



Council on Inclusive Work Environments

The Language of Inclusion – Winter Roundtable Series

Agenda

Thursday, February 17, 2022 – Virtual
Nomenclature around Visible Minorities, Racialized
Communities and BIPOC

Overview

Words have power in the workplace, especially when endeavoring to foster inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA).¹ To ensure that every employee can succeed in their job free from discriminatory language, organizations need to adapt to sometimes rapidly shifting norms and nomenclature. This roundtable series seeks to explore best practices, challenges and opportunities in developing policies and standards that organizations can implement around inclusive language, both externally and internally.

The second roundtable of the series will foster discussion and reflection on nomenclature such as “visible minorities” and “BIPOC”. Notably the term “visible minority” has long been flagged as problematic.² Or, as Sachin Maharaj and Rosemary Campbell-Stephens described the term renders “whiteness as ... the norm by which all people are judged,” thereby disempowering and othering while also implying “subordination to white power structures.”³ Other terms such as BIPOC (an acronym representing Black, Indigenous,

¹ Christina Brodzik, “The Power of Language: Building Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace” Deloitte (29 June 2021). <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/blog/human-capital-blog/2021/inclusive-workplace-language.html>

² In 2007 for example, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination called on the Canadian government to rethink its use of the term “visible minority” due to how it may heighten rather than diminish, racial equity in the country. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/term-visible-minorities-may-be-discriminatory-un-body-warns-canada-1.690247>

³ Sachin Maharaj and Rosemary Campbell-Stephens, “We are not visible minorities; we are the global majority,” *Toronto Star* (9 Feb 2021). <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/02/09/we-are-not-visible-minorities-we-are-the-global-majority.html?rf>

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People of Colour) are much more recent, yet they too have not been free from criticism, prompting some to call for further “community engagement and deep reflection” before pervasively accepting the term.⁴ This roundtable seeks to explore what’s at stake in using such terminology, especially for organizations endeavoring to improve and retain diverse talent, as well as best practices for moving forward.

Meeting Objectives

- Explore strategies by which to communicate with colleagues and senior leaders of the role of inclusive language in furthering racial equity within organizations;
- Discuss the context in which different terms emerged and the reasons why;
- Identify and discuss why different terms have been critiqued and ways forward;
- Determine best practices for prompting organizational language change so that terminology used in workplace policy and communication contributes to advancing racial justice.

Thursday, February 17, 2022

1:00 p.m. **Welcome Remarks**
Beth Robertson, PhD (she/they), The Conference Board of Canada

1:05 p.m. **Moderated Panel Discussion**

Sachin Maharaj, PhD (he/him), Assistant Professor, University of Ottawa

Debbie Owusu-Akyeeah (she/ her), Executive Director, The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity

Nicole Kaniki (she/her), Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Research and Innovation, University of Toronto

2:10 p.m. **Q&A**

2:25 p.m. **Closing Remarks**

⁴ Meera E. Deo, “Why BIPOC Fails,” *Virginia Law Review* 107, 115 (6 June 2021).
<https://www.virginialawreview.org/articles/why-bipoc-fails/>



Speaker Biographies

Nicole Kaniki (she/her)

**Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Research and Innovation
University of Toronto**

Dr. Nicole Kaniki is the inaugural Director of EDI in Research and Innovation at the Office of Vice-President Research and Innovation. In the newly created role, she examines, advocates and advances EDI in all aspects of U of T research, innovation and entrepreneurship. Dr. Kaniki is the former Special Advisor on Anti-racism to the President of Western University, and has over six years of experience in research administration and EDI roles. She holds a MSc Kinesiology, and a PhD Health and Rehabilitation Sciences from Western University. More recently, she completed a MA Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies at Western doing research in Black Feminist Narratives in the Academy. Dr. Kaniki has a passion for social justice and uses an anti-racism and decolonization framework in her EDI work.

Sachin Maharaj, PhD (he/him)

**Assistant Professor
University of Ottawa**

Sachin Maharaj is an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership, Policy and Program Evaluation at the University of Ottawa, and was previously a teacher at the Toronto District School Board. His research focuses on school boards, the equity implications of school choice, and teacher unions. Dr. Maharaj is also a regular contributor to the Toronto Star, where he has published over 60 articles, and has appeared several times on media outlets like CBC and TVO. He is currently writing a book taking a critical look at Ontario educational policy, to be published by the University of Toronto Press.

Debbie Owusu-Akyeeah (she/ her)

**Executive Director
The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity**

Debbie is an award-winning Black feminist with over 8 years of local and international advocacy experience in a variety of roles ranging from programming and counseling to policy analysis and project management. She became the new Executive Director at the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity (CCGSD) in July 2020.

Debbie holds an M.A. in International Affairs. She has had the pleasure of bridging her passion for social justice with international development at Oxfam Canada and Global Affairs Canada. Additionally, through volunteering and leading feminist initiatives with organizations like the Ottawa Dyke March, Harmony House Women's Shelter, and Planned Parenthood Ottawa.