend that they understand what their employer is requesting from them as a result of being ashamed or upset about their lack of language knowledge. It is very easy to answer questions with just a simple “yes”. In everyday situations if newcomers may have a problem hearing or understanding someone, even speaking the same language, we ask them to repeat; if we still do not understand, we just become too embarrassed to ask again. In such situations, we usually



respond with a nod and a forced smile and try to be nice. As leaders, we must be aware that our newcomer employees can feel the same emotions and pretend to understand when they do not.

Furthermore, a large part of the new employee's orientation includes reading policies which are presented to them in a language they likely are not completely fluent in. Therefore, there is always a chance that they are being misinterpreted, which happened to me multiple times while reading official documents written in a difficult language that is hard to understand for someone who speaks basic English.

Additionally, the *Canadian Multicultural Act, 1988* with its Multiculturalism Policy of Canada states, "preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French" (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988, Act.3 (1). (i), p. 4). However, there is no translated version of the Canada Multiculturalism Act, 1988 available in my first language nor any language other than English or French.


Upon my arrival, I found a unique bond between my personal values as a newcomer and the visions presented by the Canadian Government on its available policies. Therefore, I crossed the Canadian border with a positive attitude. However, my own interpretation of multiculturalism from the date of passing the Canadian borders to now has changed. My thinking was blurred by what I had learned and wanted to believe; upon my arrival, I recognized multiculturalism as an important piece of the Canadian identity. While reflecting from my current social and leadership position, working at an agency that is 80% government funded and being much more critically aware of the reality of existing power imbalances and privileges, I realize that there is much more to be done here beyond writing sound policy.

According to Burnet and Driedger (2014), the Canadian Multicultural Act's, 1988 story began as early as 1971 when the federal government of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, a white

male Canadian born “into a wealthy family” (Whitaker, 2017) committed to the principle of multiculturalism. As a result of this declaration, the policy was developed “to protect and promote diversity, recognize the rights of Aboriginal peoples, and support the use of Canada’s two official languages” (Burnet & Driedger, 2014). Following this, in 1973 the Ministry of Multiculturalism and the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism were officially set. On July 21, 1988, Brian Mulroney, a white male Canadian and the 18th Prime Minister of Canada from a Progressive Conservative government (Hillmer, 2018) approved the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988:

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which formalized the government's commitment to promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society by establishing legislation to protect ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious diversity within Canadian society. (Burnet & Driedger, 2014)



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As addressed by Fries and Gingrich (2010), and in my opinion, the Multiculturalism Policy of Canada greatly minimized challenges faced by newcomers associated with constantly changing identities. Likewise, Kaushik and Drolet (2018) emphasized that Canada’s policies were developed to encourage skilled immigrants to move to Canada. However paradoxically, skilled immigrants often struggle to find sustainable employment. Hence, it is important to remember that developed policies are not universal but developed by humans which means that they aren’t flawless.

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Reflecting on the history of Canada and its Government in 1971, represented by white privileged men, I directly connect my thoughts to Johnson’s (2018) statement that “it takes a great deal of material and labour to build a university... or to pay for political campaigns” (p.

35). Johnson also emphasized that modern capitalism is directly related to “government, authority, legitimacy and power” (p. 36). In light of Johnson’s thoughts, I am afraid to say that wealthy people support and protect the passing of policies that benefit their own interests. Furthermore, I believe that enacted policies should reduce the barriers and challenges faced by diverse community members instead, they create significant power imbalances as they do not acknowledge the uniqueness of different cultures or disclose any information regarding the Canadian history of inequality. Therefore, in my opinion, policy writing is to benefit the privileged and as emphasized by Taylor (1992) to create political status shaped by recognition made by oppressed or marginalized groups. I have personally realized in the last 11 years of living in Canada, also addressed by Taylor (1992), that the dominant culture unconsciously promotes difference blindly and by doing so, creates discrimination within Canadian society. —

There are so many cultural and experiential traits that make each of us unique which is important to keep in mind in order to avoid stereotypes (Johns & Saks, 2017). This is particularly important when managing cross-cultural communications; for example, asking questions is uncommon in some cultures while avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect when speaking with a superior in other cultures (Rana, 2013). Messages created by someone from one culture very often need 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 what is asked that matters but, how it is asked that is more important. 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 what they are agreeing to.

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Rollag (2015) addressed from a psychological perspective why newcomers fear social rejection by comparing social rejection to physical pain. This may lead to a 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.

### **Behind the Workplace Door**

There were moments that I questioned my decision about making the choice for my family to leave our country of origin. According to Bridges’ Transition Model, paradoxically the change and actual transition starts with ending and ends up with new beginning (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). For me and my teenage daughter’s entry to Canada certainly resonates with this definition, but not for my husband. Saying this, the whole process of acculturation and transformation that newcomers come through to be successful members of their new communities may also be associated with their stories of struggle to overcome their worries and confusion (Thomson, 2015).

Over the years, my husband developed social anxiety and depression that greatly impacted all areas of my family life. Gradually, he isolated himself from all friends and his closest family members and is still refusing any professional help. The overwhelming pressure of

my private life's challenges have greatly influenced my mental and physical wellbeing. At times I am completely lost between my cultural beliefs and my new "me" as an independent woman; I feel like I am stuck in a cultural trap trying to save "my marriage," while sacrificing my own health.

According to McKenzie et al. (2016), immigrants are susceptible to developing mental health problems or illness directly associated with changes that they experience during the acculturation process. They discussed how social factors could lead to newcomers' fear of using available services. Looking back, my biggest fear was about my daughter who, as a youth, was very vulnerable upon our arrival. I was always worried that her strong need for belonging would blur her logical thinking. As I mentioned, agreeing and saying "yes" to the wrong crowd may be caused by fear of being rejected (Rollag, 2015). By human nature, we naturally want to be accepted.

I often feel guilty or sometimes even selfish that I left the people that I love the most; people who devoted their life to me like my grandmother who raised me and my brother when we did not have anyone else. It is very hard not to be able to just simply stop by for a coffee or help my grandmother with groceries. On the other hand, if I had stayed, my daughter and I would not have been able to follow our dreams and we would not be who we are today. We are two women pursuing their goals with passion and who value their development of resilience through challenging change processes. In my opinion, my daughter has completed her change process as a newcomer. I, however, am still somewhere in between "Agnieszka" and "Agnes", the second being the woman that I thought I would be when I arrived in Canada. While I can acknowledge this, I am not sure if I would actually like to complete this process of completing the transformation phase that would have brought me to the "Agnes" I imagined. I think my identity

is somewhere between, and this is who I am. However, it is still very difficult to learn to be proud of myself, the strong woman that I have become.

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Educating leaders about the process of acculturation 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. 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 multicultural 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. Theoharis argued that the main key to transformational leadership is based upon each leaders' ability to express their feelings and trust in order to motivate their followers to be solution focused, creative thinkers. Hence, transformational leaders leverage their effectiveness by focusing on their follower's commitment and attitudes towards organizational change and making them involved from the beginning of implementation. Furthermore, I personally recognize and as emphasized by Shields (2004), transformational leadership as inseparably connected with ethical leadership.

There are many definitions of ethical leadership available; however, Brown et al.'s (2005) and Lawton and Pa'Ez's (2015) descriptions resonated with my understanding the most.

According to Brown et al. (2005), ethical leadership is “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (p. 120). In contrast, Lawton and Pa’Ez (2015) argued that ethical leaders behave intentionally, showing appropriate, high moral standards in order to make decisions and build relationships. Hence, an ethical leader is a role model who walks the talk and values integrity. Furthermore, I recognize integrity as the leaders’ moral responsibility in combination with consistence, honesty, and trustworthiness. In this way, leaders inspire and encourage positive change in their followers (Lawton & Pa’Ez, 2015). As highlighted by Burbules (as cited in Griffiths & Portelli, 2015), integrity and leader’s motivation toward shared goals within an organization is the foundation on which team members build relationships, trust, and effective interpersonal relationships, which are crucial to providing efficient and cohesive service delivery.

I grew up with the faith that a good person has to be virtuous and is able to recognize the moral goodness in everyday life events which is an inseparable part of moral behaviour; it is also part of the foundation of my core values and principles. Being honest is not just about telling the truth, but it is about being real and authentic with myself and others about who I am; it is about my identity. Both ethical conduct and an individual’s virtues were valued and encouraged by my grandmother in every aspect of my life. She raised me to believe that I needed to support others and remember to be our best selves. With her strong moral awareness, she also emphasized the ethical aspect for good decision making.

*I remember in my early elementary school years my grandmother was called to my school.*

*The reason was that I lied to my teacher in order to protect my friend who got involved in a*

*fight with another student. After she returned from the school, she sat with me and said:*

*“Remember that the inferior truth is better than a beautiful lie”- she explained why without being honest we can’t help anyone. Since that day and throughout my entire career I have followed my grandmother’s mantra as an inseparable part of my life. (A. Wojewoda, personal reflection, March 2020)*

Today, her words have greater meaning as I strive for excellency. Bonde and Firenze (2011) stated, “because virtue ethics is concerned with the entirety of a person’s life, it takes the process of education and training seriously, and emphasizes the importance of role models to our understanding of how to engage in ethical deliberation” (p. 5). Moreover, I believe that acting ethically and a leader’s honesty enhances openness as well as empowers and enables people to sharpen their perception and to develop consistency in how one presents and interprets facts with more clarity. Bonde and Firenze argued that by providing a set of standards and ethics enables one to behave intentionally in a variety of situations. In other words, by acting ethically, one is conscious about their steps in decision making and is able to understand the motive and purpose of one’s choice.

However, as leaders we need to be aware that what is morally acceptable for one individual might be interpreted as unacceptable by somebody else as each person is influenced by different interest, values, social identities, personal and cultural beliefs as well as even political and historical background. Consequently, as stated by Tamunomiebi, and Ehior (2019) all these factors related to each side participating in a given situation may be challenged with an ethical dilemma.

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 result in loyalty and trust in the leader's vision. The leader's competency is very important during the process of organizational behaviour change.

*Upon my arrival in Canada I worked as a Manager. My team members not only arrived to Canada from 9 different countries but most of them, including myself, had language barriers. Some of them were very spiritual and religious. I can remember learning about 6 different religions at one point. It is unbelievable, how different and unique we are. Starting from an individual's ideas around hierarchy and finishing on, what seems to be right within one culture might be consider completely inappropriate or even intimidating in another.*

*I remember how difficult was for a young man from Qatar to accept that, I a white, catholic woman was his manager. It took us a while to build a trusting relationship. I was eager to learn about everyone and from everyone. I kept on my office wall a big board that I wrote on Socrates's words "I know that I know nothing". As I had come up with an idea of how to engage collaboration within my team, I organized weekly meetings with the intention of helping everyone learn about everyone else's culture. I asked my team if they were comfortable with my idea and if they were willing to share their histories and answer questions about their cultural background. I asked them to make a list of topics that should not be asked, as I wouldn't be able to do this on my own. I also volunteered to talk first and answer their questions. Two other team members from Western Europe decided to talk about themselves during the first meeting as well. There were also members who stepped back and decided not to answer questions but still attended the meetings. But eventually all 39 people opened up and expressed how the idea was one of the best experiences in their lives. I think it was a fantastic experience. (A. Wojewoda, personal reflection, March, 2020)*

Now when I think about this, I realize that all those questions were humbly asked with respect, curiosity and interest. I never really told them what to do. I did not use my position's power but instead I was honest about how I didn't know everything, and only as a team would we be able to accomplish our common goal. 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 individuals' differences and uniqueness. 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 and have a strong belief in their team's ability to work together to find solutions and create results based on their collective knowledge.

The main key element of transformational leadership is to develop an effective organization through taking a change-oriented leadership approach with a strong focus on talent development, effective organizational structure, and inspiring vision for the future. Because, transformational leaders are passionate about continuous learning, they have the ability to share their enthusiasm, create a learning culture and identify their followers' strengths and talent capacity.

Today's organizations must draw special attention to leadership as an important component of the organization; one that is charged with managing its ability and willingness to take ownership, combined with an intrinsic drive to do what is best for the organization. Starting with the interview process, the management team should be able to clearly explain their understanding of leadership and that to be effective it must be built on a solid foundation consisting of a clear mission, a vision for the future, a specific strategy, and a culture conducive to success. Leaders need to understand that these concepts are essential for effectiveness and

personal growth. Saying this, transformational leaders must have a clear vision and be mature enough to evaluate their own performance and the consequences of their own actions and inactions. They are role models who value flexibility and are open to change. They are passionate and committed to continuous learning, have enough self-confidence to be vulnerable and are willing to work alongside their team members while being able to build trusting relationships and a learning culture. They have the ability to share and maintain values aligned with the organization's goals and learning plan. Sarder (2016) emphasized that transformation of any organization's culture starts with the leadership team who effectively share their vision but also have a strong will. Transformational leaders are achievement-oriented, dedicated and career-focused individuals who are committed to continuous endeavours towards self-development and improvement in order to create learning cultures. They openly share their enthusiasm about available training and about professional growth for themselves as well as their front-line employees.

The goal of today's organization is to provide a friendly and safe culture with all team members working and analysing issues together and being open to listening to and arguing about different solutions with respect to each other's diverse opinions. These types of behaviours are also described by Sarder (2016) as the right behaviours through the process of transformation to a learning organization. According to Bryan (2004) leaders "must create a culture worthy of employee trust, motivation and commitment. The effectiveness and worthiness of managers lies in the functions and the structures of accountable management" (p. 35). Building trust into an organization helps to create an environment in which people can count on others in the organization to keep their commitments. This trust-based environment also allows each individual to be able to express their thoughts and concerns in a safe space where they feel like they are being heard (Sarder, 2016). I

believe that accountability-based management training is crucial to be available and assigned to be completed by employees at all levels of the organization. The management team, as directly working with front line staff, play an important role in shaping a positive work environment. During the meetings that are organized on a regular basis, open communication and dialogue is encouraged. According to Schein (2003), dialogue is a crucial factor of organizational transformation that enhances cultural understanding and creates psychological safety. It also enhances effective communication and openness to constructive criticism as well as building a learning culture. Saying this, dialogue between team members, helps individuals to understand and respect everyone's uniqueness.

### **Personal Reflection**

Today, an inclusive and diverse work environment has a completely different meaning to me than it did 11 years ago. I am aware that managing diversity in the workplace is associated with a complex, organizational culture change and continuous learning. However, I believe that this change must start from my own lifelong commitment to self-improvement and continuous learning. Consequently, my ongoing educational journey enabled me to increase my awareness of how fortunate I am and how many privileges I have as an able, white, Polish/English speaking, female and how these actually intersect to form my current position as a leader.

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As defined by Reid et al. (2017), positionality, which is directly related to social location, is the way that one's position in the social hierarchy compared to other groups potentially limits or broadens one's understanding of others. Understanding my own social location is crucial, especially in relation to my current leadership role as it is increasing my awareness about the individual uniqueness of each human being in a society, their very different way of thinking and experiencing reality. Personally, I experienced that these social constructs not only intersect with

each other but also influence greatly my whole social world, hence create different privileges and disadvantages (Gopaldas, 2013). Drawing from my own lived experiences and by seeing reality through critical lenses, today I am consciously aware that I have personally experienced difference blindness after reading the Canadian Multicultural Act, 1988 for the first time before my arrival. For instance, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988 states in regard to Federal institutions: “ensure that Canadians of all origins have an equal opportunity to obtain employment and advancement in those institutions” (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988, Act. (2). (a), p. 4). Whereas, as emphasized by Dean and Wilson (2009), even newcomers who have entered into Canada under the Skilled Worker Program, developed to fill a growing skilled worker labour shortage, very often faced barriers to employment or have retention issues and either are underemployed or unemployed.

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As a newcomer to Canada under this program, I took for granted that employment and education are accessible to anyone who wishes to study or work hard. Whenever I heard about homeless or unemployed immigrants, I was making assumptions, thinking that it must be them making bad choices or not working hard enough to find employment. It took me a long time to realize that I was unconsciously “blaming the victim” (Johnson, 2018, p. 94) which is, as emphasized by Johnson (2018), the most used and easiest way of defending our own privileges. I was influenced by the meritocracy myth (Alvarado, 2010). Looking back, I also believe that I did not understand or rather did not want to see the reality around me, but I am aware now that I was “denying and minimizing” (Johnson, 2018, p. 92) the fact that I am connected to injustice by simply not doing anything about it, hence being a part of the silence. I believe, I was also a member of the “call it something else” (p.95) group by even accepting inappropriate jokes about different cultures. Reflecting on my past and the time when I was both a newcomer and a leader,

I sometimes felt that there was a wall between me the newcomer and me the leader. This quest to find my equilibrium led me to the beginning of my learning journey about critical paradigm and self-consciousness (Reid et al., 2017) as a leader as well as a person in order to be able to overcome mentioned challenges. I now realize that what I read, learn, and want to believe in upon arrival to my new country home is in contrast to other dark Canadian realities that many newcomers have to face every day.

Johnson (2018) argued that any type of privilege is associated with economic trends and situation, emphasizing that modern capitalism is directly related to “government, authority, legitimacy and power” (p. 36). Hence, further reflection made me think about white hegemony and privilege (Brookfield, 2014) and hegemonic assumptions, which I believe are linked to my origin roots. This connection is crucial for me to understand in relation to my leadership position and improving my skills of managing diversity in the workplace. According to Brookfield (2017), learning about power is related to uncovering an individual’s hegemonic assumptions to encourage awareness and positive change. Unfortunately, as our own assumptions are taken for granted, the process of uncovering our beliefs is very often met with resistance and is recognized as uncomfortable, risky, and difficult (Brookfield, 2017). I believe applying critical reflection to recognize, understand and challenge my own assumptions is essential. I also understand that to be critically reflective means to link my thinking with doing; this helps me to set goals and to use what I learned in the past to be aware of and to inform my future actions as well as reflect on the life implications of my thinking. It also helps me to articulate questions, confront my subjectivity, examine causality and spot some of my own inaccurate assumptions and stereotypes. Therefore, it enables me to better understand the connection between my social identities in relation to my social location which could greatly influence my actions as a leader.

### Conclusion

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According to Alvarado (2010), the first step to make positive change is to start changing of ourselves. Leadership in my opinion, is always connected with the degree of power and control that leaders hold over followers. When I think about power in a positive light, I believe it will lead to a positive change. However, it becomes much more complicated when I take into consideration how my life and work as well as personal and professional factors of my life's experiences, beliefs, practices and even historical context are integral to one another and are influencing my leadership. Furthermore, the influence these factors have on leading, might unconsciously portray views or beliefs which are harmful.

As leaders of today's organizations, we need to remember that each individual on this earth has an inherent packet with multiple social identities related directly to race, sex and sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities and qualities and age (Johnson, 2018). By broadening the meaning of social identity and taking into consideration individual status, geographic location, religion beliefs, education, work background income marital status and even military experience, Johnson (2018) presented a more holistic vision which resonates with my beliefs and understanding. All these inherent factors influence one's actions throughout their entire life providing the lenses through which individuals view and interpret the world, experiences, and other people; they directly intersect to form our social location (Brookfield, 2014). Hence, I believe that my lifelong learning journey has allowed me to realize that all thoughts and behaviours that have typically lived under the surface, such as racism and so many other layers of hatred and fear, are very often developed from certain ethnic, racial, cultural, or religious beliefs.

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Furthermore, I believe that critical, reflective consciousness about my own privileges is extremely important in order to encourage and participate in positive change. Privilege can show up in all aspects of our lives particularly if we are not aware of our positionality (Johnson, 2018) and therefore, very often it is blurred and difficult to recognize without an extra effort. Saying this, I believe that the critical conscious is a moral awareness that encourages people to distinguish their individual cultural, social, and political environment and to better understand that all of the factors above impact one's action. (Mustakova-Possardt, 1998). Therefore, I feel responsible for gaining new knowledge and an understanding of the intersectionality of people so that I lead and support as well as improve my self-awareness of how my own intersectionality influences my role as a leader.

Through conducting this MAR, I realized that developing my strong sense of need to make this world a better place is directly influenced by my social identities rooted deeply in my childhood lived experiences. The more I reflected on my identities, the more I asked myself: "Who am I and where do I belong?". Therefore, I realized that my journey of identifying my social identity brought me to where I am now career-wise as I assist and advocate for the most vulnerable population who most of the time struggle to self-identity and senses of belonging. This process also helped me to reflect on my current positionality as a leader and my moral responsibility to encourage change. Hence, I believe that my lifelong commitment to learning and self and professional development that I value allows me to be more effective in educating my followers. This quest to find my equilibrium was a meaningful learning journey as it relates to critical paradigm and self-consciousness (Reid et al., 2017) in order to better manage a diverse workplace.

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*I am sitting on the stairs looking at the beautiful view. It is the first time in my life that I have a place that I can call my REAL HOME. I enjoy the silence because now it is a nice silence with no crying. My happy daughter is already on her own and understands my decision to bring her to this country. It is the first time that I have stayed at the same place longer than two years. It is actually seven, and finally I am thinking—yet still hesitant—maybe it is the right time to unpack all of my moving boxes and place a few family pictures on my walls for the first time in my life. As immigrants, we have to travel a long way to find our real, safe home, and I am not talking about the time that we have to spend on the plane. I am talking about all challenges associated with the process of change that we have to face, go through and overcome in order to start our new life and appreciate the opportunity Canada has given to us. (A. Wojewoda, personal reflection, March 2020)*

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