

Editorial

Inclusion as a Vision: A New World of Opportunity

Submitted by the Aboriginal Human Resource Council

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” -- Margaret Mead

In the next decade, as baby boomers continue to retire, the Aboriginal Human Resource Council is awakening more employers' to the fastest growing labour market solution-- the baby boom of First Nations, Métis and Inuit talent across Canada. Overcoming barriers, making connections and creating partnerships will make this a lasting reality.

In the council's forward-looking vision, the current economic downturn will subside, allowing the country to enjoy a new era of growth – perhaps, fueled by developing sectors, innovative business strategies and technology that is beyond current capabilities.

As the economy settles, new priority sectors will emerge, making it important that the Aboriginal workforce align with these opportunities. Since these growth sectors will require skilled workers that can make enterprises prosperous and profitable, it will be critical to Canada's economy that inclusive workplaces exist to engage the next generation of workers.

Canada's economy depends on having a sufficiently large labour force to support business operations. Before the economic downturn, it was clear that shortages in skilled workers had put increased constraints on businesses within a wide range of sectors. Today, long-term labour market forecasts estimate a shortfall of one million workers in the country in the next decade – mostly in highly-skilled and knowledge-oriented occupations.

If this forecast is realized, it will affect the operations of many businesses, impeding their level of productivity and distorting labour markets. The impact, if left unchecked, could be debilitating. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates that Canada's annual labour force growth will fall to less than 0.5 per cent between 2000 and 2020 and, thereafter, net annual growth will be negative.

Business Leadership as a Catalyst

Every day, Canadians come together in workplaces across the nation. Some of these workplaces are progressive and inclusive – environments where differences are respected and individual strengths celebrated. Other workplaces are just beginning the climb up our [Inclusion Continuum](#) (employers' roadmap to an inclusive workplace) while, unfortunately, some are discriminatory or exclusive.

The council has long focused on the workplace, believing that if workplace issues can be corrected, the overarching barriers to inclusion will erode. Ultimately, it recognizes that Aboriginal involvement must be encouraged and supported, not just in the workplace, but in society as a whole.

In 2009, the council created a new partnership group called the *Leadership Circle* - a group comprised of some of Canada's best thought leaders from corporations, government departments and the Aboriginal community that know the power of inclusion are committed to making inclusion work.

Leadership Circle partners advance inclusion and the employment and development of Aboriginal people - a goal that can only be accomplished with the backing of Canadian business.

Additionally, *Leadership Circle* partners also play an important role in amplifying the policy and partnership solutions that are developed; helping to convince other business leaders to adopt inclusive workplace strategies.

Spring-boarding on this support, the council is taking direct aim at industry problem areas and difficult social and economic barriers that continue to block Aboriginal people from achieving their full potential.

In December 2009, the council held its 11th annual *Champions' Event*, bringing together Canadian leaders (corporate, government, Aboriginal, education, labour organizations) to reflect on the ways in which Aboriginal people can contribute to the nation's economic growth and productivity.

The discussion centered on what partnerships, strategies and linkages need to be implemented to advance a positive economic development agenda. The answer... change the misperception about the potential contribution of Aboriginal people in Canada's economy and make the business case for Aboriginal inclusion -- the rest will follow. Corporations need to recognize the untapped value that lies waiting in the Aboriginal workforce and how this value can support their business model.

The discussion also noted the critical role that youth play in reshaping Canada's future workforce - from inheriting the current problems to reliving the status quo unless they are provided with the knowledge and opportunity to repaint the canvas of old.

Today, Aboriginal youth represents Canada's youngest and fastest growing population. Currently, there are 652,000 Aboriginal people in Canada of working age. By 2020, an additional 400,000 young Aboriginal people will enter the workforce - providing an enormous pool of talent that corporate Canada can draw on it to further enterprise growth.

The time to advance inclusion in workplaces across Canada is now. Visit aboriginalhr.ca to find out how you can lead opportunity through inclusion in your workplace.

The council's *Inclusion Continuum*, a seven-stage employers' roadmap, breathes life into new workplace behaviours/attitudes, skills and competencies in Aboriginal employment strategies, practices and systems. These new attributes build at each level of the continuum, moving the workplace towards a healthy, inclusive environment that eventually harnesses the full benefits of an engaged and diverse workforce.