Guest editorial: Crossing boundaries and strengthening social connections through improved professional integration of immigrants

Tania Saba (University of Montreal, Montréal, Canada)

Joana Vassilopoulou (Brunel University, London, UK)

Eddy Ng (Queen's University, Kingston, Canada)

Mustafa Ozbilgin (Brunel University London, London, UK)

This is the second of two special issues, which emerged from a discussion that began at the EDI 2018 conference, where researchers explored the advances, setbacks, drifts and transformations brought about by strategies and actions to promote equity, diversity and inclusion. This issue focuses on the labor market integration of immigrants from a global and comparative perspective. This includes the institutional and social approaches aiming at achieving equity and inclusion goals at the social, labor market and organizational levels.

Globally, immigrants are often disadvantaged in their host country's labor markets, being denied jobs that match their educational credentials, segregated into lower-paying and precarious jobs and being subjected to frequent discrimination (Vassilopoulou et al., 2022; Vassilopoulou and Brabet, 2019). Thus, from a comparative perspective that strives to analyze more closely the dynamics of the employment integration of immigrants, three paths can be taken to correct their underrepresentation and improve access to different job categories and working conditions within organizations. The first, and perhaps most influential, is by strengthening public policy on employment equity. The second is by involving various stakeholders, including unions, civil society and other bodies in the establishment and achievement of equity and diversity objectives. The third is by redefining the role of organizations in implementing more effective action plans aimed at better integrating disadvantaged workers into the labor market.

Stronger employment equity legislation

Employment statistics continue to highlight the persistence of structural inequalities and discrimination against disadvantaged groups, such as immigrants, in the labor market. These inequalities persist irregardless of whether a country experiences a challenging or prosperous economic condition. Studies show that employers, even when they are willing to voluntarily engage

in strategies and action to strengthen employment equity, face difficulties in fully and advantageously utilizing migrant and underrepresented workers (Saba et al., 2021; Vassilopoulou, 2017). Three main reasons account for the underrepresentation of disadvantaged and migrant workers in organizations. The first is employers' lack of knowledge about the systemic and structural barriers in employment that inhabit their organizations. The second is organizations' lack of expertise in implementing effective and proven EDI programs to hire and retain diverse workers. The third relates to the backlash and resistance to any change that seeks to create more inclusive organizations and workplaces (Lam and Ng, 2020). Moreover, EDI action plans are often misunderstood, thought to set up a preferential system when, in fact, they establish redress mechanisms, systems to ensure equitable treatment and support to strengthen these systems (Saba et al., 2021).

Canada, for example, has long-standing employment equity programs that include all of the principles and elements that are essential for developing coherent programs to correct the underrepresentation and achieve equality of opportunity and outcomes for designated groups (e.g. Indigenous peoples, visible minorities, workers with disabilities and women). The problem is that they are not adequately enforced. Organizations are rarely sanctioned for failing to correct underrepresentation and eliminate discrimination (Chicha and Charest, 2013). Likewise, in Germany, the government only recently started to promote diversity management as a tool to better 'integrate' migrant workers into the labor market (Vassilopoulou et al., 2019). However, it is yet to be seen how effective diversity management measures will be in better integrating migrants into the workforce in Germany.

Public policies such as affirmative action and equity legislations can be an effective tool for promoting and encouraging equality and diversity and providing better employment outcomes for underrepresented groups. Their effectiveness depends on the proactivity of the institutions that develop employment equity laws and their ability to enforce them. These institutions must help organizations understand the foundations of EDI interventions, target the most disadvantaged groups and support them through the development of appropriate tools. Rigorous monitoring and sanctions must be built into policies and legislation to ensure their effectiveness.

Greater involvement of unions, associations and civil society

Management programs are rarely designed at a granular level that would address the specific systemic and individual barriers of each disadvantaged group (Ng and Lam, 2020). Thus, different

types of intersectionality of discrimination grounds are poorly addressed. Consultation and assessment processes do not systematically include diverse civil society and social partner stakeholders who can adequately inform the challenges faced by underrepresented groups (Saba et al., 2021).

Correcting underrepresentation depends on the willingness of, not only unions, but also various associations, community groups and employers to take collective action (Özbilgin and Tatli, 2011). Social movements such as Black Lives Matter, MeToo and Pride Marches provide strong normative pressure for organizations to address demographic underrepresentation and inequality (Özbilgin and Erbil, 2021). However, Wrench and Virdee (1996) note that European trade unions face a dilemma when it comes to migrant workers since traditionally, they have worked to limit the labor supply as one method to improve wages and conditions. As such, it does not come as a surprise that some trade union leaders in the UK supported Brexit, which was seen as an opportunity to lock out European migrant workers from the UK labor market.

Power dynamics, organizational culture, industrial sector and workplace climate influence employment relationships and, consequently, the quality of employment. The role of stakeholders external to the organization, and in particular, their influence on job quality, are often underestimated (Simms, 2017). When unions embrace EDI goals, they can be instrumental participants in reducing inequities and establishing initiatives supportive of migrants and underrepresented workers. Some unions are active in promoting equity and diversity by including EDI issues in collective bargaining. Actions that address representation gaps include negotiating better access to higher quality jobs through recruitment policies, selection processes, career development and training programs. These human resource management activities and practices are important bargaining issues that require unions and management to share a vision of equity in order to improve employment for migrants and underrepresented workers. Improving access and job security requires proactive initiatives that prevent job segregation by identifying discriminatory biases that affect recruitment, selection, promotion and training.

Homogeneous union leadership is reflected in decision-making structures that result in less sensitivity to diverse member concerns about EDI issues (Kusku et al., 2022). However, unions can employ several different strategies to address inequities in employment conditions (Chicha and Charest, 2013; Kirton and Greene, 2021; Saba et al., 2022). They can establish committees to ensure fair practices; achieve better representation on decision-making bodies by allocating seats for members of underrepresented groups; promote an EDI vision that is reinforced by action and follow-

up; introduce new approaches to conducting union business that considers EDI perspectives, and implement training and awareness programs for union executives and members.

Redefining the role of business in the transition to green and sustainable economies

Despite recent advances to improve their social responsibility, most organizations seem to be more concerned with their image as good corporate citizens than with achieving social goals that do not directly impact their economic performance (Eswaran, 2019; Samdanis and Ozbilgin, 2020). The transition to green and sustainable economies requires that previously unaccounted-for or under-recognized performance metrics and criteria be considered. These include reducing employment inequities, building skills and increasing well-being at work. Yet, recent health, economic, social and environmental disruptions have brought home the vulnerabilities and inequities in our economies. Establishing a better balance between market values and those of more humane and sustainable workplaces is critical to develop more equitable societies. EDI objectives are at the heart of the transformations aimed at achieving a sustainable economy. This transition faces three major challenges. The first is that it requires a change in culture and that organizations be held accountable for non-compliance with standards that are new and unfamiliar. The second challenge is that despite the progress made to increase the social responsibility of organizations, most remain preoccupied with the immediate imperatives of economic performance. The third challenge is the well-documented inability of EDI programs and, more broadly, affirmative action policies to eliminate discrimination and improve the representation of disadvantaged groups.

There are compelling reasons beyond economic imperatives to pursue EDI goals. Organizations must strive to embrace the new key performance indicators for a sustainable economy and society. Organizations of all sizes and across different industries need to be supported by government and institutional initiatives to meet new standards based on the 17 Global Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015. This means that their growth must be accompanied by a balance between social, economic and environmental sustainability. This also requires locating ways to align their organizational culture with these indicators, designing coherent EDI management systems and implementing actions that address the specific needs of diverse underrepresented groups. We can predict that there will be more joint thinking in the social, economic, environmental and technological fields to enhance equity and achieve sustainability standards in the near future.

This special issue identifies different theoretical frameworks through the lens of an international comparative perspective, examining the role of solidarity across different societies and the dynamics underlying the integration of underrepresented people, including immigrants, in various spheres of employment.

Nine articles make up this second special issue. The first, by Genin, Laroche and Marchadour, addresses the challenges of gender equality in workplaces in Quebec, a province with a relatively favorable institutional context for employment equity initiatives. The authors explain the reasons why employers adopt measures that go beyond what is required by the legal framework. The results show that there are more employment equity initiatives in companies that consider gender equality as a strategic priority, those that are unionized, and those subject to legal obligations. The second article, by Thomas, presents a youth leadership program as an opportunity to establish best practices for youth and broader community development. The author analyzes a formative framework for further exploring the impact of community participation on social cohesion. Through an experiential approach, Thomas highlights the need for shared values, strong social networks and shared problem-solving mechanisms, which are central to primary prevention and bridging capital community responses. The third contribution, by Holck and Muhr, examines how the establishment and day-to-day maintenance of racialized psychological boundaries in the Greenlandic police force reproduce a postcolonial hierarchy of knowledge, where the knowledge and perceptions of Danish professionalism are constructed as superior to those of Greenlandic professionalism. The authors show how racial boundaries limit how professionalism is understood in the Greenlandic police force. Making implicit everyday discrimination explicit through vignettes, for example, offers the possibility of challenging and disrupting the colonial hierarchy that is, otherwise, deeply embedded in the work practices of the police force. In the fourth article, Benjamin explains the importance of the involvement and inclusion of union representatives in public contracting procurement procedures to enhance organizational diversity. The author shows how the power struggle between budget administrators and union representatives ultimately undermines diversity in the workplace. Benjamin identifies social processes deployed to hijack union campaigns to improve job quality and how to control such processes. The fifth article examines the indicators that aim to measure cultural pluralism. Németh, Sümeghy, Trócsányi and Pirisi attempt to show that results may differ if authors use different indices to explain attitudes towards cultural pluralism. The ability to measure these processes quantitatively is an issue of paramount importance for the social sciences in order to adequately address the challenges of equity and diversity in contemporary societies. In the sixth article, Keles, Markova and Fatah deepen our understanding of the role of ethnic solidarity networks

in the labor market participation of immigrants with precarious legal status. Specifically, they explore working conditions and employment sectors as well as strategies for accessing work in relation to these networks. The authors delve into the complex phenomenon of "extended solidarity" and demonstrate its role in immigrants' access to and retention in the host labor market. Their research provides a platform for identifying the most pressing issues for further policy reflection. The seventh article, by Farashah and Blomquist, identifies the contributions and limitations of eight theoretical approaches to studying the work experiences of immigrants. Concluding that a comprehensive theoretical framework is lacking, they propose one that considers the role of labor market organizations and intermediaries, the strategic view of immigrant labor, the agency-institution game, the identity-capital game and the host-immigrant game. In the eighth article, Ertorer, Long, Fellin and Esses explore the integration experiences of immigrants in the Canadian workplace from the perspective of immigrants themselves, focusing on cultural capital and cultural judgments as factors influencing workplace entry, advancement and social integration in an increasingly diverse work environment. They identify barriers to social integration that could be largely overcome by improving the cross-cultural competencies and cultural intelligence of employers and employees through training, and by incorporating the values of diversity and inclusion into the corporate culture. Finally, in the 9th article, Merma-Molina, Ávalos-Ramos and Martínez Ruiz examine the effectiveness of government diversity policy in the Netherlands from the perspective of public servants. Based on a comparison between two samples collected in 2008 and 2018, their results show that in 2018, public administration employees demonstrate greater cultural openness, better access to jobs, and a greater contribution of cultural diversity to creativity and innovation. The authors explain the importance of sustaining EDI management efforts and express the changing attitudes over time to better appreciate the benefits of a diverse workforce.

This special issue addresses many aspects of institutional and social approaches that have helped achieve EDI goals and provide food for thought to avoid compromising the significant progress made over the past decade in promoting diversity and equity in the workplace. We hope you enjoy reading it.

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