



FULL REPORT

Career Development & Experiences of

**Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Women
in the Canadian Workplace**

JULY 2025

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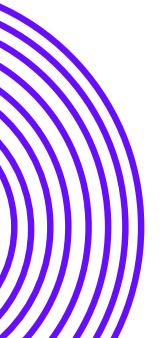
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Accelerate Her Future is a purpose-driven virtual career accelerator tackling intersectional gender equity from both sides. We partner with organizations to address workplace barriers holding Indigenous, Black and racialized women back. Our tailored programs support self-identified Indigenous, Black, and racialized women pursuing careers in business and STEM to navigate the system they live in today.



The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. They believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, they are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

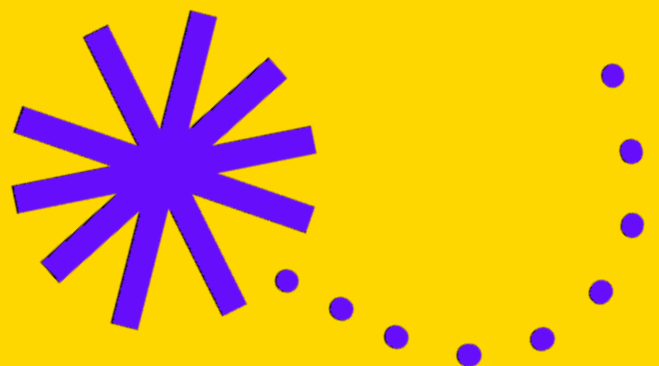


Canada

Accelerate Her Future's Career Development & Experiences of Indigenous, Black and Racialized Women in the Canadian Workplace research project was partially funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Centre. This study was approved on ethical grounds by Veritas Independent Review Board.

Honouring Indigenous Peoples in Canada

Accelerate Her Future® was founded on land and waters of the traditional territory of many nations including the Haudenosaunee, Anishnaabeg, the Attawandaron, and the Metis within the lands protected by the “Dish with One Spoon” wampum agreement. We respect Indigenous peoples’ deep connections to the land and waters, and affirm our commitment to continued learning while engaging our head, heart and hands to advance the TRC Calls to Action 92 and the MMIWG2S+ Calls to Justice 6.1, 11.1 and 15. We invite you to learn more about the history and presence of the Indigenous communities on the land and waters you gather on and work to build a better future for all.



About this Study

Accelerate Her Future® (AHF) initiated the “Career Development & Experiences of Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Women in the Canadian Workplace” research project in 2023 to gain a deeper understanding of the unique career development experiences of these women in business and technology sectors. Recognizing that existing workplace programs often fail to address the specific needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, who face distinct barriers compared to their white counterparts, this study aims to identify these challenges and explore opportunities for improvement. By actively listening and learning from the participants, AHF sought to develop preliminary recommendations that not only benefit Indigenous, Black and racialized women in the Canadian workforce directly involved but also assist employers, academic institutions, and policymakers in fostering more inclusive and supportive workplaces. This study was partially funded by the Government of Canada’s Future Skills Centre. This study was approved on ethical grounds by Veritas Independent Review Board.

How to Use this Report

This report is grounded in a critical finding: most workplaces are not designed to meet the career development needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. Whether you’re reading the full report or exploring a specific section, each chapter is designed to guide reflection and action across the career development ecosystem. For ease of use, we’ve made the report available in both full and modular formats by section.

- **Introduction:** An overview of gender equity in Canada and why AHF conducted this research.
- **From Past to Present: Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Women and the Workplace:** A foundational exploration of how inequities show up differently for different communities and its impact on career development barriers.
- **Sharing Circle Findings:** Draws on the voices of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women who participated in facilitated group discussions.
- **Interview Findings:** Presents insights from one-on-one interviews with Indigenous, Black, racialized, and white professionals working in HR, EDI, career development, and leadership roles.
- **Discussion:** Synthesizes the key themes across all participant groups and surfaces critical insights about career development systems, workplace culture, and leadership accountability.
- **Recommendations:** Outlines suggestions from Indigenous, Black, and racialized participants who took part in the study to better support career development across the employee lifecycle.
- **Calls to Action:** A forward-looking section that outlines specific actions to co-create a more equitable and inclusive career development ecosystem.

Meet the AHF Research Team



Dr. Golnaz Golnaraghi

Lead Investigator & Researcher

"This project directly aligns with my hopes and goals to advance Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in their careers of choice while addressing the gap in career developing research through an intersectional lens. A key insight I've had from this project is the critical need for people leaders, senior leaders and organizations to understand and acknowledge the unique experiences and barriers faced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized women and take meaningful actions through allyship, sponsorship, and solutions that create more equitable outcomes."



Dana Carriere

Sub Investigator & Indigenous Researcher

"A key insight I've had from this project is realizing that my experiences in the workplace as an Indigenous woman are not unique, and that there are many Indigenous women and women of colour with similar lived experiences. By coming together as Black, Indigenous, and racialized women to share our experiences, this project aligns with my hopes and goals to use our voices to create awareness and make a difference."



Seema Taneja

Sub Investigator & Researcher

"This project directly aligns with my hopes and goals of advancing a nuanced understanding of the needs of Black, Indigenous, and racialized women for employers to engage with. A key insight that I had while participating in this project is the need for employers to be responsive, accountable, and targeted in advancing women's careers. Employers are at the centre of developing the careers of racialized women and it is essential that they sponsor these women so they can get a seat at decision-making tables."



Deborah Eliezer

Research Assistant

"This project directly aligns with my hopes and goals to advance the understanding of the lived experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, breaking down barriers and advocating for change. A key insight I had from participating in this project is the urgent need to humanize workplaces and foster cultural shifts away from individualistic mindsets."



Natasha Sidi

UX & Project Management

"This project aligns with my values and advocacy work for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in the workplace. A key insight I had from participating in this project was the lack of awareness and foresight within workplaces, notably among leaders, who disregard the critical importance of ensuring the psychological safety of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. This oversight can perpetuate significant harm to their health in the long term, and their careers, a reality that demands immediate recognition."

Acknowledgments

As we reflect on this project, we are filled with gratitude for the countless individuals and supporters who have played an essential role in our success. The dedication and expertise of our small but mighty research team has been crucial, and we are also thankful for the unwavering encouragement and collaboration of Accelerate Her Future's vibrant community, especially our volunteer Advisory Group. Together, we are creating systemic change by accelerating equitable workplaces where Indigenous, Black and racialized women can thrive.

The research team would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation and thanks to the 122 research participants who joined the sharing circles and interviews for contributing their time, insights, and perspectives.

We would like to thank Elder Alice Kaquitts for helping to open our sharing circles for Indigenous women in a positive way. Elder Alice resides on the Stoney Indian Reserve in Morley and is a member of the Goodstoney First Nation. She is a mother, grandmother, knowledge keeper, and interpreter/ translator of the Îethka Nakoda language.

We are also grateful to Aarti Poon, Therapist/ Registered Social Worker, M.Ed (Couns. Psych), B.Ed, RSW, of Manifest Counselling for being available to participants in our sharing circles to ensure they had access to mental and emotional support services.

Additionally, our deepest thank you to our volunteer Advisory Group members who took part in consultations as we worked through the thematic analysis of this research, as well as providing feedback. Our Advisory Group helped to ensure that we centre the voices, experiences, and expertise of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in every aspect of our work, and that we stay true to our “nothing about us, without us” approach.

The research team is grateful to Dr. Brittany Gataveckas, Director of Operations and Strategic Initiatives, Chester & Fourth Inc., for her collaboration on the writing of this report. We appreciate your thoughtfulness, understanding our vision, and providing space to reflect on the key messages for this report.

The graphic design for this report was created by research team members Natasha Sidi and Deborah Eliezer. We would like to thank Natasha and Deborah for turning our vision into reality and producing a visually impactful report.

A special thanks to all community organizations, individuals, and postsecondary institutions that helped with promoting this research project and helping with the recruitment of participants.

Lastly, we would like to acknowledge and thank the Government of Canada's Future Skills Centre for partially funding this research project.

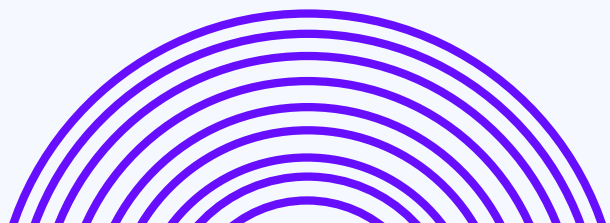
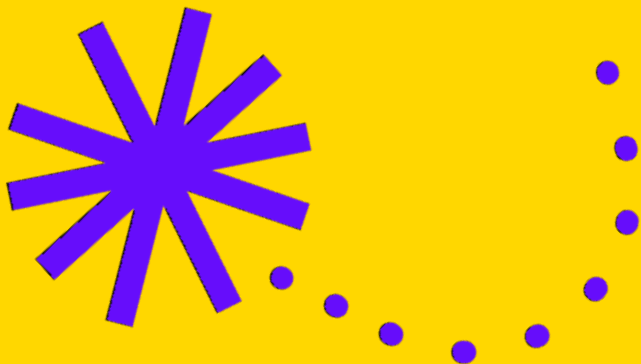




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Introduction:

Rhetoric versus Reality



In 2024, the World Economic Forum released its annual *Global Gender Gap Report*, ranking Canada 36th overall based on its performance in four thematic areas: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment.¹ This ranking represented a dramatic drop from Canada's position of 16th in 2018, reflecting a troubling downward trend over the past decade.² A closer look at one of the categories from the World Economic Forum's report, economic participation and opportunity, which tracks women's labour force participation, wage equality, women's earned income, and percentage of women in management, reveals that the Canadian labour market and businesses are underperforming.³ For a country that prides itself on its **feminist** policy record, the widening gap between promises of progress and the stagnation of efforts on the ground is deeply alarming.⁴ Canada's declining **gender equity** performance has significant repercussions on the lives and livelihoods of women and **gender diverse** individuals across the country. The United Nations underscores that "gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world."⁵

¹ The report ranks 146 countries for their annual gender equality performance. World Economic Forum, "Global Gender Gap Report 2024," 2024, page 135. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024/>

² World Economic Forum, "Global Gender Gap Report 2018," 2018, page 55. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018/>

³ World Economic Forum, "Global Gender Gap Report 2024," 2024, page 14. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024/>

⁴ For more on Canada's feminist foreign policy, please see Global Affairs Canada: https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_developpement-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/policy-politique.aspx?lang=eng. For more on Canada's domestic gender equity work, please see Women and Gender Equality Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/mandate.html>.

⁵ United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 5 Fact Sheet," 2023. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Goal-5_Fast-Facts.pdf





Gender Equity and the Workplace: A Data Snapshot of Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Women

The gap between Canada's perceived and actual gender equity status is partly due to the inconsistent adoption of gender equity policies and practices across workplaces. Women continue to face a myriad of challenges and injustices in the workplace, ranging from high rates of harassment and sexual assault, wage gaps, and underrepresentation. This also encompasses gender-based discrimination, such as being overlooked for opportunities or facing backlash for exhibiting traits that are valued in men, like ambition, assertiveness, or directedness.⁶

In addressing these systemic issues, some organizations have gradually prioritized gender equity as part of their sustainability, human resources (HR), corporate social responsibility (CSR), or **equity, diversity, and inclusion** (EDI) portfolios. Common approaches include strategies such as setting public targets to increase the representation of women in senior leadership roles, developing gender equity plans, admitting more women into **mentorship** or **sponsorship** programs, and investing in or partnering with women-owned businesses. However, these standardized, gender-first efforts often disproportionately benefit white women because the policies and programs fail to account for **intersectionality** – the diverse and overlapping identities, such as race,

gender, age, religion, sexual orientation and disability, that shape individual experiences. As a result, organizational gender equity initiatives do not adequately support Indigenous, Black, and racialized women because they are not designed to respond to their needs and values.⁷

Research shows that the unique needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women stem from the compounding disadvantage of being both women and members of a **systemically marginalized** racial group.⁸ In contrast, white women, as members of Canada's dominant racial group, benefit from racial privilege, especially when it comes to workplace representation. For example, while 89 white women are promoted to manager from entry level roles for every 100 men, only 54 Black women are promoted.⁹ Gaps in the representation of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women permeate all levels in businesses and institutions across North America. Global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company has identified that racialized women encounter significant obstacles in advancing past the "**broken rung**" of the career ladder. As of 2024, women of colour start with 19% representation in entry-level functions, but this drops to 13% at the manager levels, and further declines to just 7% in the C-suite.¹⁰

6 Statistics Canada, "Gender Results Framework: A new data table on workplace harassment," 2024. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240212/dq240212a-eng.htm>; Gelaye Debebe, "Creating a safe environment for women's leadership transformation," *Journal of Management Education*, 35 no. 5 (2011): 679-712. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562910397501>

7 Dr. Golnaz Golnaraghi, "Intersectionality at Work: Why Gender-Only Approaches Aren't Enough," *The Future Economy*, 2024. <https://thefutureeconomy.ca/op-eds/intersectionality-at-work-why-gender-only-approaches-arent-enough/>

8 LaShanda A. Beckwith, et al., "The Underrepresentation of African American Women in Executive Leadership: What's Getting in the Way?" *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly* 7 no. 4 (2016): 115-134.; D. Smith and B. Johnson, "What's missing from your gender equity program? MEN: Gender equality in the workplace is largely seen as a women's issue," *American Management Association Quarterly* 6 (2020): 44-47.

9 McKinsey & Company, "Women in the Workplace," 2024, page 7. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>

10 Ibid., page 5.

Looking specifically at corporate director roles in Canada, the Prosperity Project reported that in 2024, women held 37.7% of corporate directorships, but the disaggregated data showed that the representation of Indigenous women is 0.4%, Black women is 0.8%, and “women of colour” (as a collective category) is just over 5%.¹¹ This stark underrepresentation signals that barriers to advancement for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women are deeply rooted in systemic issues such as **hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy, colonialism, and white supremacy**, and are manifested through both overt and unconscious **bias**.¹²

The underrepresentation of women from systemically marginalized groups becomes even more pronounced when considering Canada’s diverse demographic landscape. Data from the 2021 Canadian census speaks to the racial and ethnic diversity of Canada’s current population. Five percent of the population identify as Indigenous, 23% identify as foreign-born immigrants, 26.5% identify as racialized people.¹³ In some urban centres like Toronto and Vancouver, these figures are even more striking with 55% of residents identifying as a racialized person, and 12.4% of Winnipeg’s population identifying as Indigenous.¹⁴ While this diversity is evident across Canadian communities, it is not equally represented in the workforce. Regardless of industry, sector, size, or location, organizations across Canada consistently fall short in reflecting the demographic diversity of the broader population.

Lack of proportional representation for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women is just one of the factors leading to inequity in Canadian workplaces. Discrimination based on intersecting identity factors such as gender, race, religion, age, immigration status, and language is also widespread. A WomanACT study from 2022 highlighted the persistent challenges racialized women faced throughout their employment journey. The study found that 51% of racialized women experienced racism during the job application and hiring process, with prejudice related to their language skills, appearance, or details on their resumes, such as their name and previous work locations. Even if they succeeded in securing a position, they frequently contended with **stereotypes** about their work ethic, reliability, and demeanor – biases deeply rooted in the enduring legacy of white supremacy.¹⁵

11 The Prosperity Project, “2024 Annual Report Card on Gender Equity and Leadership,” 2024, pages 16-17. <https://canadianprosperityproject.ca/data-tracking/>

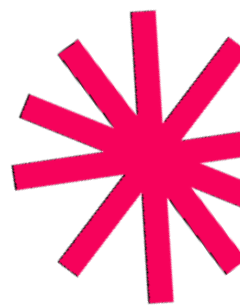
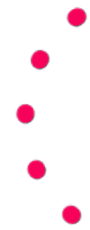
12 Samantha E. Erskine and Diana Bilimoria, “White allyship of afro-diasporic women in the workplace: A transformative strategy for organizational change,” *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 26 no. 3 (2019): 319-338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051819848993>.

13 Government of Canada, “Census of Population,” 2021. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm>

14 City of Toronto, “2021 Census: Citizenship, Immigration, Ethnic Origin, Visible Minority Groups (Race), Mobility, Migration, Religion,” 2021, page 2. <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/8ff2-2021-Census-Backgrounder-Immigration-Ethnoracial-Mobility-Migration-Religion-FINAL1.1-corrected.pdf>; City of Vancouver, “City of Vancouver 2021 Census – Immigration, Ethnocultural Diversity, Mobility and Migration,” 2022. <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/2022-12-12-census-immigration-ethnocultural-diversity-mobility-and-migration.pdf>. Statistics Canada, “Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population: Winnipeg City,” 2021.

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/Page.cfm?lang=E&topic=8&dguid=2021A00054611040>

15 Premila Chellapermal, “Intersections between Employment and Safety among Racialized Women,” *WomenACT*, 2022, page 12 <https://womanact.ca/publications/intersections-between-employment-and-safety-among-racialized-women/>



Moreover, Indigenous, Black, and racialized women often face additional barriers related to age, organizational rank, race, and immigration status. These barriers can lead to experiences of invisibility, where they are overlooked in meetings, their contributions are ignored, and their individuality and unique experiences are not acknowledged.¹⁶ For instance, the **emotional tax** of constantly being on guard against bias and **microaggressions** affects 67% of Indigenous women, resulting in feeling psychologically unsafe in their workplaces.¹⁷ Additionally, 22% of Black women reported not receiving credit for their ideas, compared to 17% of Asian women and 15% Latina women.¹⁸ The onslaught of racism, microaggressions, and ostracism takes its toll: 50% of racialized women report that racial inequality has impacted their self-belief or confidence which has, in turn, impacted their success in the labour market.¹⁹

The data demonstrates that Indigenous, Black, and racialized women face various systemic barriers in the workplace, such as the broken rung, microaggressions, lack of promotional and advancement opportunities, and emotional labour. Eliminating these barriers and advancing intersectional gender equity in the workplace is first and foremost a matter of human rights, but it also brings substantial economic benefits. Women's economic inclusion has the potential to significantly boost the global economy, with some estimates suggesting that closing the gender gap completely could add billions of dollars to Canada's economy.²⁰



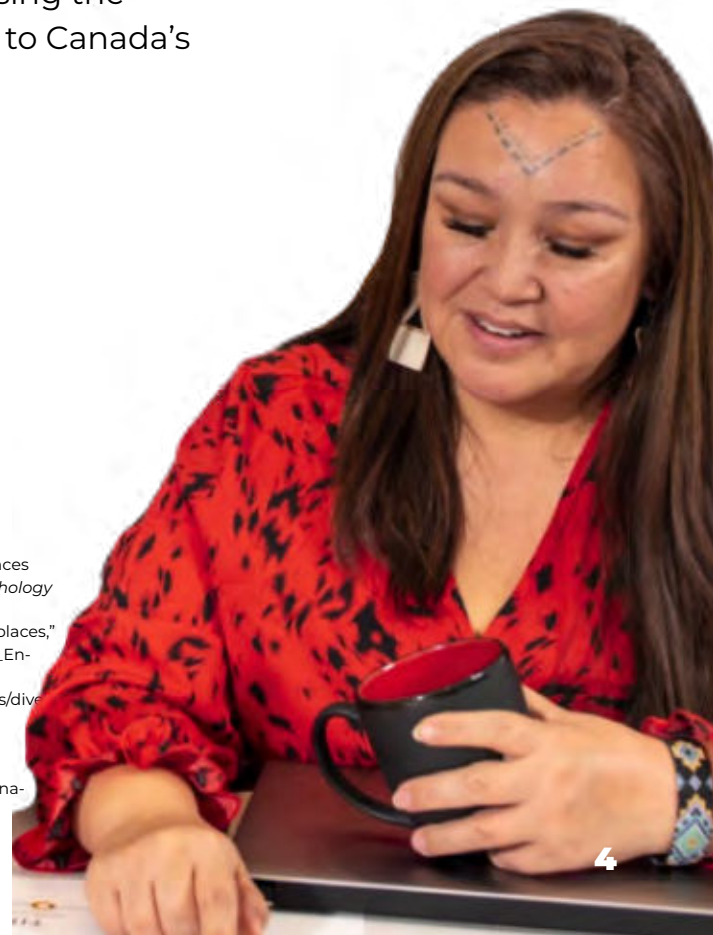
16 Barnini Bhattacharya and Jennifer L. Berdahl, "Do you see me? An inductive examination of differences between women of color's experiences of and responses to invisibility at work," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 108, no. 7 (2023): 1073–1095. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0001072>

17 Jennifer Thorpe-Moscon and Joy Ohm, "Building Inclusion for Indigenous Peoples in Canadian Workplaces," *Catalyst*, 2021. https://www.catalyst.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/IndigenousPeoplesCanadaReport_English_final.pdf

18 McKinsey & Company, "Women in the Workplace," 2023. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>

19 Premila Chellapermal, "Intersections between Employment and Safety among Racialized Women," *WomenACT*, 2022, page 12

20 Canadian Women's Foundation, "Five Ways that Gender Equality Benefits Everyone," 2018. <https://canadianwomen.org/blog/5-ways-gender-equality-benefits-everyone/>
Photo by: CIRA.CA



Importance of Career Development

It is evident that inequities faced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in the workplace reflect deep-seated systemic barriers rooted in colonial, patriarchal, and racist ideology. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort to dismantle the entrenched systems of bias and inequality that hinder true equity in the workplace, beginning with hearing directly from Indigenous, Black, and racialized women about the barriers they face at work and how to best support their career aspirations. The voices of systemically marginalized women are often absent, ignored, or silenced in **career development** research leading to gaps in understanding and a dearth of effective solutions that address their needs.

As it currently stands, career development programs, initiatives, and services often fail to serve everyone because traditional career development approaches can be seen as narrow and one-dimensional. Previous research has defined career development as an active, continuous process leading to improved outcomes such as better job performance, progression towards career goals, and professional advancement.²¹ However, this conventional framework tends to overlook the diverse needs and aspirations of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in the workplace, failing to account for their different backgrounds, lived experiences, career paths, and goals.

For example, scholars point out that for Indigenous Peoples, cultural identity is an essential aspect of their lives and sense of self which means that effective career development solutions for Indigenous Peoples require deep cultural consideration.²² This limited definition means that those who require alternative processes or approaches to achieve their career aspirations may not be getting adequate and equal support. It also assigns responsibility for successful career progression to the individual rather than the organization or institution employing that person, leading scholars to describe the current trend as “an era of do-it-yourself career management where individuals are being challenged to play a greater role in constructing their own career development.”²³

This lack of organizational accountability can lead to the misconception that individuals not benefiting from career development services lack agency and motivation. In reality, they may be overlooked as high-potential candidates due to entrenched biases surrounding their gender, skin colour, or ethnicity.

This exclusion can be especially significant for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women who often face compounding barriers accessing relevant, tailored, and valuable career development supports. In a pre-survey conducted as part of this

21 Brown and Brooks, 1990, as cited in Wendy Patton and Mary McMahon, *Career development and systems theory: Connecting theory and practice*, 3rd Edition, Sense Publishers, 2014; Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling (CERIC), “Career Development,” In *Glossary of Career Development*, n.d., <https://ceric.ca/glossary-of-career-development/>; Career Development Institute “What is career development?” n.d., <https://www.thecdi.net/about-us/career-development-and-the-cdi/what-is-career-development#:~:text=Career%20development%20is%20the%20lifelong,achieve%20long%2Dterm%20career%20goals>

22 Deepak Matthew et al., “Cultural Infusions and shifting sands: What helps and hinders career decision-making of Indigenous young adults,” *Canadian Journal of Career Development* 22 no. 1 (2023); Alaina Goodwill et al., “From knowledge to wisdom: Indigenous women’s narratives of doing well with career decision making,” *Canadian Journal of Career Development* 18 no. 2 (2019).

23 Wendy Patton and Mary McMahon, *Career development and systems theory: Connecting theory and practice*, 3rd Edition, Sense Publishers, 2014, page 8.



study, 36% said their organization does not offer any such programs, 29% of respondents reported that their organization offers career development programs for women, and 13% were unsure. Access to, or awareness of, career development options is crucial to an effective and equitable career development process: according to the World Economic Forum, women's career advancement requires access to a network of leaders and colleagues who are willing to develop, promote, mentor and/ or sponsor them in both their professional and personal aspirations.²⁴ However, career advancement for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women is routinely inhibited by a lack of access to senior leaders (especially those from similar racial and ethnic communities) and **affinity bias**, the tendency to favour people who look like you or have similar backgrounds. Affinity bias can reduce Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's interactions with influential decision-makers, who are often white, restricting their access to critical networks and opportunities for advancement.²⁵

Given the diversity of Canada's labour market and the unique social identities, lived experiences, talents, and strengths of its workers, it is important for organizations to consider the specific professional and career development needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.

Regrettably, few organizations approach career development with an intersectional, culturally-informed lens. McKinsey & Company research shows that 54% of companies surveyed in North America offer career development programs and services for women but only 25% offer them for women of colour.²⁶ Providing socially just and culturally responsive career development options and interventions is essential for closing equity gaps in workplaces and advancing efforts to eliminate discrimination, however, organizations are coming up short in meeting demands for culturally appropriate career development. For example, research has shown that career counselling lacking a customized approach fails to address the needs of racially diverse and Indigenous women because Western perspectives of career counselling emphasize individualism, overlook the integration of work and family roles, and value linear career development processes.²⁷

The Career Counselling with Underserved Populations (CCUP) model states that due to the career development issues that **equity-deserving** groups face, it is crucial to provide culturally appropriate career development and counselling that reflects specific cultural issues, considers family roles and obligations, responds to lived experiences, and other nuances that may affect equity-deserving groups.²⁸

24 Sharmila Karve and Robert E. Moritz, "3 Things Women Need to Succeed in their Career - According to Women," *World Economic Forum*, 2018. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/03/women-work-pwc-survey-2018/>

25 Dr. Golnaz Golnaraghi, "Mentoring as a pathway to more equitable organizations," *Women of Influence*, 2021. <https://www.womenofinfluence.ca/2021/01/06/mentoring-as-a-pathway-to-more-equitable-organizations/>; Jane Hurst et al., "Women managing women: Intersections between hierarchical relationships, career development and gender equity," *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 31 no. 1 (2016): 61-74. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-03-2015-0018>; Miller McPherson et al., "Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 415-444. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.415>.

26 McKinsey & Company, "Women in the Workplace," 2024, page 16. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>

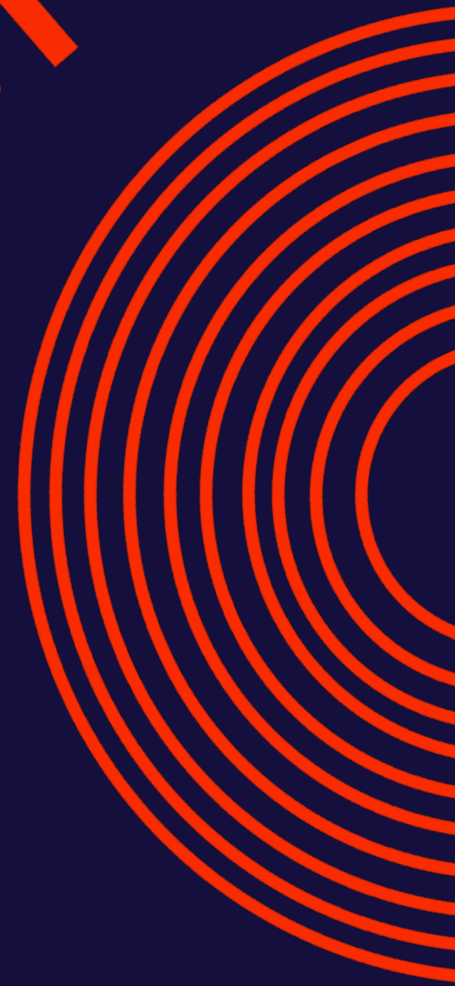
27 Ellen P. Cook, et al., "Career development of women of color and White women: Assumptions, conceptualization, and interventions from an ecological perspective," *The Career Development Quarterly*, 50 no. 4 (2002): 291-305. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2002.tb00574.x>

28 M. Pope, "The career counselling with underserved populations model in practice," in N. Arthur, R. Borgen, and M. McMahon (eds), *Career theories and models at work: Ideas for practice*, (2019): 572-578.

Research suggests that organizations can incorporate intersectionality into their career development models by moving beyond one-size-fits-all programs towards tailored career development initiatives that meet the needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.

As the research in this report will further detail, current career development models are ones where Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's needs are not being adequately addressed, resulting in unequal career outcomes and stunted advancement. This oversight also perpetuates systemic barriers and reinforces cycles of inequality, leading to greater discrimination, prejudice, and microaggressions in the workplace. In order to break this cycle and usher in more equitable career outcomes, career development requires an evolution and shift toward a more inclusive framework that acknowledges and addresses intersectional factors, such as race, gender, ethnicity, and immigration status. To facilitate this evolution, we need to address gaps in our understanding of career development, starting with including and amplifying the voices and lived experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in career development discourse. This report seeks to contribute to this gap by hearing directly from Indigenous, Black, and racialized women on the career development obstacles they experience as well as their recommendations for corresponding solutions to improve career development services.

These insights are integral to build a more inclusive and responsive career development ecosystem and ultimately, an economy that leaves no one behind.



Why This Research Project

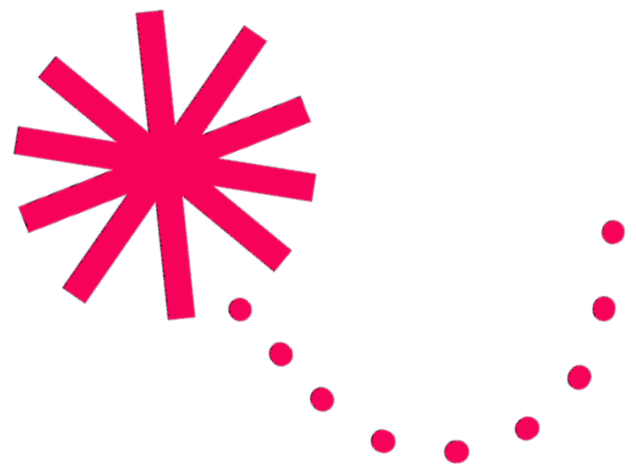
Prioritizing career development opportunities that are tailored to the lived realities of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women is not only a matter of equity, but essential to building workplace cultures where people feel seen, valued, and supported to grow. Creating inclusive, responsive systems of career development strengthens organizational cultures, supports talent retention, and models the kind of ethical leadership that the future of work demands. The reality is that most career development programs and strategies are not designed with Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in mind. Despite commitments to EDI, there is a gap in fully understanding the intersecting barriers faced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized women or how to meet their career advancement goals in ways that are culturally relevant and structurally transformative.

Recognizing the significant gap in intersectional research in Canada, Accelerate Her Future received partial funding from the Government of Canada's Future Skills Centre to explore the career development experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in the Canadian workplace.

The "Career Development and Experiences of Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Women in the Canadian Workplace" research project was guided by the premise that to create solutions that remove barriers, we must centre the voices of those impacted.

This study was grounded in the insights of 122 participants, including Indigenous, Black, and racialized women at various career stages, as well as HR professionals, EDI leaders, and people managers in Canada. Through sharing circles and interviews, we examined not only the barriers and gaps that persist, but also the promising practices and visions for what is possible.

This report offers tangible, community-informed recommendations for transforming career development systems. They are intended to support equity-deserving women, as well as employers and workplaces, postsecondary institutions, government, and social purpose organizations. To make these recommendations meaningful, action is required. A commitment to equity without accountability is **performative**. These findings invite leaders across sectors to move beyond programmatic responses and into systems-level change, reimagining what career development can look like when it is rooted in inclusion and sustained by shared responsibility.



From Past to Present: Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Women in the Workplace

The barriers that equity-deserving groups experience in the workplace are not simply the result of contemporary biased practices; they have historical roots embedded in colonialism, systemic racism, and exclusionary policies that have shaped Canada's socio-economic structures over centuries. Understanding the history of systemically marginalized groups in Canada is essential to building workplaces with career development opportunities that respond to diverse groups' needs and address the root causes of inequality, providing all employees with equitable opportunities for growth, success, and leadership within the workplace. While a fulsome historical analysis is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to highlight that the barriers experienced by equity-deserving groups have historical roots that are not often discussed in workplaces and career development contexts.



A Historical Perspective

Positive discourse on diversity in the workplace began to develop in North America at the end of the 20th century. Gloria Miller and Julie Rowney point out that the concept of “diversity” and subsequently, “diversity management,” was developed, in light of backlash to affirmative action in the United States, as a more palatable way to address the inclusion of diverse peoples within the workforce.²⁹ In Canada, Justice Rosalie Abella, the head of the 1984 Royal Commission on Equality in Employment, pioneered language around “employment equity” instead of affirmative action, paving the way for the Human Rights Act (1985) and Employment Equity Act (1995) which together, enshrined **anti-discrimination** practices into legislation.³⁰ As Canada’s immigrant population grew throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the government also enshrined the importance of cultural diversity, heritage, and respect with the Multiculturalism Act (1988).³¹ Taken together, these Acts established employers’ fundamental responsibility to prevent discrimination based on various identity factors, providing a legal framework that has supported the expansion of formal EDI efforts in the 21st century.

There was broad public support for these Acts, but government agencies, commissions, and task forces were the driving forces behind the adoption of

enhanced EDI mandates in Canada.³² Businesses were forced to align with these legislative pronouncements and in doing so, it changed the way organizations approached employment within Canada’s shifting demographic landscape. Business leaders began to move away from acknowledging population diversity as something that was passively happening to their workforce, to strategically managing diversity to enhance their workplaces.³³ This ideal can still be seen in the prevalence of the business case for diversity, centring on arguments related to enhanced financial and operational performance, that defines modern approaches to EDI.³⁴

Canadian businesses’ current EDI initiatives aim to address systemic discrimination faced by what the Government of Canada has termed equity-deserving groups: women, racialized individuals, Indigenous Peoples, members of the **2SLGBTQIA+** community, and those with disabilities. While the history of human rights and employment equity in Canada includes Indigenous Peoples, it is important to distinguish EDI from **decolonization** and **truth and reconciliation**; these concepts are cornerstones in the Canadian social justice movement as they work to address the historical and ongoing injustices faced by Indigenous Peoples.

29 Gloria Miller and Julie Rowney, “One Step Forward, or Two Steps Back? Diversity Management and Gender in Organizational Analysis,” 2007, pages 2-3. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247055096_One_Step_Forward_or_Two_Steps_Back_Diversity_Management_And_Gender_In_Organizational_Analysis

30 Harish C. Jain, “Racial Minorities and Affirmative Action/Employment Equity Legislation in Canada,” *Relations Industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 44, no. 3 (1989): 595-596.; Gloria Miller and Julie Rowney, “Workplace diversity management in a multicultural society,” *Women in Management Review*, 14 no. 8 (1999): 307-309.

31 Government of Canada, “About the Canadian Multiculturalism Act,” 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/about-multiculturalism-anti-racism/about-act.html>

32 Gloria Miller and Julie Rowney, “Workplace diversity management in a multicultural society,” *Women in Management Review*, 14 no. 8 (1999): 307-309.

33 Ibid., page 2-3.

34 For an in-depth look at the business case for diversity, see Dr. Golnaz Golnaraghi, “Postcoloniality, Diversity Discourses and Corporate Canada: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Corporate Images of the ‘Immigrant’ at Work,” 2015, Athabasca University, Doctor of Business Administration Thesis, pages 31-35.

Decolonization as a Social Imperative

Decolonization is an evolving concept but, in general, it refers to the act of rectifying exploitative political and cultural power structures, systems, and ideologies that were established during colonial rule on native populations. On Turtle Island, or the land we refer to today as North America, British, French, Spanish, and Dutch colonizers imposed systems of oppression and exploitation of Indigenous populations which stripped them of their land, wealth, culture, language, practices, and in many cases, lives, and transferred power to white European settlers. As Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission summarized it, "the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of **assimilation**, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada."³⁵



Truth and Reconciliation in Canada

As outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions of Canada, the dual concepts of truth and reconciliation work together to forge a path forward.

On truth: "the importance of truth telling in its own right should not be underestimated; it restores the human dignity of victims of violence and calls governments and citizens to account. Without truth, justice is not served, healing cannot happen, and there can be no genuine reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada."

On reconciliation: "reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour... Reconciliation must support Aboriginal peoples as they heal from the destructive legacies of colonization that have wreaked such havoc in their lives. But it must do even more. Reconciliation must inspire Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to transform Canadian society so that our children and grandchildren can live together in dignity, peace, and prosperity on these lands we now share."

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," 2015.

³⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," 2015, page 1. https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf

Decolonization is a small step towards acknowledging the genocide of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and its sweeping repercussions on Indigenous Peoples' health, safety, stability, and rights. Geena Holding defines decolonization as "... the only solution to the inequalities and social problems that stem from colonization. This implies taking the power back through active resistance against ongoing colonization by embracing the resurgence of Indigenous cultures, laws, and governing systems."³⁶ To accomplish this, both macro and micro forms of decolonization are required. Muhammad Asadullah outlines that macro forms of decolonization address systemic or institutional change by redistributing social, economic, and political power, while micro forms focus on the mind and body such as restoring language, cultural practices, and traditional value systems, beliefs, skills, and teachings.³⁷

Decolonization is a broad movement relevant to all people who experienced colonization globally, but the concept of truth and reconciliation is specific to Canada's relationship with its Indigenous Peoples. In Canada, the government has endorsed the joint concept of truth and reconciliation as a key means towards rebuilding its relationship with Indigenous Peoples and as a way to honour the victims, survivors, families, and communities of residential schools. Specifically, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada calls on the business community to "adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources."³⁸ The movement for truth and reconciliation is an endeavor that openly confronts past atrocities while also envisioning a future where bridges are built between communities to foster unity.

³⁶ Geena Holding, "Decolonization and Court," in *Decolonization and Justice: An Introductory Overview* by Muhammad Asadullah, University of Regina, 2022. <https://opentextbooks.uregina.ca/decolonizingjustice/chapter/chapter-3-justice-for-all-decolonizing-courts-through-indigenous-justice/>

³⁷ Muhammad Asadullah, "Decolonization and Restorative Justice: A Proposed Theoretical Framework," *Decolonization of Criminology and Justice*, 3 no. 1 (2021): 30-31.

³⁸ Government of Canada, "Business and Reconciliation," 2021. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1524506030545/1557513309443>

Photo by: CIRA.CA

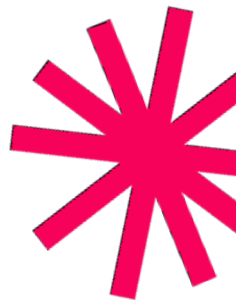


When addressing decolonization and truth and reconciliation in the workplace, organizations must have a distinct approach to avoid conflating these frameworks with their EDI efforts. For example, a hiring, retention, or advancement initiative that targets systemically underrepresented groups would be classified as a EDI initiative, but it is not a practice that is necessarily prioritizing deeply understanding and being present with Indigenous communities and women.³⁹ Recognizing this nuance not only aligns with the principles of decolonization but also supports the broader mandate for truth and reconciliation by ensuring that initiatives are genuinely responsive to and respectful of Indigenous People's status, as well as their histories, cultures, and rights.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Workplaces

Organizations have increasingly asserted a commitment to prioritizing EDI, both within their workforces and in the causes they support, as a means of addressing employee needs and stakeholder demands. They have also sought to deliver on these well-intentioned commitments by launching **employee resource groups** (ERGs), issuing statements of support for social justice movements, and partnering with community leaders or organizations working in the equity space. However, there is often a disconnect between decision-makers and employees regarding what constitutes genuine equity and inclusivity.

In practice, EDI can be likened to experiences everyone has over the course of their lives. A common metaphor, often attributed to lawyer and thought-leader Vernā Myers, describes “diversity” as receiving an invitation to the party, while “inclusion” is being asked to dance.⁴⁰ While inviting someone from an equity-deserving group to “dance” may be an inclusive action, it is problematic to ask them to participate in a system that reinforces their discrimination or minimizes their perspective. This disconnect largely occurs when an inclusive action is automatically conflated with achieving equity. Equity is an outcome-driven approach that centres on providing fair, but not necessarily uniform treatment to achieve equal outcomes, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach. As Elizabeth (Dori) Tunstall aptly points out, inclusion in practice often forces equity-deserving groups to “culturally assimilate to the dominant norms” which can stand in conflict with their own values.⁴¹ Moreover, what might be considered an equitable practice for one group could simultaneously reinforce assimilation for another. This emphasis on assimilation instead of inclusion has created additional hurdles, barriers, and trauma for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, resulting in workplaces that lack true inclusivity.



³⁹ Elizabeth Tunstall, *Decolonizing Design: A Cultural Justice Guidebook*, The MIT Press, United States of America, 2023, pages 75-76, 94.

⁴⁰ Laura Sherbin and Ripa Rashid, “Diversity Doesn’t Stick Without Inclusion,” *Harvard Business Review*, 2017. https://hbr.org/2017/02/diversity-doesnt-stick-without-inclusion?referral=00563&cm_mmc=email-_-newsletter-_-daily_alert-_-alert_date&utm_source=newsletter_daily_alert&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=alert_date&spMailingID=16466199&spUserID=MTk2NDkzMjE1NwS2&spJobID=960100237&spReportId=OTYwMTAwMjM3SO.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Tunstall, *Decolonizing Design: A Cultural Justice Guidebook*, The MIT Press, United States of America, 2023. Page 71-72.

Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Women, Career Development and the Workplace

White supremacy and patriarchy, whether manifesting as colonialism, slavery, or **xenophobia**, have deeply embedded racism and misogyny within the very fabric of Canadian institutions, society, and culture, ranging from education, healthcare, government, legal systems, media, and cultural norms. The implications of **systemic racism** extends to career advancement as women of colour increasingly report that their race and gender has prevented them from receiving a raise, being promoted, or getting ahead professionally in other forms.⁴² Although Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in Canada face race- and gender-based discrimination and systemic oppression, their experiences are distinct, shaped by unique historical, cultural, and personal contexts. To understand the barriers impeding women's career development, it is essential to acknowledge and respect these differences rather than conflating their diverse experiences under a single banner.

To understand how white supremacy and anti-Black racism manifest in workplaces and impact career development, we must acknowledge the destructive legacy of slavery. Beginning in 1682, approximately 3,000 people of African descent were forcibly brought to Canada and enslaved until Upper Canada passed an Act to Limit Slavery in 1793 and the British Parliament's Emancipation Act abolished slavery across its empire in 1833.⁴³ The perpetrators of slavery instituted a system of oppression and exploitation built on treating Black people as property rather than human beings, subjecting them to harsh living and working conditions including physical violence, psychological trauma, and social degradation, separating families, restricting cultural identities, and denying basic human rights. Despite the abolition of slavery in British North America, Canada was not a tolerant and welcoming place

for formerly enslaved Black people who remained marginalized due to segregation, exclusionary policies, and pervasive racist attitudes.⁴⁴ This anti-Black racism continued to shape the experiences of Black immigrants to Canada in the 20th century, as immigration officers obstructed Black immigrants from the United States by refusing to process requests for assistance, creating administrative barriers to the process, and bribing officials to deny entry to Canada.⁴⁵

⁴² McKinsey & Company, "Women in the Workplace," 2024, page 31. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>

⁴³ Shahzia Noorally and Dr. Golnaz Golnaraghi, "Building Alliances in the Workplace," *UN Global Compact Network Canada and Accelerate Her Future*, 2023.

⁴⁴ Steve McCullough and Matthew McRae, "The Story of Black Slavery in Canadian History," *Canadian Museum for Human Rights*, 2023. <https://humanrights.ca/story/story-black-slavery-canadian-history>

⁴⁵ Steve Schwinghamer, "The Colour Bar at the Canadian Border: Black American Farmers," *Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21*, 2021. <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/black-american-farmers>



Despite these barriers, 60% of Canada's current population of those identifying as Black comes from abroad, predominantly from African countries, the Caribbean, and Bermuda.⁴⁶ Long standing socio-economic hierarchies that outlasted the institution of slavery continue to adversely impact Black people in Canada through modern institutional, systemic, cultural, and economic anti-Black discrimination.

When it comes to dismantling systemic racism in career development, EDI initiatives are crucial, but to be truly effective, they must explicitly confront the legacy of anti-Black racism and **misogynoir** – a term, coined by Moya Bailey, used to describe the unique burden of racism and sexism experienced by Black women.⁴⁷ Misogynoir leads to numerous biases in the workplace, particularly regarding Black women's professionalism and credibility. These biases are often exacerbated for Black women in executive or leadership roles, or those aspiring to climb the career ladder. They face the juxtaposing challenges of being hyper-visible as the only, or one of few, Black women in their workplace, while simultaneously feeling invisible due to skepticism or marginalization from colleagues.⁴⁸ Since whiteness often defines professional standards, Black women struggle with showing up authentically and often feel the need to **code switch** or play a role to avoid conflict at work.⁴⁹

To address these unique barriers to career development experienced by Black women, EDI initiatives must tackle the intertwined systems of white supremacy and patriarchy that perpetuate institutional biases and social stigmas disproportionately affecting Black communities.

Race-based discrimination can affect anyone who does not identify or present as white, but the nature of these experiences can vary significantly between individuals. For instance, the race-based discrimination faced by a Black woman can differ fundamentally from that encountered by a South Asian woman or a nonbinary Latinx, owing to distinct stereotypes and biases shaped by the unique historical contexts and cultural backgrounds of different racial and ethnic groups. In Canada, this variation which often takes the shape of xenophobia, is influenced by the specific histories and immigration experiences of groups during the 19th and 20th centuries. A few notable examples include Asian Canadians facing exclusionary laws and discriminatory practices, such as the Chinese head tax and Japanese internment during World War II.



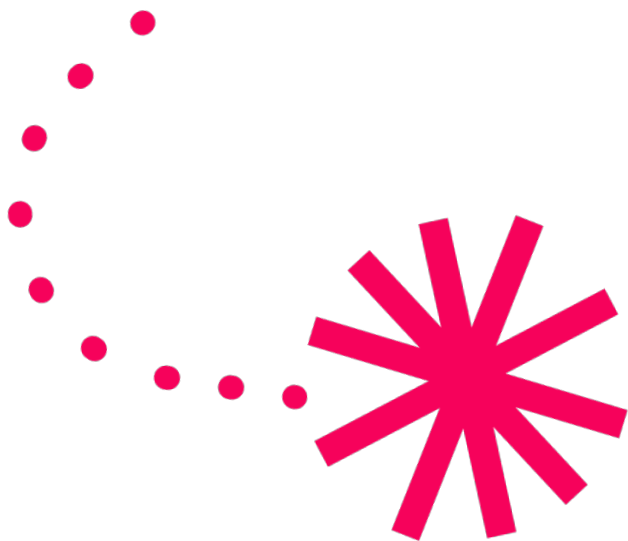
⁴⁶ Alpha Abebe, "Analysis: The diversity within Black Canada should be recognized and amplified," *The Conversation*, 2024. <https://theconversation.com/the-diversity-within-black-canada-should-be-recognized-and-amplified-222242>

⁴⁷ See Moya Bailey, *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*, NYU Press, 2021.

⁴⁸ D. Smith and B. Johnson, "What's missing from your gender equity program? MEN: Gender equality in the workplace is largely seen as a women's issue," *American Management Association Quarterly* 6 (2020): 44-47.

⁴⁹ Ibid.; Courtney L. McCluney et al., "To be, or not to be...Black: The effects of racial codeswitching on perceived professionalism in the workplace," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 97 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2021.104199>.

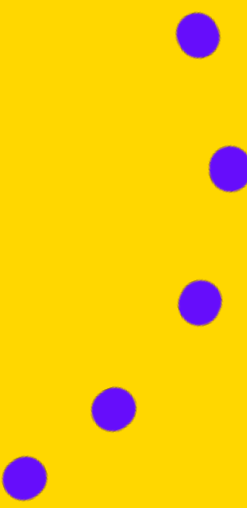
In more recent decades, racial discrimination has continued to affect various groups, including those of South West Asian, Latin American, and South Asian descent, often manifesting in stereotyping, race-based hate crimes, and employment barriers. Understanding how racism, xenophobia, and gender discrimination intersect is key to addressing the varied experiences of all racialized groups in Canadian workplaces and creating a more inclusive career development system.



Why History Matters?

Understanding the history of systemically marginalized groups in Canada is essential to building workplace cultures and career development strategies that meaningfully support Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. Yet most studies and interventions overlook how historical discrimination, colonization, and racial exclusion continue to shape the structures and norms of today's workplaces. These legacies are not behind us; they are embedded in the systems, policies, and practices that define whose contributions are seen, valued, and advanced. As briefly illustrated in this section, the long-standing impacts of inequity ripple into the present day, limiting access to leadership, fair evaluation, and psychologically safe environments. Many organizations are unprepared to do the deep, systemic work required to address these root causes. True career development cannot be separated from the broader project of decolonization, anti-racism, and truth and reconciliation. Without integrating these principles into corporate strategy, policy, and practice, efforts at inclusion risk being surface-level or performative. Awareness of historical and ongoing injustices is essential to facilitate the building of more inclusive policies and practices, and creating an environment where diverse voices are heard and valued.





Insights from Sharing Circles with Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Women

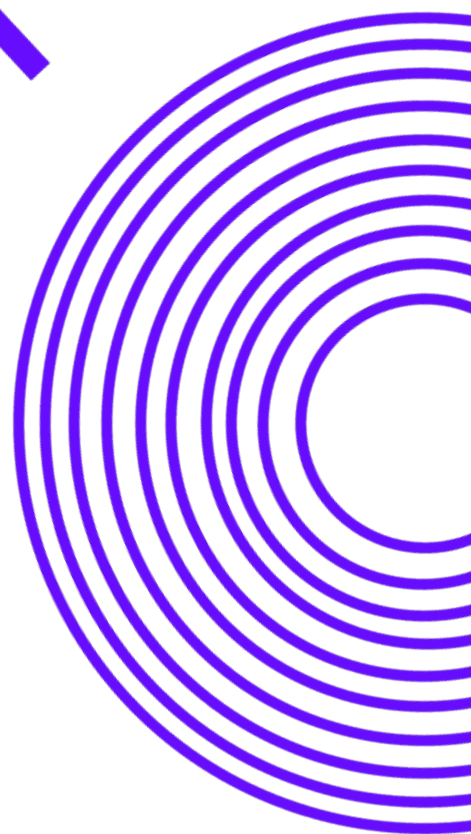


About the Sharing Circles

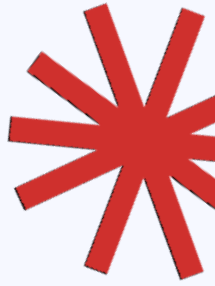
From May - August 2023, the AHF research team held 21 sharing circles with 63 Indigenous, Black, and racialized women with an aim to better understand their career experiences in Canadian workplaces. Using a trauma-informed lens, the sharing circles centred the voices and knowledge of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. The sharing circles provided space for participants with work experience to discuss the barriers, gaps, promising practices, and recommendations related to career development in their past or current workplace. Women with varying degrees of work experience including those new to their careers as well as manager, director, and senior roles were included. Refer to **Appendix B** for participant demographics breakdown and our methodology.

What follows is a thematic analysis of sharing circle insights, presented for each of the three participant groups. In some cases, the barriers, gaps, and promising practices presented below overlap among participant groups which speaks to how entrenched and pervasive inequity is in the workplace. It is important to acknowledge these similarities while also recognizing the diversity and intersectionalities among Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, and that they should not be understood or treated as a monolith. In fact, as this section demonstrates, distinct themes also emerged which convey unique challenges or perspectives that are specific to Indigenous, Black, or racialized women. Please see the **Discussion** section of this report for an analytical examination of these themes.

Throughout this section, we refer to those who participated in the research as “research participants,” or “participants” to clearly identify their voices and ensure that their insights stand apart from any secondary source research that is cited to provide definitions or additional context. It should also be noted that participants utilized a range of terms to describe their experiences with career development, but for the purposes of this report, we have used consistent and official terms where possible (e.g., **imposter phenomenon** instead of imposter syndrome).



Sharing Circle Insights from Indigenous Participants



Barriers to Career Development Experienced by Indigenous Women

Anti-Indigenous Racism and Mistreatment in the Workplace

Indigenous participants described experiencing discrimination in the labour market and workplace due to the prevalence of long-standing systems of oppression including patriarchy, colonialism, and **eurocentrism**. This discrimination can take the shape of microaggressions, exclusion, **lateral violence**, bias, and stereotyping. Microaggressions with racist undertones were a common experience for participants, who provided examples such as colleagues perpetuating stereotypes and appropriating language that may be insulting to Indigenous Peoples (e.g., “let’s have a powwow in the conference room”, or “that priority is lowest on the totem pole”). Additionally, Indigenous participants reported that they were routinely excluded or felt invisible in the workplace, or they were expected to minimize themselves by being quiet or non-confrontational to “fit in”. According to participants, experiencing this type of mistreatment in the workplace can lead to distrust and it may negatively impact their wellbeing because it increases the burden of emotional tax, or the anticipation of microaggressions or derogatory treatment.

It can also lead to further invisibility and exclusion, as Indigenous participants described experiences of being treated as a **token** person instead of equal colleagues or peers.

Participants also shared experiences of lateral violence from other women colleagues and managers, both subtle or not so subtle in nature, as well as from other Indigenous colleagues since they often have to compete for roles, opportunities, and recognition by organizations looking for Indigenous talent. For example, one participant shared that they received comments that suggested they had their position due to favouritism because they were Indigenous. Another participant explained how Indigenous women are put into competition with each other for positions and recognition due to limited opportunities available within organizations. While workplaces can be competitive spaces for anyone looking to advance, Indigenous participants shared that this specific type of competition between Indigenous women was particularly harmful because it goes against values of collective support and community that are important among Indigenous worldviews.

Tokenism and Othering

Indigenous participants described tokenism and **othering** as significant barriers to their career development. Tokenism refers to performative support that does not actually improve outcomes or foster change for systemically marginalized groups, such as using Indigenous employees as spokespeople for any work related to Indigenous culture and causes, while excluding them from other types of work that could build their skill set and offer opportunities for advancement.⁵⁰ Oftentimes, organizations cause tokenism by implementing an initiative to improve representation (e.g., introducing a hiring target to increase the number of Indigenous women employed). When done incorrectly or impetuously, an initiative to improve representation can become a checklist activity instead of a genuine attempt to improve inclusion in the workplace, leading to tokenization. Indigenous participants who have felt tokenized reported being perceived as a diversity hire or token hire which subsequently brought their merit into question.

Some participants noted that tokenism and othering can reinforce self-doubt, feelings of inferiority, and self-limiting behaviours. When hired or promoted, Indigenous participants felt they were expected to be experts in all Indigenous matters as well as spokespeople for all Indigenous Peoples, both internal and external to the organization, regardless of their role. This tokenism was amplified around Indigenous-specific days, weeks, or

months of significance or political, socio-cultural, and economic matters, ignoring the fact that Indigenous Peoples are not monolithic, and individuals have differing levels of connection with their communities and comfort levels bringing this to work. As some Indigenous participants noted, being tokenized (e.g., being perceived as a “diversity hire”) can lead to imposter phenomenon, the self-doubt of one’s skills, knowledge, identity, and ability compared to others and despite evidence to the contrary. The imposter phenomenon experienced by Indigenous women due to tokenism has serious repercussions as it can lead Indigenous women to opt out of opportunities due to a lack of confidence and sense of belonging in the workplace.



⁵⁰ Victoria Roseberry, “How Stereotypes Impact Women (and Men) at Work,” *Catalyst*, 2017. <https://www.catalyst.org/2017/11/29/how-stereotypes-impact-women-and-men-at-work/>; Toronto Metropolitan University, “Equity, Diversity and Inclusion In Practice: Module 2: Anti-Indigenous Racism,” *Experiential Learning Hub, Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching*, n.d., <https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/ediinpractice/>



I really have a strong dislike for tokenism initiatives. I don't like the initiatives during the history months where you are the spokesperson for the entire company when you were never asked about it. You're put on the spot at some type of meeting around Indigenous History Month and they point you out and they're like, 'so what do you think?' And you're thinking, I thought I was just here attending the meeting like everybody else. I didn't know I was the spokesperson for the whole company just because I'm Indigenous. I didn't know that I'm the person that needs to speak on all of this because I also don't know all the facts. I shouldn't be the one that's speaking about it for a whole community. These initiatives that are more for the company's appearance don't make individuals of those groups feel better. I feel like it makes me feel worse.

— Indigenous Sharing Circle Participant

Opting Out of Career Development Opportunities

Opting out of opportunities and feeling the need to evaluate whether or not one is “Indigenous enough” to participate in career advancement programs geared towards Indigenous Peoples was another theme brought up by participants, specifically for those Indigenous women who noted presenting as white. The self-doubt and privilege that can be associated with presenting as white led some Indigenous participants to self-limit their career advancement as they felt uncomfortable taking away opportunities from other Indigenous Peoples. Along with self-limiting their career growth, some participants who perceived themselves as presenting as white questioned their own Indigenous identity and shared feelings of doubt about whether they were “good enough” or were “qualified” for career development and advancement opportunities. Furthermore, participants expressed that white presenting Indigenous women may not actually reap the systemic benefits of racial privilege that white women experience (although they may benefit from more racial privileges due to their proximity to whiteness), and they also may experience more self-doubt around their identity, leading them to feel like they do not fit in.



Self-Directed Career Development

Indigenous participants explained that they have relied on self-directed career development as a result of shortcomings with formal and informal career development opportunities offered in the workplace. For example, shortcomings shared by participants included a lack of tailored or effective career development programs for Indigenous women, unsupportive managers or leaders, work climates that did not foster psychological safety or ensure Indigenous women felt valued, supported, or appreciated in the workplace, and a misalignment of workplace values and practices with Indigenous values and practices. Some participants also noted that self-directing their career development was about proving that they deserved to be there (i.e., in workplaces and ascending corporate ladders) for their merit. It should be noted that the barriers to career development shared by participants appeared to be all interconnected, and that the implications of tokenism, othering, and mistreatment in the workplace amplified the need for self-directed career development.





I felt I had to work harder than anyone else just to prove that I deserved to be here. I always felt I had to do more. I wasn't in the graduate program like others were, I came through the 'back door' and I made my own development program.

— Indigenous Sharing Circle Participant

In many cases, participants indicated they looked to their community of Elders, mentors, and external networks, as well as volunteering opportunities and community building engagement opportunities outside of work to support their personal and professional development. While it appears that self-directed career development can provide space to improve skill sets, access value-aligned opportunities, and build confidence through self-empowerment, it was taken up by Indigenous participants due to the overwhelming barriers impeding their participation in more formalized advancement opportunities at their organizations. This exclusion may ultimately reinforce the notion that Indigenous women do not belong in corporate settings and that their ambition is not recognized or rewarded. Moreover, the individualism required when adopting a self-directed approach to career development may put some Indigenous women in an uncomfortable position of having to compromise their community and collectivist values to see professional success.⁵¹

⁵¹ Deepak Matthew et al., "Cultural Infusions and shifting sands: What helps and hinders career decision-making of indigenous young adults," *Canadian Journal of Career Development* 22 no. 1 (2023): 6-18.



And there's also another set of people who are, you know, trying to keep you in your place and that is a very challenging place. And when you're navigating the next steps yourself, when it's very self-driven, that lack of psychological safety, whether it's at an organization or just in the general population, is very challenging because the narrative is that you don't belong in those spaces.

— Indigenous Sharing Circle Participant

Workplace Gaps

The following section introduces gaps identified by Indigenous participants in the workplace. It should be noted that not every gap identified here was experienced or noted by every participant, and not every organization has the same gaps to close. Instead, this section presents common gaps shared by participants that all organizations should be aware of, but it is not intended to serve as a fulsome list of all the gaps experienced by Indigenous women.



Underrepresentation of Indigenous Women

Indigenous participants pointed out that their underrepresentation in the workplace is reflected in an absence of Indigenous leaders, but it also extends to a lack of role models and mentors across the organization who share their backgrounds or understand their lived experiences. According to the Diversity Institute, Indigenous Peoples are the fastest growing population segment in Canada but they are underrepresented across all functions in workplaces.⁵² For instance, in 2022, Statistics Canada reported that First Nations are the least likely to be in managerial positions – the first rung of career advancement – and Métis remain underrepresented compared to non-Indigenous peoples (5.8% and 7.6% respectively versus 9.4% for non-Indigenous people).⁵³

Further complicating the matter, two participants shared that their organizations have filled positions explicitly related to Indigenous Peoples, decolonization, or truth and reconciliation with those who do not identify as Indigenous. For example, some organizations will combine all equity matters into a singular function (e.g., Director of EDI and Reconciliation) and place a non-Indigenous person in the position. Appointing a non-Indigenous person to an Indigenous-focused portfolio can signal that your organization's decolonization and truth and reconciliation efforts are disingenuous since the leader lacks lived experience with anti-Indigenous racism or colonialism, and it eliminates the opportunity for Indigenous women to see and interact with a leader or mentor who shares their background and understands their lived experiences.



⁵² Wendy Cukier et al., "Skills for Inclusive Workplaces and the Advancement of Indigenous Peoples," *Diversity Institute*, 2024, page 7.

⁵³ Statistics Canada, "Quality of employment among First Nations people living off reserve and Métis, 2022," 2022.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/41-20-0002/412000022024002-eng.htm>



Lack of Holistic and Tailored Career Development

One of the factors contributing to fewer Indigenous women in leadership positions is a dearth of holistic and tailored career development opportunities within organizations. Indigenous participants shared that they lack exposure and access to career development opportunities that are tailored, including organizational support to chart a career path, assistance from managers, and access to appropriate mentors or structured mentorship programs. The importance of holistic and tailored career development opportunities cannot be overstated: according to the Diversity Institute, access to Indigenous-specific programs and initiatives or mentorship brings cultural awareness and Indigenous women's engagement and growth to the forefront, creating the conditions for Indigenous women to actualize their career development goals in a culturally safe and informal environment.⁵⁴

At the same time, Indigenous participants also found that traditional career development offerings and options do not align with their need for the holistic development of the whole self. For example, there is no space within traditional career development offerings for Indigenous women to connect with an Elder, other Indigenous women, or spend time in their communities to allow, for example, healing, learning their Indigenous language, or attending cultural ceremonies. Allowing for a more holistic approach to career development can provide time and space for Indigenous women to exercise and embrace their Indigenous spirituality and cultural practices which could, in turn, also help prevent **burnout** and improve wellbeing along their career journey.

54 Wendy Cukier et al., "Skills for Inclusive Workplaces and the Advancement of Indigenous Peoples," *Diversity Institute*, 2024, page 23.
Photo by: CIRA.CA



The opportunity for healing is often missed. People don't give you time in your career to go to ceremony. You have to take a vacation day or a personal day for something like that. I think that that's something that more places can do for career development because one of my workplaces does respect that and I don't have to utilize one of my designated days. I've had the opportunity to do better in my career because I've actually been able to do some of that healing, feel calm, not be as burdened by everything that's going on the outside.

— Indigenous Sharing Circle Participant

Misalignment of Corporate Values with Indigenous Values

As outlined in the previous section, **From Past to Present**, patriarchy, colonialism, and white supremacy are deeply embedded in institutional structures and across the labour market leading to significant biases that can harm Indigenous women in a multifaceted way. The gender-based biases inherent in patriarchy, in particular, can put Indigenous women in competition with one another for roles, promotions, and recognition. Indigenous participants described that this competition goes against their Indigenous values and teachings. Moreover, the legacy of colonialism and eurocentrism have resulted in long-standing racial and settler biases that dictate corporate behaviours and beliefs including capitalistic competition, performance driven organizational cultures, and lack of support for community and the collective. For example, an Indigenous participant shared that the corporate value of prioritizing profit over “the environment and taking care of Mother Earth” put them in an uncomfortable position, inhibiting them from working at large corporations because they did not share the same values.

Research has shown that Indigenous Peoples find strength in their indigeneity and culture when it comes to career decision-making, but the disconnect between an Indigenous emphasis on a strong connection to community versus Western corporate values which prioritize individualism poses a significant barrier for Indigenous women.⁵⁵



⁵⁵ Deepak Matthew et al., “Cultural Infusions and shifting sands: What helps and hinders career decision-making of indigenous young adults,” *Canadian Journal of Career Development* 22 no. 1 (2023): 6-18; Alainaise Goodwill et al., “From knowledge to wisdom: Indigenous women’s narratives of doing well with career decision making,” *Canadian Journal of Career Development* 18 no. 2 (2019).
Photo by: CIRA.CA



I find that a lot of places will put you in competition with other Indigenous folks, especially other Indigenous women. It's almost like they'll make you fight for these roles, or fight for positions, or fight for recognition. They'll almost try to pin people against each other – and that's all organizations, big or small. They're looking for that competitive aspect, which makes sense because it is the corporate scene, but at the same time, it doesn't follow the values of Indigenous teachings or walking along certain paths with people. That can get really disheartening because it almost teaches our people to get more away from what they believe and what their Elders tell them, and puts them more in a space of seeing everyone as competition and seeing how you can get ahead.

— Indigenous Sharing Circle Participant

Inadequate Understanding of Indigenous Women's Unique Needs and Lived Experience

As indicated by participants, workplaces are not designed to address the unique needs of Indigenous women who seek supportive and inclusive cultures and environments. Indigenous participants reported that workplaces are falling short when it comes to creating and offering policies, practices, and accommodations that support their needs. An example shared by an Indigenous participant was that many workplaces prioritized the recruitment of Indigenous Peoples to meet a diversity target, but they had no corresponding practices in place to support the inclusion and retention of Indigenous employees or their career development within the organization, leading to high turnover rates and employee dissatisfaction as a result of a variety of factors including anti-Indigenous racism, discrimination, and microaggressions.

Indigenous participants also noted that since few leaders share or are knowledgeable on the histories and lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples, there is insufficient understanding of their mental health needs, family and community responsibilities, and intergenerational trauma which can be triggered by lapses in workplaces. For instance, research has shown that Indigenous women tend to be the primary caretakers for immediate and extended family members or other community members, and they often take on multiple roles and have significant

community and family responsibilities which can interfere with their work schedules or responsibilities, or it can delay their entrance into the workforce.⁵⁶ Additionally, one participant noted that Indigenous Peoples who move from a rural to an urban centre can experience complete culture shock as the living, working, cultural, and social environments and norms can be very different. Leaders and direct managers lack competency when it comes to understanding these differences and inequities and as such, may not be able to anticipate how their own knowledge gap negatively impacts Indigenous women's experience in the workplace. If leaders do not possess the ability to relate to Indigenous women or understand their needs, values, and experiences, they will not be able to take meaningful action to eliminate inequities and create more inclusive workplaces.



⁵⁶ Amber Ward et al., "Supporting First Nations Family Caregivers and Providers: Family Caregivers', Health and Community Providers', and Leaders' Recommendations," *Diseases* 11 no. 2 (2023): 65; ACWS, "Stepping into the Circle: Contemporary Indigenous Women's Leadership," 2024. https://acws.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Stepping_into_the_Circle-M7-compressed.pdf

Promising Practices in the Workplace

This section presents a selection of promising practices that can support Indigenous women's career development, as experienced or witnessed by participants. It should be noted that not every promising practice identified here was experienced or witnessed by every participant. These promising practices should be seen as examples of targeted approaches that may help an organization address a specific gap, if implemented properly; however, they are not intended to serve as fulsome solutions guaranteed to close all gaps.

Indigenous Recruitment Strategy

Participants noted that increasing Indigenous women's representation in the workplace requires a twofold approach that targets external candidates as well as internal employees. This recruitment strategy should recognize that setting targets can lead to tokenization and othering, and aim to reduce these unintentionally harmful repercussions. To attract new candidates to workplaces, participants highlighted designing and implementing an Indigenous recruitment strategy to be a promising practice. While this will look different for every workplace, participants indicated how they or other Indigenous employees have supported their organizations by utilizing their knowledge in designated positions such as Director of Indigenous Relations, Indigenous Partnerships Coordinator, Indigenous Knowledge Manager, etc.

In organizations that do not have Indigenous-focused roles, many Indigenous Peoples still contribute in meaningful ways to building inclusion and cultural competency despite it not falling directly within their portfolios or official responsibilities, however this work should be recognized. In terms of recruitment and retention, participants also spoke about the positive effects of organizations that employ Indigenous HR professionals, partner with HR personnel/recruitment and workforce development offices that are Indigenous-owned, or that have knowledgeable staff advocating for Indigenous employees.

Inclusive Leadership

Supporting the career development of Indigenous women requires inclusive leaders and colleagues. Indigenous participants identified managerial and leadership support as one of the crucial factors that can make a difference in their experience in the workplace and their subsequent career development. Inclusive leaders can serve as advocates for Indigenous women's ambitions and careers, offering informal mentorship or career tips which can build their confidence and exposure to opportunities. Participants indicated that Indigenous leadership in decision-making roles is crucial to effecting change from the inside out because these leaders can drive the development of more inclusive policies and practices that respect the needs of Indigenous women and amplify their voices. Moreover, the presence of Indigenous leaders helps to ensure that Indigenous women feel that their concerns are represented and that they belong and are psychologically safe.

Allyship from Privileged Peers

Some participants noted having experienced **allyship** as an especially powerful practice when demonstrated by a white man in a managerial or leadership role, who tackled systemic inequity by pointing out gender or racial gaps (e.g. pay discrepancies) or recommending an Indigenous woman for a promotion. While the participants did not use the term "sponsorship" specifically, the allyship behaviours they described are rooted in public and action-oriented advocacy which are cornerstones of sponsorship. Since men are often predominantly the ones occupying positions of power and hold decision-making authority, it is essential for men and others in privileged positions, especially senior leaders, to continuously demonstrate active allyship and sponsorship behaviors to effect changes in the workplace.⁵⁷



⁵⁷ S. E. Erskine and D. Bilimoria, "White allyship of afro-diasporic women in the workplace: A transformative strategy for organizational change," *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 26 no. 3 (2019): 319-338.; D. Smith and B. Johnson, "What's missing from your gender equity program? MEN: Gender equality in the workplace is largely seen as a women's issue," *American Management Association Quarterly* 6 (2020): 44-47.

Culturally Inclusive Policies, Practices, and Benefits

Some participants mentioned that their organization demonstrated concern for the wellbeing and values of Indigenous Peoples by establishing organizational policies, practices, and benefits that are culturally inclusive and designed explicitly for Indigenous employees. An example of these types of supports shared by Indigenous participants included a robust benefits package that allowed Indigenous medicine and mental health considerations, especially offering support to people experiencing trauma or hardships. It can also include showing up for Indigenous women by offering cultural support such as access to Elders and opportunities for funding related to Indigenous focused activities (e.g., Indigenous knowledge workshops, language training). Notably, for one participant, they had access to culturally supported benefits because they worked for an Indigenous-led organization that inherently understood their Indigenous employees' needs. Culturally inclusive benefits and policies can help build trust and reflect an important step in the dismantling of outdated colonial values in the workplace while fostering more equitable outcomes for Indigenous women.

Culture of Learning and Development

Several participants highlighted how a culture of support for learning, training, and development is a promising practice because it provides access to mentorship, learning opportunities, skill development, and funding for professional

development. Furthermore, participants noted that when direct managers were genuinely invested in having career planning conversations with Indigenous women, it had a positive impact on career development and growth.

Inclusive Employee Resource Groups

As an additional step to ensure that Indigenous women's voices and concerns are made visible across corporate hierarchies, participants mentioned the promising practice of having an Indigenous-focused ERG that is well resourced and supported. Along with providing a safe space for Indigenous colleagues to connect, network, and discuss issues important to them, ERGs are noted to be beneficial for career development when set up appropriately with the sponsorship of a vested leader, adequate time, resources, and recognition are provided to ERG organizers, and when they provide meaningful programming and access to mentors and allies. Some participants also noted ERGs can amplify Indigenous leaders and spread knowledge and education by incorporating local Indigenous worldviews, customs, and history such as bringing in Indigenous guest speakers, and making space for cultural and ceremonial practices.





A safe space. One of my best employers has given me the space to truly let me state how I feel and, within those professional borders still say, I am a person, I have things going on in my personal life, and this is overwhelming for me. To not be punished for that ... and to recognize that we are human beings and we do need time away and there are things that unfortunately happen that are not the greatest. Having a workplace where I don't feel scared or intimidated to say things and feel that I can share these issues, still within a professional boundary, and feeling that I'm not going to be punished or frowned upon and still they treat me with kindness and humanity - it sounds funny to ask. I just want the organization to treat me with humanity.

— **Indigenous Sharing Circle Participant**

Sharing Circle Insights from Black Participants



Barriers to Career Development Experienced by Black Women

Anti-Black Racism and Mistreatment in the Workplace

As outlined in the previous section, **From Past to Present**, misogynoir, the dual discrimination experienced by Black women based on their gender and race, is a significant barrier preventing equity in the workplace. This discrimination is rooted in **white supremacy culture** where Black women are often seen as inferior in white dominated spaces like the workplace. Black participants noted that this bias, manifesting in both overt and unconscious forms, can be amplified, especially if they also came from an immigrant background, dressed in religious or cultural attire, or had a discernible accent.

In participants' experience, anti-Black racism and bias take many different forms, including microaggressions, stereotyping, and exclusion. For example, according to scholars Clynessia Harris and Deanna Davis, Black women have been blocked from career advancement opportunities and had their competencies questioned and undermined for wearing their hair naturally.⁵⁸ The consequences of anti-Black racism in the workplace on

Black women's career development is significant. Black participants described increased levels of anxiety navigating white-dominated spaces, particularly as a first generation immigrant or newcomer, and discomfort managing the emotional tax of constantly being on guard against bias and microaggressions.⁵⁹ Participants shared that their success is not seen as the norm or they are seen as inferior, which can lead to feelings of imposter phenomenon, self-gaslighting, and **internalized racism**. Internalized racism is a reflection of white supremacy culture which can lead to a lack of psychological safety and behavioural changes designed to protect oneself.⁶⁰ For instance, according to participants, experiencing racism and microaggressions may cause Black women to downplay their credentials and opt out of promotions and leadership opportunities because it feels out of reach. These actions reinforce a cycle of self-limiting behaviours and self-marginalization that further hinder professional growth.

⁵⁸ Clynessia Harris and Deanna Davis, "Wear your CROWN: How racial hair discrimination impacts the career advancement of Black women in corporate America," *Journal of Business Diversity* 23, no. 2 (2023).

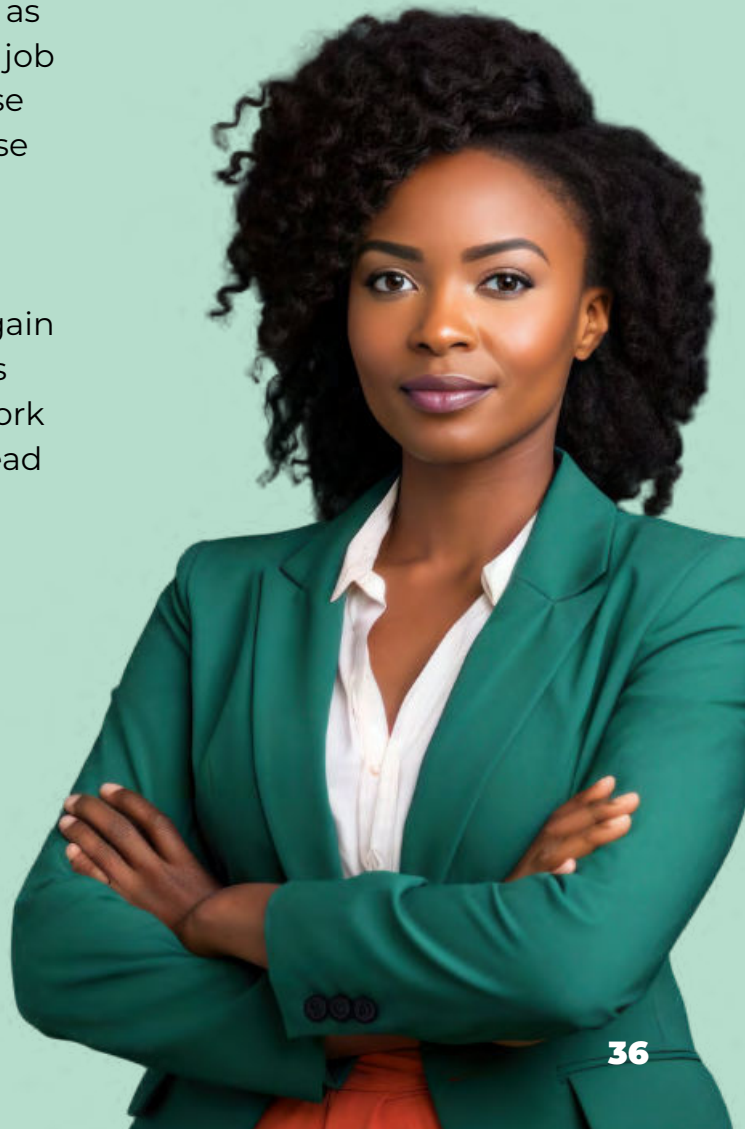
⁵⁹ Joy Ohm et al., "How Racism Shows Up at Work and the Antiracist Actions Your Organization Can Take (Report)," *Catalyst*, 2023. <https://www.catalyst.org/reports/racism-work-antiracism/>

⁶⁰ Bianca M. Blakesley, "African-American and Black women's process of learning, unlearning and resisting internalized racism," Masters Thesis, Smith College, Northampton, MA., 2016. <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/1719>

Immigrant Experience

For Black participants who recently immigrated to Canada, racism combined with xenophobia resulted in challenges finding employment or feeling the need to adapt to Canadian culture in order to get hired and fit in at work. Before immigrating to Canada, some Black participants shared that they were understandably unaware of the significant employment barriers they would face and, once they arrived, were unsure how to navigate these challenges. These discriminatory practices were described by participants as structural in nature, such as their international experience or credentials not being recognized, lacking Canadian experience, or not being seen as “Canadian” enough, but these obstacles were likely influenced by deep-rooted manifestations of racism, xenophobia, and assimilation which gave one participant the feeling that people in Canada saw Black women as “less than”. Complicating matters further, Black women immigrants faced these employment barriers while also dealing with culture shock, familial upheaval, and the administrative complications that come when moving countries.

Despite having international work experience and/ or credentials, some participants found that their skills, qualifications, or credentials were not recognized as transferable, and they faced challenges landing a job not because they were inexperienced, but because this experience did not take place in Canada. These challenges can force Black women immigrants to take on roles that are not congruent with their experience or skill set, or they end up having to attend a Canadian post-secondary institution to gain a Canadian credential. In some cases, participants shared that they did not have access to decent work commensurate with their expertise, which may lead to deskilling or underemployment. Furthermore, for some participants, these barriers were amplified when working in a white and male dominated sector or organization. According to participants, the barriers related to immigration and work experience can also produce internalized bias, self-gaslighting, anxiety, and mental health implications, complicating an already challenging transition for Black immigrant women and reducing their potential career growth in a new country.





Being very conscious that I am Black, I am a woman, I sound the way I sound in a Canadian landscape, there have been challenges and there will definitely be more. In looking to see what is possible for me, I'm not opposed to going up against challenges as it's the very spirit that has got me where I am now. With that said, I think I've also experienced so much challenge to even get to this point, I would similarly not mind other paths of least resistance for a change - life needn't be a cycle of constant feats of resilience.

— **Black Sharing Circle Participant**

Familial Pressure and Influence on Career Development

Black participants reported that grappling with family expectations and influence on their careers can be a barrier to their professional development. Cultural and generational differences combined with a fear of disappointing familial relations puts added pressure on Black women to succeed in their careers in line with their family's expectations which may differ from their individual goals and aspirations. Balancing these concerns means that some Black participants had no other option but to figure out their career goals outside of parental or familial expectations which eliminated a significant source of support for a group that already lacks a professional support network in the shape of allies, mentors, sponsors, and coaches.

Black participants shared that at times, the career advice they received from family, specifically the behavioural traits they were told to embody, may not be suitable or relevant for advancement in corporate spaces (e.g., being told that if you work hard good things will happen, or being told to stay humble and avoid promoting your accomplishments and success). The networking, socializing, and self-promotion required for career advancement is contradictory to many participants' familial values of keeping their heads down and not boasting.



I think about what I would tell my children about what to do and how to show up at work. It's different from what my mom told me, and she had a lot of wisdom. It's not that she doesn't have that knowledge of what it's like here and in these professions, but my mom's advice would be go in every day and work as hard as you can, and don't brag - nobody likes a bragger - and go all out and do your best. That's because that's what she did. And she made a beautiful life for us doing that, but that's not what works anymore.

— Black Sharing Circle Participant

Balancing High Visibility with Cultural Values

Participants noted that in workplaces, career advancement requires recognition from decision-makers who identify individuals as candidates for promotions. One tactic used widely by those seeking recognition to advance their careers is to promote themselves and their achievements to make themselves known to influential colleagues and leaders. While Black participants acknowledged this traditional path for advancement, for some, the self-promotion required to be highly visible in the workplace does not align with their cultural and personal values. For example, one participant explicitly said that they were taught not to brag, and for another participant, the individualist competitive nature of workplace environments felt too “cut throat”. This disconnect means that to actively pursue career growth and get noticed by leadership, some Black participants felt they had to behave in inauthentic ways including self-promoting or “humble bragging”. Discomfort with, or the unwillingness to utilize, these tactics can result in a lack of visibility, limited access to mentors and sponsors, or potentially negative performance reviews.



One of my most memorable periods in my early engineering career was whilst I was pregnant for my second, leading up to my maternity leave. I found myself, due to unforeseen job changes within my team, taking on the role of two job grades above me, including subject matter sign off whilst working on my professional accreditation. I went on maternity leave and came back and found out that my performance review was basically the worst for me over the last couple of years. When I went to sit down with one of the leads to seek feedback on what I could have done differently, because this was actually my rock star year - I was filling in for seniors, I got my accreditation, I saved us from a major safety issue, all while heavily pregnant, I literally killed myself over the stretch roles - the response was, ‘you did great, but in the performance session many people didn’t know your name, so there was no one to support your performance.’ So, it wasn’t about my performance anymore, and that was an aha moment! Painful moment, but an aha moment of oh my goodness, I need to take more control now of my own destiny.

— **Black Sharing Circle Participant**

Feelings of Burnout

Dealing with the psychological repercussions of inequity in the workplace can lead to feelings of burnout, defined by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health as “a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.”⁶¹ Career burnout is ultimately an equity issue related to health and wellbeing in the workplace, and a symptom of systems of oppression, like white supremacy, which can have a disproportionate impact on Black women.⁶² Notably for career development, being in a state of burnout can hinder professional development because the focus is on day-to-day survival, not future advancement.

Black participants reported that they experienced increased physical and mental burnout when their work responsibilities increased without commensurate pay or skill development opportunities. For Black participants who were one of the only members of their race and gender in their workplace, they experienced emotional burnout from being ignored or feeling invisible, and from facing backlash when they spoke up. At the same time, Black women can become hyper-visible in the workplace such as during the racial justice movement that occurred after the murder of George Floyd in 2020. Black participants described that they not only have to advocate for equity and inclusion in the workplace, but they also have to educate their colleagues on current events and manage their colleagues' emotions, specifically white guilt. In addition, this is often invisible labour and does not result in any meaningful changes taking place. Researchers refer to this as **cultural taxation**, and its repercussions mean that Black women are expected to take on the monumental responsibility of disrupting systems and dismantling barriers that disadvantage their careers, which can lead to increased burnout.⁶³

⁶¹ Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, “Career Burnout,” 2024. <https://www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/career-burnout>

⁶² Amira Barger, “POV: Is it burnout or exploitation? For Black women, it's often both,” *Fast Company*, 2023. <https://www.fastcompany.com/90955852/pov-is-it-burnout-or-exploitation-for-black-women-its-often-both>

⁶³ Amado M. Padilla, “Ethnic Minority Scholars, Research, and Mentoring: Current and Future Issues,” *Educational Researcher* 23, no. 4, (1994): 24-27.



I think we're tired and you just don't wanna fight anymore. You don't believe that it's gonna change, so we don't bother. I think you get used to being disrespected, dismissed, ignored. I just don't always want to have to fight and then when you do fight, you're in trouble, you did something.

— Black Sharing Circle Participant

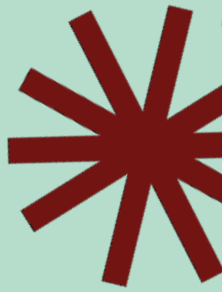
Self-Directed Career Development

Black participants shared that a lack of clear career pathways for advancement and an inability to access or benefit from career and professional development programs were significant barriers that compelled them to take charge of their career development. Other barriers that led Black participants to self-direct their career include gender and racial wage gaps, a lack of recognition, and transactional relationships with direct managers. This self-direction is exacerbated by inadequate access to mentors and coaching or financial limitations for career development, which led some participants to seek out career advancement services specifically designed for Black people external to their workplace or establish stronger connections with their community to access mentorship and coaching. To prevent professional stagnation, Black participants shared they have to work “twice as hard”, “develop thick skin”, take charge of their own careers, seek work that aligns with their values, and/ or self-advocate to ensure their contributions are acknowledged and valued. Participants reported proactively seeking professional development opportunities outside of their organizations and taking initiative to find mentors and coaches, forging their own paths to success.



Workplace Gaps

The following section introduces gaps identified by Black participants in the workplace. It should be noted that not every gap identified here was experienced or noted by every participant, and not every organization has the same gaps to close. Instead, this section presents common gaps shared by participants that all organizations should be aware of, but it is not intended to serve as a fulsome list of all the gaps experienced by Black women.



Underrepresentation of Black Women

Black participants pointed out that being “the only” in an organization or meeting room can lead to alienation, othering, and self-doubt, reinforcing a cycle of exclusion and invisibility. As it currently stands, Black women lack proportional and significant representation across hierarchical levels and job functions in Canadian workplaces. According to the Prosperity Project, only 14.6% of organizations in Canada have one Black woman in a senior management role, and that number drops to 6.1% for executive officer roles.⁶⁴ Even in organizations that are actively working to increase diverse representation, McKinsey & Company’s *Women in the Workplace* study suggests that Black women are often the sole representative of their gender and race: in 2024, 51% of Black women reported that they are frequently the only person of their race in the room.⁶⁵

Black participants reported that a lack of representation leads to power imbalances resulting in their voices going unheard and their needs not being addressed. Participants added that while representation in senior roles is important, it is not enough on its own. The lack of representation in leadership positions extends to include limited access to mentors, sponsors, and allies. One participant noted that to feel motivated to pursue career growth, it is extremely important to have role models who look like you and understand your experiences. Black women who not only failed to see themselves represented in their organizational leadership but also were unable to receive mentorship or sponsorship from those with similar lived experience or those with privilege in power positions, experienced career development and growth gaps.



⁶⁴ Prosperity Project, “2024 Annual Report Card on Gender Equity and Leadership,” 2024, page 20.

⁶⁵ McKinsey & Company, “Women in the Workplace,” 2024, page 42. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>



What I heard was the right people didn't know about me, so it didn't matter what I was delivering. I did not just deliver my day job, I delivered for various departments and also led employee networks. It was also a realization of 'I don't think those right people will know about me, even if I stuck a banner in front of them'. That was it because when I looked at what those people were and who they supported or mentored or sponsored, none of them were like me.

— **Black Sharing Circle Participant**

Lack of Holistic and Tailored Career Development

Performative statements and disingenuous initiatives supporting EDI can signal that an organization lacks follow through and is not prepared to do the work required to deliver authentic action to support equity-deserving groups. When it comes to career development, the issue is not as simple as Black women not having access to opportunities; participants also indicated that standard career development options were not serving the needs of Black women.

The one-size-fits-all career development offerings from organizations are not designed with an intersectional lens and therefore, lack relevance for Black women, further narrowing ideals of who belongs in corporate spaces. For example, one participant pointed out that career development programs often only target gender, which disproportionately benefits white women's career advancement. At the same time, another participant shared that initiatives that focused predominantly on race may be designed to be inclusive for Black people, but they tended to overlook Black women because these programs lacked a gendered lens. While there is a dearth of tailored and formalized career development programs, Black participants also noted that organizations do not provide information on the nomination process for internal career development opportunities for high-potential talent and women, such as leadership development programs.



I found out about a leadership development group in my organization by accident because I was having coffee with someone and they mentioned it and asked me if I had been invited to take part. And I was like, 'I have no idea what you're talking about'. I looked into it on our website and there was nothing about it. Then I started to ask a few people that I thought might know, and they knew about it, but no one knew how or why, or what goes into who gets invited to it. I found out through asking around and through the grapevine that my supervisor at the time had been invited to be a part of it and that she had, and she could have invited others. I don't know if she did, it wasn't talked about, it felt like it was sort of secretive.

— Black Sharing Circle Participant

Direct Managers Can Hinder Career Development and Growth

Participants indicated that direct managers have the most significant impact on their experiences in the workplace. An ineffective manager can increase stress and be detrimental to employee wellbeing, with one study from 2023 finding that managers have more of an impact on mental health than a doctor or therapist, and an equal impact when compared to one's spouse or partner.⁶⁶ In addition, Black participants recognized that their managers wielded disproportionate power over their workplace experiences and career development. Participants shared that managers often do not face accountability for overseeing the career progression of those reporting to them, which can obscure role expectations or viable career paths and advancement opportunities. According to McKinsey & Company's *Women in the Workplace* report, only 43% of Black women say that their manager has consistently shown interest in their career advancement, and only 38% report that their manager consistently promotes their contributions to others.⁶⁷ The lack of support for Black women's career development and advancement results in managers who may block access to opportunities, question their judgment, micromanage their work, and foster an environment devoid of trust or safety thus preventing productive and open career and performance conversations.

Moreover, Black participants also pointed out that managers are often ill-prepared to deliver consistent, effective, actionable, timely, and constructive feedback and performance reviews (if they happen at all), and they appear to be uncomfortable engaging in conversations where they need to deliver direct, critical feedback that is integral to career progression or growth. For instance, one participant shared that while their manager recognized their efforts and outcomes and went so far as "ego boosting" (i.e., expressing positive sentiments about this individual being smart, capable, and competent), they failed to provide adequate support so they could excel to the next level. Another participant expressed that the critical feedback they received was biased and not delivered in a straightforward manner where it could be turned into constructive action to improve performance (e.g., "you are abrasive", or "you are too ambitious"). The tendency of direct managers to avoid constructive feedback and forgo formal promotions or advancement in favour of informal recognition has dire consequences on Black women's career development: according to McKinsey & Company, 61% of Black women in 2024 report that their race or ethnicity played a role in missing out on a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead.⁶⁸

66 UKG Workforce Institute, "Mental Health at Work: Managers and Money," 2023, page 1. <https://www.ukg.com/resources/white-paper/mental-health-work-managers-and-money>

67 McKinsey & Company, "Women in the Workplace," 2024, page 35. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>

68 Ibid., page 31



I became a manager alongside doing my MBA so everything I'm learning right now is about leadership, and being a leader, and thinking about careers, and thinking about how I am adding value for my employees. But there are lots of leaders or managers that don't have that. They get put into manager positions because they were really good at the technical aspect of their job, not because they are good at honing people's skills.

— **Black Sharing Circle Participant**

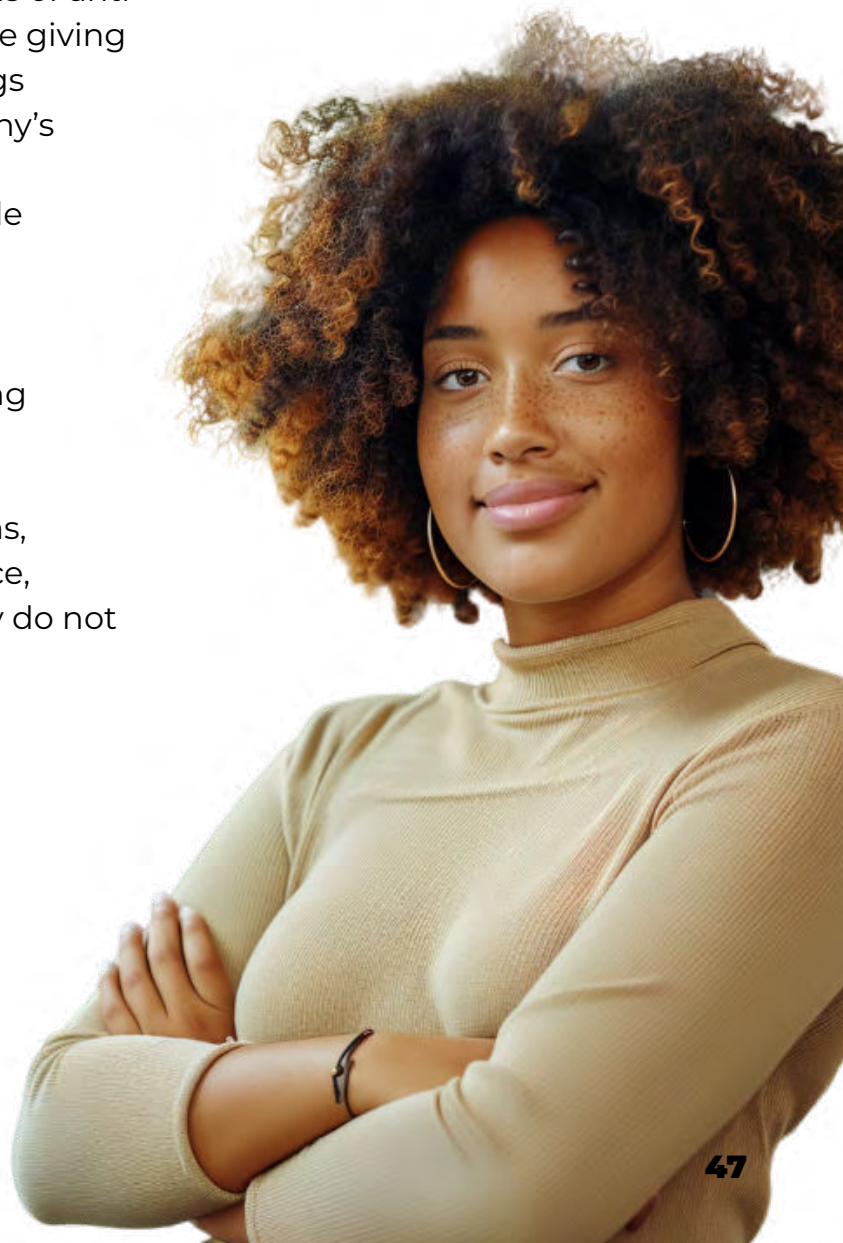
Inadequate Understanding of Black Women's Unique Needs and Lived Experiences

According to participants, one of the reasons that organizations fail to support Black women's career development is that leaders and managers do not understand the needs, values, and lived experiences of Black women. Despite organizational efforts to foster inclusion, research has shown that many workplaces reinforce elite culture and "old boys clubs" which prioritize the advancement of men from similar backgrounds who share business and personal networks (e.g., attended the same university).⁶⁹ Black participants reported that they were either invisible in their workplace or seen to be an aberration due to their gender and race, which meant to get ahead, they had to work twice as hard and learn to function in spaces that did not align with their values. For example, a Black participant shared that they felt uncomfortable or unwelcome in certain social environments, such as a pub, where unofficial business and relationship building with managers takes place outside of work.

The extra effort required by the Black participants to overcome these systemic barriers was not recognized by leadership who failed to understand the manifestations of anti-Black racism, and were often uncomfortable giving space to Black women to share their feelings and experience. In fact, McKinsey & Company's *Women in the Workplace* report highlights that 14% of Black women feel uncomfortable speaking with colleagues about their lives outside of work.⁷⁰ Participants indicated that when leadership fails to create a psychologically safe workplace by neglecting to understand Black women's personal issues, career development needs, or how their gender, race, other identity dimensions, and culture influenced their lived experience, they were made to feel isolated or that they do not belong in corporate spaces.

⁶⁹ Lindsay Kohler, "New Research Finds The 'Old Boys Club' At Work Is Real — and Contributing to the Gender Pay Gap," *Forbes*, 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lindsaykohler/2021/04/22/new-research-finds-the-old-boys-club-at-work-is-real---and-contributing-to-the-gender-pay-gap/>

⁷⁰ McKinsey & Company, "Women in the Workplace," 2024, page 40. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>





When we think of corporations and institutions, there's often this automatic association with 'corporate professionalism', which is typically a very white-centric idea. Breaking down some of those traditional notions of professionalism and rethinking approaches to recruitment, workplace culture, and operational dynamics could pave the way toward a more inclusive environment. When the atmosphere isn't so rigid, people might feel less pressured to present as a specific type of Black person to fit in or feel that reaching a high level of professionalism requires acting white. I think this extends to the way we speak and dress, too. In many industries, especially where older white leaders are still at the helm, a top-down culture tends to set the tone for what's expected. A shift or rearrangement in these dynamics is absolutely necessary, and ultimately, that's a societal issue.

— **Black Sharing Circle Participant**

Affinity Bias and Unequal Benefits

Affinity bias, mentioned by Black participants, has the tendency to favour people who look like you or have similar backgrounds and can lead to stark differences in the treatment of Black women compared to their white peers. Scholars have shown that traditional ideals of professionalism have been defined by white supremacy which “implicitly privileges whiteness and discriminates against non-Western and non-white professionalism standards related to dress code, speech, work style, and timeliness.”⁷¹ Participants noted that those who align with white supremacy culture benefit from gender-first career development initiatives such as career coaching, mentorship, and sponsorship while Black women are not seen as “natural” candidates for promotions or advancement opportunities.

Black women also noted that they often experience affinity bias-based microaggressions related to their professionalism and conduct in the workplace because traditional notions of professionalism are defined through a white lens. McKinsey & Company research demonstrates that 23% of Black women have heard peers express surprise at their language skills and abilities.⁷² According to Black participants, affinity bias can also result in white people receiving more awards for work achievements, while those from different racial backgrounds may not receive the same accolades.

Issues with Human Resources

According to Black participants, hiring initiatives that include a EDI lens can be seen to be a disingenuous checklist activity by applicants from diverse communities as they do not centre the unique needs of the candidate. Black participants identified a significant racial hiring bias on the part of HR departments or recruiters because hiring managers lack accountability to select Black candidates. According to research, many organizations still use language around **meritocracy**, which can reinforce affinity bias and allows them to overlook systemic barriers experienced by equity-deserving groups in the name of hiring the so-called “most qualified candidate”. In reality, numerous flaws, biases, and inequitable practices in the hiring process make the concept of a meritocracy impossible.⁷³ For example, Black participants pointed out that their ability to land a job or improve their self-presentation skills has been complicated by “ghosting” during the interview process (i.e., when the hiring manager stops contacting the candidate), especially when the candidate requested feedback after a decision has been made.

One of the most significant issues identified by Black participants was that HR staff lack cultural awareness and racial equity knowledge which means they can perpetuate harm or put candidates in an awkward position during the recruitment process. Examples shared by participants included scheduling an interview on a culturally significant day or during a period of religious observance.

⁷¹ Aysa Gray, “The Bias of ‘Professionalism’ Standards,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2019. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_bias_of_professionalism_standards

⁷² McKinsey & Company, “Women in the Workplace,” 2024, page 40.

⁷³ Emilio J. Castilla et al., “The Paradox of Meritocracy in Organizations,” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 55 No. 4 (2010): 543 - 676

Promising Practices in the Workplace

This section presents a selection of promising practices that can support Black women's career development, as experienced or witnessed by participants. It should be noted that not every promising practice identified here was experienced by every participant. These promising practices should be seen as examples of targeted approaches that may help an organization address a specific gap, if implemented properly; however, they are not intended to serve as fulsome solutions guaranteed to close all gaps.

Mentorship and Sponsorship

Black participants noted that offering responsive and well-designed workplace development opportunities is integral to increasing Black women's representation in the workplace. Supporting research has shown that senior level Black women have been able to overcome career development barriers by receiving sponsorship and mentorship, especially from white men (since they dominate positions of power).⁷⁴ Black participants concurred that the encouragement and support provided through effective mentorship can create the conditions for them to overcome self-doubt and self-limiting beliefs that hinder career growth. This type of mentorship can also help foster a sense of understanding, particularly when mentors make an effort to connect with, and listen to, Black women's perspectives.

While mentors can provide encouragement to reach career goals, sponsorship is the crucial piece for career advancement, as sponsors share practical advice, advocate in real-time, and help to develop self-advocacy and self-promotion skills. Participants indicated the sponsorship of Black women by those in positions of power was especially impactful when leaders recognized their privilege and used it to advocate for their sponsee's needs. An example of this shared by a participant was the important role two sponsors played ensuring that they were not exploited and that their work was visible and acknowledged with leadership.

According to participants, sponsorship in the workplace coupled with self-promotion and self-advocacy are essential for career development and growth. While sponsorship is typically taken on by a leader or someone with decision-making power, Black participants also reflected that sponsorship has a positive impact at all levels. For example, when their peers perform micro acts of sponsorship by saying the name of Black colleagues in positive

⁷⁴ D. Smith and B. Johnson, "What's missing from your gender equity program? MEN: Gender equality in the workplace is largely seen as a women's issue," *American Management Association Quarterly* 6 (2020): 44-47.

ways in different rooms, passing along career development information that may not have landed in their inbox, or sharing networking opportunities. Some participants also spoke about the positive impact they experienced when leaders (regardless of race and gender identity) acknowledged their privileges and in turn, took meaningful action to sponsor and address the career growth and advancement inequities faced by Black women.

Holistic and Tailored Career Development Opportunities

Participants reported the value of organizations offering varied and unique career development options that respond to the needs of Black women. For instance, in addition to tailored career development programs that apply an intersectional lens, participants identified that career coaching can provide a safe space for Black women to discuss their career goals openly, learn technical and human skills, participate in development opportunities that are paid for by the organization (with time allocation), and join mental health and wellbeing training, all of which can translate to enhanced career mobility. Alternatively, supporting Black women's ability to network and build a professional community can help them to connect in meaningful ways with those from similar backgrounds (i.e., ERGs as well as internal and external networks). Not only has this benefited Black participants as they built relationships to foster their career growth, but it can also provide safety to discuss common experiences like dealing with microaggressions, how to navigate white supremacy in the workplace, and tactics to get promoted or a pay raise.





I had a colleague that retired, and he recommended that I go to something where my role is involved... more of a community of practice or an alliance where we're able to come together. I think being able to be open, whether it's internal training or even external training, and being encouraged to go and look for them, I think is helpful. Managers don't necessarily come and say, 'Here's a catalogue of professional development or external professional development, you can do it'. More so, look and see what you want to do and that speaks to your interest, and then they offer support by covering costs and allowing time off when needed.

— **Black Sharing Circle Participant**

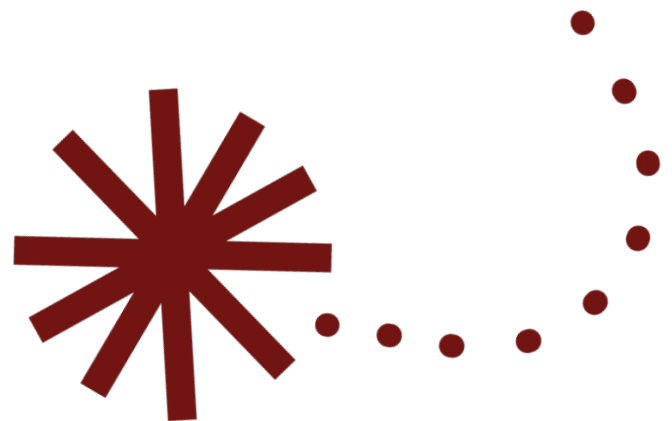
Inclusive Leadership and Allyship

According to participants, supportive managers can have a positive impact when they prioritize the career development of Black women who report to them. Black participants noted that inclusive direct managers and leaders who are self-aware, conscious of bias, and take proactive action can fundamentally change their working experience and career trajectory.

According to participants, allyship from direct managers and decision-makers helps to address barriers faced by Black women in the workplace. Allyship that is responsive to the needs of women of colour has been defined in research as “ongoing, action-oriented, beneficiary-centred, and built on solidarity with beneficiaries to dismantle oppressive systems at work.”⁷⁵ In practice, Black participants demonstrated that inclusive allyship actions can come in the form of connecting Black women to a broader professional network, making sure that career or skill development information and opportunities are communicated and offered, and proactively addressing issues in the workplace that can lead to discrimination or bias.

Addressing the Unique Needs and Enabling Black Women’s Advocacy

According to Black participants, one way to ensure that the needs and values of Black women are represented in an organization is to provide support and outlets for Black women to change and advocate from within. Participants expressed that this can be accomplished by increasing Black women in leadership positions who have the power to call out and eliminate systemic race-based exclusion and help advance Black people across the organization. At the same time, Black women at all hierarchical levels discussed that they wanted to be able to advocate for their needs and the needs of their peers. To facilitate this, participants suggested providing a means to propose changes that address anti-Black racism and align an organization’s working culture with equity-deserving groups’ values. One example shared by participants for creating space and support for Black women to discuss their needs and suggest improved practices was establishing a Black or African ERG that adopts an intersectional lens.



⁷⁵ Barnini Bhattacharyya, Samantha E. Erskine, and Courtney McCluney, “Not all allies are created equal: An intersectional examination of relational allyship for women of color at work,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 182 (2024).

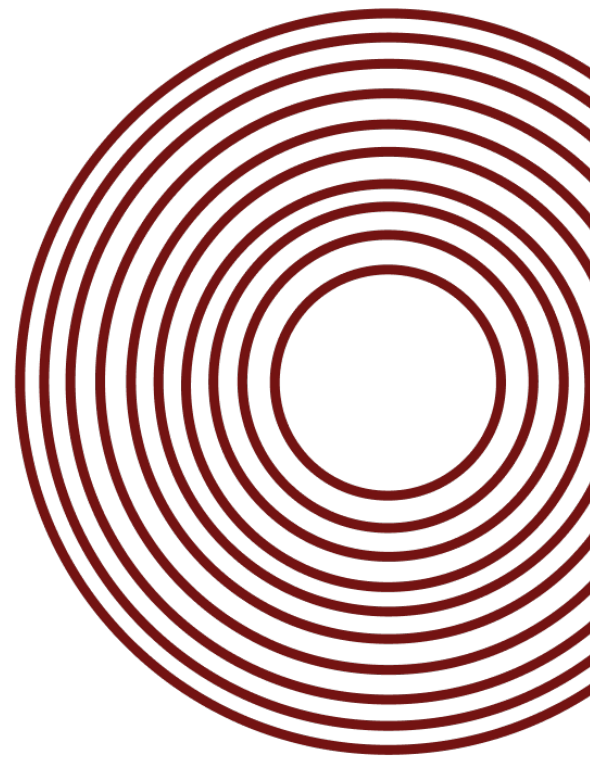
Burnout, Health, and Wellbeing

Black participants identified it is crucial to have access to inclusive benefits to better address their physical, mental, and emotional needs. For instance, some participants remarked on the positive impact of organizations offering a specific bereavement and sick policy expanded to accommodate differing family structures that may better represent Black communities. According to one participant, these policies extend the days allowed for bereavement leave for family members like grandparents as well as close relations such as aunties, and they recognize that sick leaves may be needed to support important people beyond direct dependents (i.e., children). While culturally relevant benefits and policies are noted as important promising practices, according to the World Economic Forum, to reduce Black women's burnout, organizations must dismantle the systemic barriers of patriarchy and white supremacy in the workplace. Part of this work includes acknowledging the ways that gender and race interact to hold Black women back, and working to close these structural gaps related to pay inequity, career progression, and access to opportunities.⁷⁶

Addressing Affinity Bias

A promising practice Black participants noted to help address affinity bias was educating those in power positions to recognize and mitigate their biases while ensuring leadership is accountable for upholding inclusive behaviours. Additionally, offering leadership training for individuals from equity-deserving

groups can enhance their access to career development support and opportunities. Many participants noted their organizations offer training to leaders and direct managers on unconscious bias and EDI. One participant noted training being offered on anti-racism and white supremacy along with supporting case studies that demonstrate how harm is caused to employees from equity-deserving groups. Participants also shared that direct managers who proactively work with Black women to provide support in their leadership journeys, such as offering them career advice, stretch assignments, tools, resources, and training opportunities, as well as promoting strong work-life integration, have a significant positive impact on their career growth and wellbeing.

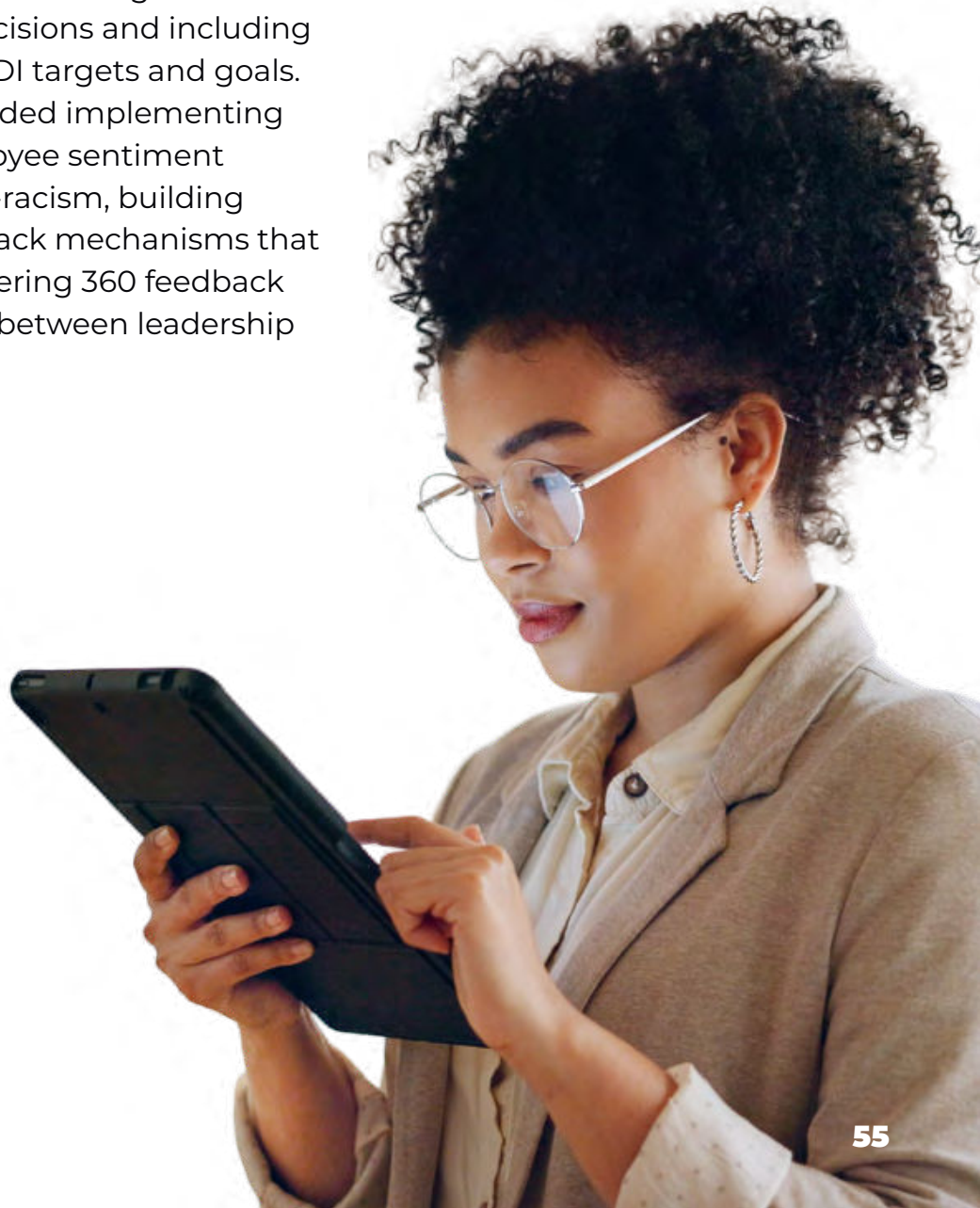


⁷⁶ Adwoa Bagalini, "5 ways intersectionality affects diversity and inclusion at work," *World Economic Forum*, 2020. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2020/07/diversity-inclusion-equality-intersectionality/>

Inclusive Human Resources Practices

Inclusive hiring and promotion practices should, according to Black participants, centre on removing bias and favouritism from the recruitment process. Externally, organizations can partner with recruiters specializing in attracting and retaining Black talent. Internally, participants shared that this can include adding questions about EDI to the recruitment process to ensure that both the candidate and hiring manager have competency and recognize it as integral to the organizational culture, sharing information early about career development opportunities like training or educational stipends, and providing feedback to candidates throughout the recruitment process to allow them the opportunity to adjust their interview tactics or learn from an unsuccessful attempt.

To facilitate the retention or advancement of Black women, participants shared the belief that organizations should focus on leadership accountability for fostering EDI. Participants spoke about issuing voluntary demographic surveys to collect meaningful metrics that can inform evidence-based decisions and including leadership accountability for EDI targets and goals. Other examples provided included implementing psychological safety and employee sentiment surveys with questions on anti-racism, building more agile performance feedback mechanisms that support career growth, and offering 360 feedback to ensure positive interactions between leadership and equity-deserving groups.



Sharing Circle Insights from Racialized Participants

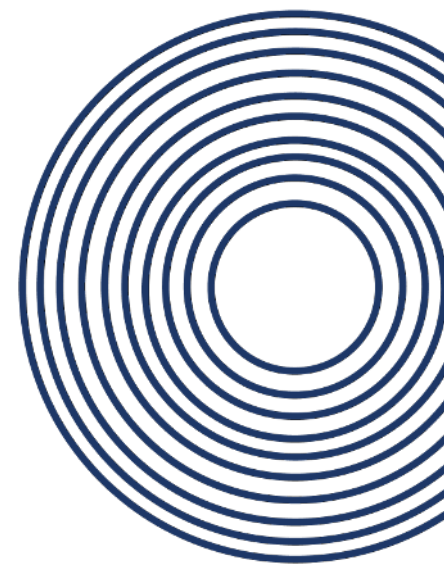


Barriers to Career Development Experienced by Racialized Women

Racism and Mistreatment in the Workplace

Encountering racism and mistreatment in the workplace was a common experience shared by racialized participants. Some participants disclosed that they experienced microaggressions and unconscious bias as a counterreaction to their high confidence which was perceived as aggressive and threatening to the status quo. For other participants, women's failure to support other women (regardless of their race) in the workplace stood out. For instance, participants mentioned that workplace rivalries with other women occurred when they were recognized for their high performance, resulting in jealousy, bullying, and attempts to take credit for their work. While participants did not use the term "lateral violence" to describe these repercussions, they are examples of lateral violence against racialized women. Other repercussions of workplace mistreatment were varied for participants, ranging from feeling like they do not belong, losing confidence, and being seen as a threat. One participant shared that poor treatment from their manager had an adverse impact on their health and wellbeing, while another noted that their manager took credit for their work which negatively affected

their compensation and opportunities for promotion. In general, participants demonstrated that their organizations lacked adequate support to deal with the racism they experienced, and in particular, managers were not taking action or holding perpetrators accountable for mistreatment. Insufficient solutions to prevent racism and mistreatment in the workplace is reflected in McKinsey & Company's *Women in the Workplace* report from 2024, where it is stated that only 36% of women of colour believe their organization is making progress when it comes to handling microaggressions in the workplace.⁷⁷



⁷⁷ McKinsey & Company, "Women in the Workplace," 2024, page 23. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>

Immigrant Experience

Racialized participants identified that immigration status and identity can pose a significant barrier to finding a job, having a positive experience at work, and taking their careers to the next level. Research has shown that establishing a career in a new country can be a source of empowerment for immigrants, and conversely, unemployment or underemployment can lead to increased acculturation stress, alienation, and lower self-confidence.⁷⁸ Identifying as a racialized immigrant meant that many participants could not rely on a large, homegrown network to find a job, or they did not have access to career resources like many of their Canadian-born peers. During the application process, many participants experienced bias and discrimination related to being undervalued or seen as inferior, especially when it came to language skills (e.g., fluency in English was the priority of employers). Others reported high rates of ghosting by recruiters during the interview process.

Participants also noted that hiring managers tend to favour those with traditional career paths, which often leads to the hiring of white, Canadian-born candidates who were educated in Canadian institutions and worked previously in Canada. Participants pointed out that although racialized women may have non-traditional career journeys, it does not mean they lack the skills and knowledge required to excel in a role. One of the most prevalent obstacles faced by participants when searching for a job, centred on employer demands for

Canadian work experience. A lack of recognition for international work experience prevented participants from getting jobs for which they were qualified, or it limited their career trajectory because they did not have the traditional career path, skills, and understanding of Canadian culture that their counterparts possessed. While their peers were recognized as high performers, racialized immigrant participants felt the need to prove themselves in the workplace. In some cases, participants felt no other option but to attain Canadian education or credentials to offset foreign work experience, even though they already held relevant degrees, qualifications, and jobs. For others, it was difficult to navigate white dominant workplaces because there were few resources or career services geared towards helping racialized immigrants understand workplace culture and team dynamics. For example, participants pointed out that networking as a racialized woman could be particularly challenging or uncomfortable because they did not fit into narrow eurocentric work standards related to speech, looks, and experience. Participants noted that trying to overcome these barriers has led to significant career progression gaps and compensation disparities between racialized women immigrants and Canadian-born individuals.

⁷⁸ Tatjana Elez, "Restoring Hope: Responding to Career Concerns of Immigrant Clients," *The Canadian Journal of Career Development/Revue canadienne de développement de carrière* 13, no. 1 (2014): 33.

Familial Pressure and Influence on Career Development

Racialized participants shared that their families had a significant influence on the trajectory of their careers. Some participants were taught to be ambitious and to seek out opportunities, which led many to struggle to find a suitable work-life integration, while others were told if they simply worked hard, they would receive recognition and accolades which they came to realize was not the case. One participant shared that they felt pressure to work in certain fields in which their family worked (e.g., engineering), or which were approved by their family, to receive support. Many also pointed out that they had family and caregiving responsibilities that included extended family, which influenced the jobs they sought out and their overall career growth. While the racialized participants in this study represented different ethnicities, many noted that in general, racialized cultures and upbringings tend to emphasize collectivism and community, which differs from dominant capitalist Western norms, like individualism and competitiveness.

Participants demonstrated that they have made a range of sacrifices in their careers to manage their family's influence. For some, accommodating family ideals about work resulted in greater self-advocacy skills or it was the impetus to accessing mental health supports with the goal of establishing healthier work-life integration. For others, they sacrificed career ambitions as a response to their family's financial constraints or to provide more support as caregivers by only seeking out certain types of jobs, avoiding career changes, or declining to participate in extracurricular work events outside of business hours that may have benefited their career development (e.g., networking sessions).



If you do a good job, you'll automatically get recognized, right? That's just the way I grew up, that's how I was expecting it to be. I think joining companies that are not diverse, you start to realize that it doesn't work that way and you're essentially your own advocate; you have to be the one advocating for yourself. I had to learn how to sell myself, to keep a list of all my accomplishments – no one's going to do that for me. Keeping track and staying firm in terms of what I'm doing, having regular check-ins with your manager, getting feedback. I had to figure it out for myself.

— **Racialized Sharing Circle Participant**



Balancing High Visibility with Preference for Introversion

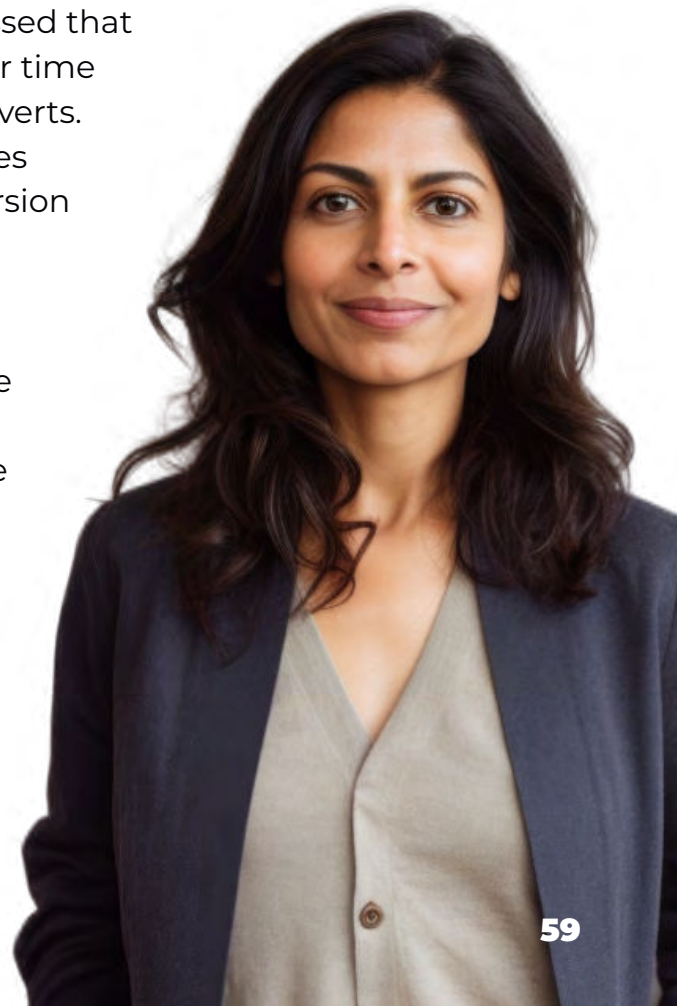
The pressure to be constantly visible at work to gain recognition for advancement and career growth was a theme brought up by racialized participants. In many cases, they framed this discussion by pointing out that their personality type, behavioural traits, and cultural values complicated their career development because they were uncomfortable self-advocating for a pay raise or benefits, they felt inauthentic participating in networking, or they felt shy when speaking with older white superiors like managers or mentors. A number of participants stated that these barriers were due to a preference for introversion, a personality type defined by a preference for a less stimulating environment. According to expert Susan Cain, workplaces have been designed for extroverts, and as such, significant biases exist for those with a preference for introversion who may miss out on job opportunities despite excelling in their roles.⁷⁹ While few studies have examined the prevalence of, or preference for, introversion using a racial or ethnic lens, scholars have noted that introverted individuals experience higher rates of stress or poor wellbeing due to workplace conflicts or unexpected intrusions.⁸⁰ The conflict and intrusions that arise when racialized women experience mistreatment and microaggressions can further exacerbate challenges faced by introverts.

Based on insights provided by participants, the biases against introversion appear to be amplified for racialized women who already face additional layers of racial and gender-based discrimination in the workplace. For instance, one participant noted that the pressure to be constantly visible at work puts those with a preference for introversion at a disadvantage when it comes to promotions and growth opportunities. Another participant expressed that those with a preference for extroversion have an easier time advancing up the corporate ladder compared to introverts. When companies are assessing performance measures and criteria, they tend to prioritize qualities of extroversion which one study from the University of Toronto noted as being talkative, outgoing, taking charge, being optimistic, and seeking new experiences.⁸¹ Finding it hard to “put themselves out there” has hindered some participants’ career development despite working twice as hard to get ahead, to the point that they have struggled to establish themselves as high potential candidates for advancement at work or build a productive rapport with their managers.

⁷⁹ Susan Cain, “Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can’t Stop Talking,” Crown Publishing Group: United States of America, 2012.

⁸⁰ Juliet Herbert et al., “Personality diversity in the workplace: A systematic literature review on introversion,” *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health* 38 no. 2 (2023): 165-187.

⁸¹ Don Campbell, “U of T study finds extroverts enjoy advantages in the workplace,” *U of T News*, 2019. <https://www.utoronto.ca/news/u-t-study-finds-extroverts-enjoy-advantages-workplace>





Networking has turned into this facade almost like you have to constantly present yourself in a certain way - be the most extroverted person. Then what about people who have a preference for introversion? Do they have no chance to succeed in life? Is that what you're telling me? It's a mix of everything, there's a focus on being your true authentic self, but what does that mean in a corporate role? Because maybe the real you might not even be accepted.

— **Racialized Sharing Circle Participant**

Feelings of Imposter Phenomenon

According to participants, internalizing bias, discrimination, and rejection at work or in the labour market can lead to feelings of imposter phenomenon. McKinsey & Company has reported that 35% of women of colour have had their judgment questioned by colleagues in their area of expertise, which undermines their skills and reputation, and can lead to feelings of being an imposter.⁸² Racialized participants shared that they have internalized beliefs that they do not deserve their jobs, they are not qualified to get interviews, and they are not good enough to reach the next level in their careers. For some, these feelings corresponded to a lack of confidence in their ability or clarity in their career path because there were no role models in positions of power that looked like them. One participant believed that men do not internalize workplace rejection to the same degree as women, which makes men feel that they are qualified for promotions and opportunities regardless of whether or not they meet all the credentials. According to participants, this is not the case for racialized women, especially those experiencing imposter phenomenon, which may result in self-limiting behaviours like exclusion, selling themselves short, or opting out of opportunities.



I feel like I'm the biggest person who stands in my way sometimes in terms of how we self-eliminate before we even go towards something because it's like, 'I can't do this because I don't have enough skills,' or 'I can't do this because I'm not qualified' or whatever it is. And I think that's been a really big challenge – that lack of confidence in my ability sometimes because I don't see a lot of people that look like me who are in these roles, and also a culture of safety. I feel like I'm constantly trying to present myself in a way that is acceptable rather than just showing up as my authentic self... I have the skills. Even if I don't have this particular qualification I can learn it quickly because I'm adaptable. I can think quickly, and I'm educated in all of these different things. I think that it's a personal thing but also a societal thing – we don't see people like me who are in a position of power.

— **Racialized Sharing Circle Participant**

⁸² McKinsey & Company, "Women in the Workplace," 2024, page 37. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>

Tokenism and Othering

The underrepresentation of racialized people in the workplace made some participants feel like a “diversity hire”, which increased feelings of being othered or not feeling a sense of belonging. Examples of tokenism shared by participants included microaggressions like racist comments, and other cases where organizations leveraged a participants’ racial identity to give clients the impression the company was diverse. One participant pointed out that women at their organization were only acknowledged or considered for promotion during certain periods of the year such as International Women’s Day on the 8th of March. Another shared that they were invited to client conversations only when they were the same race as the client. These examples of tokenization demonstrate the ongoing challenges that racialized women face when they work in exclusionary environments that do not genuinely support diversity and inclusion.

Self-Directed Career Development

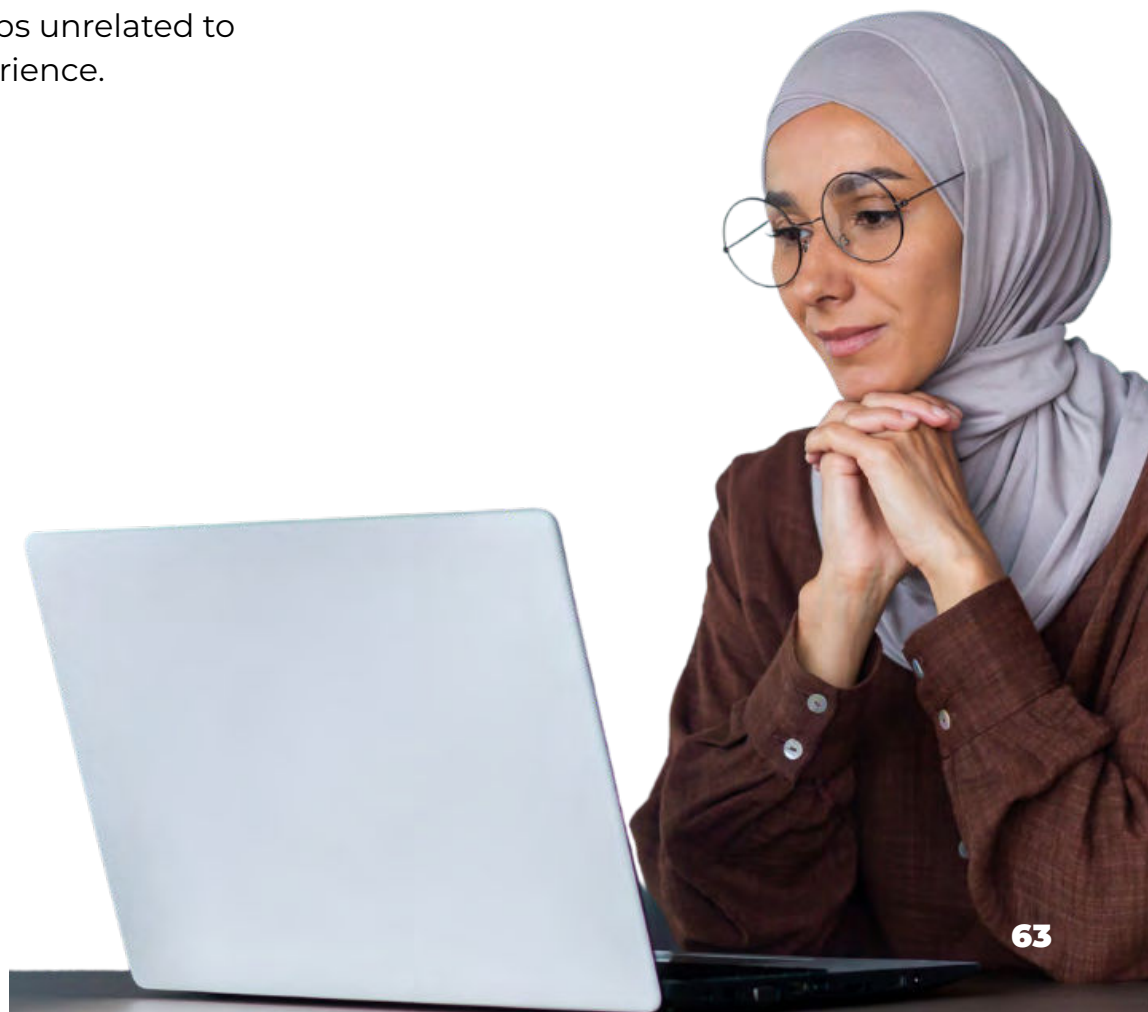
One of the ramifications shared by participants experiencing compounding and complex race-based workplace barriers was that they felt compelled to take charge of their career development. For some, undertaking self-directed career development was due to a need for greater financial security and stability, and a lack of professional development opportunities in their workplaces including access to mentorship, sponsorship, networks, influential colleagues, and connections with peers. Underrepresentation of racialized women in the workplace or being the only racialized woman in a senior role also encouraged some participants to seek out value-aligned workplaces that had diverse leadership teams and appeared to be committed to impacting meaningful change or “walking the walk”, as one participant put it. For others, being underestimated, not receiving due recognition, having their skills undervalued, or being ignored during meetings reinforced feelings of not belonging which amplified the need to find career development support elsewhere. One participant likened their career journey to a “jungle gym instead of a ladder” due to the lack of support and unclear pathway for advancement.

The repercussions of self-directed career development can be varied. Some participants shared how they went out of their way to access greater career support in their workplaces by advocating to their manager for skills and professional development opportunities, joining volunteer committees, insisting on regular check-ins with management to receive feedback and proactively discuss their performance plan, and completing projects outside of work responsibilities to signify they were a high potential employee. A significant number of participants indicated they looked outside their organizations to find mentors, sponsors, and coaches or built connections with external communities by getting involved in career accelerators, professional development programs, and attending events through associations, tech focused groups, or women’s groups.



Some participants went as far as to create their own informal and formal support networks of racialized women. Another career development strategy that was prominent for racialized participants was participating in skills and competency trainings (e.g., skills bootcamps, hackathons, accessing free resources, completing online courses and certifications) to remain competitive including upskilling on the technical side or gaining human skills including emotional intelligence and negotiation skills.

Some participants indicated they made the decision to leave their company for better opportunities, while others opted to become self-employed due to a lack of career development opportunities and growth. Others indicated that due to financial necessity, they had to stay in jobs that offered little room for growth and development, or took jobs unrelated to their expertise and experience.





Workplace Gaps

The following section introduces gaps identified by racialized participants in the workplace. It should be noted that not every gap identified here was experienced or noted by every participant, and not every organization has the same gaps to close. Instead, this section presents common gaps shared by participants that all organizations should be aware of, but it is not intended to serve as a fulsome list of all the gaps experienced by racialized women.

Underrepresentation of Racialized Women

Participants pointed out that racial ideals persist in workplaces and those typified for leadership positions are not women of colour. Participants shared that they felt alienated from leadership (especially leaders who were white and middle- or upper-class), and faced challenges relating to their peers who do not have to try to fit in the same way they do. Participants who held leadership positions noted that they were often the only member of their gender and race in senior roles, which may send the message that it is difficult for other racialized women to reach the top, or that diversity initiatives at the organization were performative. One participant noted that for a racialized woman to progress up the career ladder, they needed to “assimilate” which means that they, in turn, may become less relatable to other racialized women in the organization. Participants lamented that a lack of representation of racialized women in leadership meant that there was usually no one in a senior position who would be able to understand their lived experiences as racialized women or their unique needs and career journey, which signaled limits in future career opportunities in the organization, or more broadly in the industry.



A big issue with how things operate is that previously we talked about white men leading organizations, and [now] we see more men of colour, and we see white women. But you rarely see different females from different backgrounds being in leadership positions. The majority of them are middle management, and they stop at that. And when you see VPs and SVPs and CVPs and CFO, etc., they're all either white men, maybe men of colour, and white women.

— **Racialized Sharing Circle Participant**

Direct Managers Can Hinder Career Development and Growth

A 2022 study by Achēv revealed that immigrant and racialized women in Canada considered career development and professional growth opportunities as a significant factor to their decisions to apply and accept job offers.⁸³ According to participants, while some workplaces may offer career development supports, individual managers have disproportionate power over racialized women's careers, especially during the early stages of advancement, by recognizing their work, clearly communicating career pathways, and providing access to career development opportunities and tools. For example, participants shared that if their manager did not believe they were a future leader or failed to acknowledge their capabilities, they remained stuck at the same level or were prevented from accessing career development opportunities. Some participants noted that their managers actively blocked them from advancement, with one participant sharing that they did not receive a promotion because their manager wanted to keep working with them, and another participant divulging that they were routinely assigned menial work like note taking instead of high-visibility assignments that would benefit their professional growth. Even those participants who actively sought opportunities, communicated their career goals with managers, and took on extra responsibilities to demonstrate their value to the organization (e.g., leading EDI work, training colleagues) shared that they struggled to get their managers

to consider them for promotions, or they quickly reached a career ceiling because their company lacked adequate support for development. Others found it challenging to build a relationship and strong rapport with their direct manager because they did not share the same lived experience, which meant that their managers were not understanding of their needs and did not consider them for advancement.

Inadequate feedback was also identified by participants within conversations about how managers could hinder career growth. In general, participants painted a picture of uneven feedback from managers: a few managers were truly invested and used feedback to provide career guidance, other managers were performative in their support because it benefited them to be affiliated with a high-performing racialized woman, and some managers had no framework for feedback which meant advancement was based on their sole discretion and subjective opinions.

⁸³ Achēv, "Addressing Barriers to Employment for Immigrant and Racialized Women and Youth: What We Heard Report," 2022. <https://achev.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/What-We-Heard-report-Advancing-Equity-for-Women-and-Girls.pdf>

Many participants shared that they did not receive clear, quantifiable, and actionable feedback on their performance from their managers, which made it challenging to self-advocate for promotions or understand how advancement decisions were made by leadership. One participant also noted that it is a barrier to not have a seat at the table to self-advocate during annual review processes; rather, it would be ideal to join career development conversations between their manager and leadership to participate and discuss their goals. Not receiving support, guidance, or productive feedback from managers contributes to racialized women's career stagnation and professional dissatisfaction.

Misogyny and Sexism with Male Managers

For some participants, it was important to explicitly note the misogyny and sexism that has defined their experience with white and/ or racialized male direct managers, adding an additional lens to the ways that managers can hinder or grow careers. Participants shared several experiences where men in management roles were biased against racialized women and limited their careers. For example, one participant was told by a manager to “stay in her lane” when she advocated on behalf of another racialized woman colleague. Others shared experiences where they were overlooked by their male managers for promotions, professional development and exposure opportunities.



There are some that were challenged by my competence, and [I was] dealing with those insecurities. And then there were those that saw my competence and were really happy with it, but they wanted to keep me in their teams rather than have me grow because I made them look good and I did good work where I was. And, you know, we had a good working relationship and all that kind. And so, while you could say I have a wonderful manager, however, after a certain point if they're not propelling you or supporting your growth, then you outgrow that relationship and it's time to move on.

— Racialized Sharing Circle Participant

Some participants shared belittling and discriminatory comments they received from men in management positions. Misogynistic behaviours, comments, and beliefs contribute to increased rates of microaggressions, harassment, and discrimination for racialized women, making workplaces less safe, respectful, and supportive.

Inadequate Understanding of Racialized Women's Unique Needs and Lived Experiences

While an inclusive organizational culture is crucial when it comes to supporting employees, fostering genuine connections, and ensuring a sense of belonging, many participants shared that their employers do not adequately understand their needs, experiences, and values, which has negatively impacted their career progression. The inability to be authentic at work was brought up by many racialized participants. They expressed discomfort opening up to mentors, managers, and leaders who, they felt, did not genuinely care about their careers, or they feared that their manager or mentor could use their vulnerabilities against them by removing them from projects or not assigning them certain types of work. Some participants also revealed flaws in formal mentorship programs that did not respond to their needs, with mentors only participating to enhance their own resumes or being ill-equipped to provide advice to a racialized woman and instead, monologuing about their own career journey. Many participants shared that

- individualistic corporate cultures do not
- align with their own values of collectivism
- and inclusivity. For some, relating to
- colleagues at white and male dominant

workplaces and making connections with those who have different interests was challenging. For instance, one participant pointed out a gap in terms of inclusive networking events as many take place at dimly-lit bars, and another participant shared that office small talk (e.g., golf, sports) made them feel like they did not fit in. In general, participants identified that there is a lack of cultural understanding and geopolitical knowledge on current issues, and the ways that global affairs may impact immigrant communities. Feeling like an outsider or unwelcome at work can lead to increased feelings of loneliness and a lessened desire to pursue career growth at that particular workplace.





When you're having meetings, just before everyone is going to join in and you're just doing some small talk, more often than not the topic goes towards golf and those kinds of things. And I have nothing to add to that because I am not interested, I don't play golf. So the topics again turn more to the white male territory, which I might not relate to completely. And then after that's done, then the talk moves to work, so there's no way to make those kinds of connections. I feel like a lot of times in small talk, that's when you become more personable to the people in your company and you kind of lose out on those opportunities. When I was starting out, they had a lot of like golf programs for women, you know, trying to fix us to fit into the white male culture and that just doesn't resonate either.

— **Racialized Sharing Circle Participant**

Lack of Tailored and Holistic Career Development

According to participants, there is a significant gap across workplaces due to career development supports that do not meaningfully advance racialized women's professional development, or more broadly, organizational EDI. Many participants pointed out that EDI initiatives at their organizations were performative because decision-makers were out of touch with the needs and experiences of racialized women, or they were undertaken primarily as marketing initiatives to make the company look good. A few participants shared that the people leading these initiatives had a **saviour complex**, approaching conversations with racialized women from a patronizing or condescending perspective and lacking the ability to empathize with their lived experiences. Participants believed that performative EDI work occurred because leaders prioritized profits and revenue over building an inclusive organizational culture.

Participants noted that many programs and initiatives were not tailored to address their career development needs and as such, were not propelling racialized women into leadership positions. In general, these programs were underfunded, ineffective, did not address technical upskilling or building functional skills, lacked structured supports like formal mentorship or coaching, and not tailored. Many participants shared that while their organizations offered generic career development tools and opportunities, it was unclear how to access them for their individual advancement. One participant noted they signed up for a formal sponsorship program, but their assigned senior level sponsor missed meetings or was too busy to provide useful career support. Organizations that do not offer holistic career development options or that provide uneven access to these supports fail to align with the needs of racialized women, creating larger career development gaps.



I feel like the decision-makers are maybe out of touch, and don't want to hear about the reality sometimes, which means you don't get different perspectives, or you're maybe not really listening to what people want or aware of what people want. And companies do their pulse checks, and their employee satisfaction surveys, and you have your ERGs but what happens from there? In my experience, nothing really changes.

— **Racialized Sharing Circle Participant**

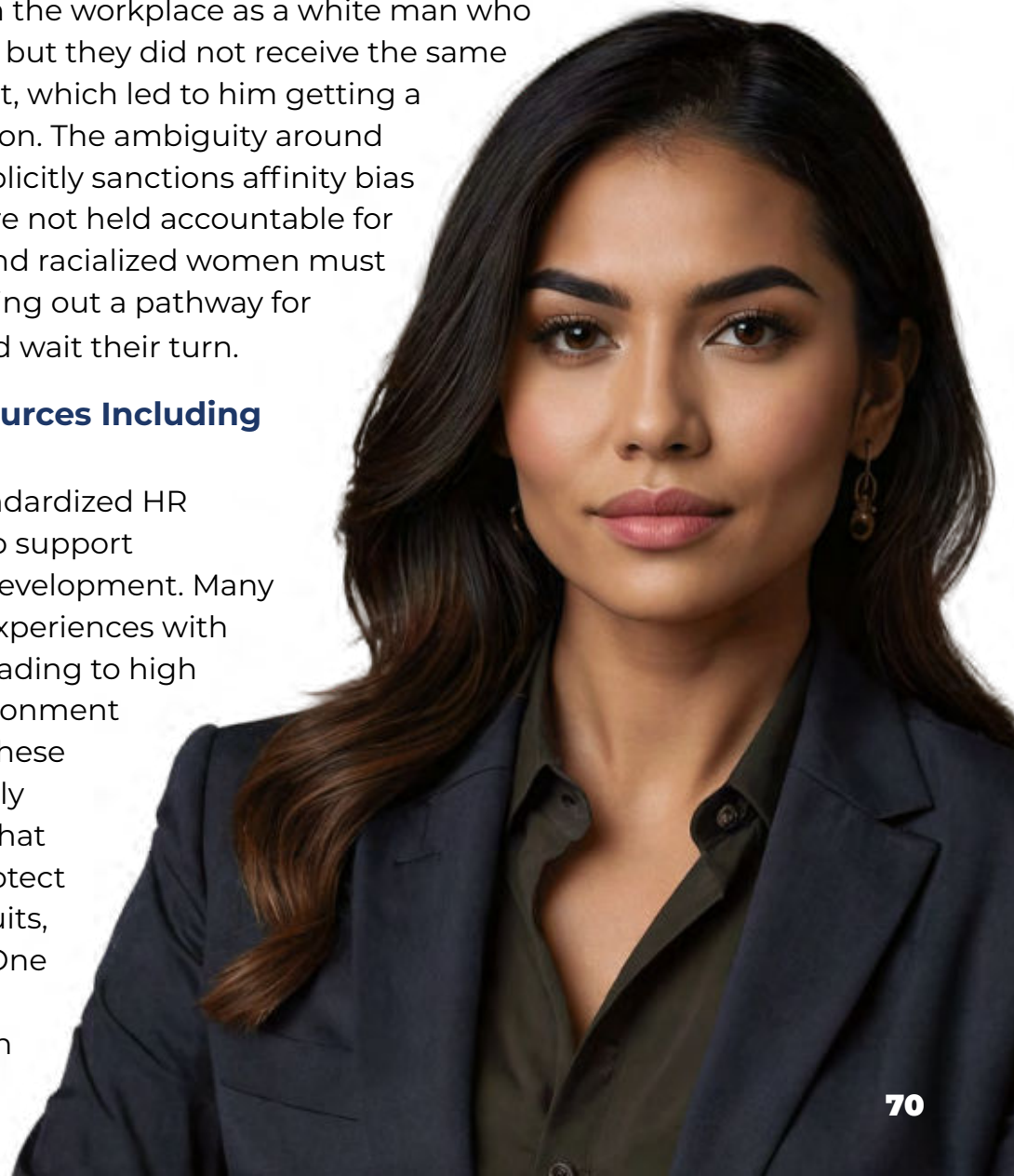
Affinity Bias and Unequal Benefits

Participants noted that workplaces inherently favour people who look like existing leadership or have similar backgrounds, which means that to get ahead, employees are expected to align their looks, behaviours, and speech with white supremacy culture. Participants observed that, due to this affinity bias, white employees, and in particular white women, have an easier time securing job opportunities, getting mentors and sponsors, and fitting in compared to racialized women. Some participants added that when white women were promoted to leadership positions, they often reinforced affinity biases because they do not understand racialized women's lived experiences and cannot provide useful advice to guide racialized women who are working "twice as hard" to break through. Participants shared that despite gender gaps in workplaces, white women were not seen as outsiders because they knew how to communicate at work with white men due to sharing similar interests, socio-economic upbringings, and lived experiences.

Additionally, racialized women face significant barriers achieving promotions and pay raises because there is a lack of transparency around the decision-making process for advancement opportunities. One participant shared that they had the same education, knowledge, and presence in the workplace as a white man who was hired at the same time, but they did not receive the same career development support, which led to him getting a salary increase and promotion. The ambiguity around advancement decisions implicitly sanctions affinity bias because decision-makers are not held accountable for justifying their selections, and racialized women must spend additional time figuring out a pathway for their own career growth and wait their turn.

Issues with Human Resources Including Recruitment and Hiring

Participants noted that standardized HR functions are not working to support racialized women's career development. Many participants had negative experiences with HR at their organizations, leading to high rates of distrust and disillusionment with personnel working in these functions. Participants widely shared the understanding that HR departments exist to protect the organization from lawsuits, not to support employees. One participant explained that they came to this conclusion



because their HR department shared sensitive information with leadership, breaking any notion of confidentiality and trust. A lack of meaningful action by HR was also noted by other participants as a persistent gap. For example, one participant shared that their HR department talked about attracting and retaining more women, but they failed to take concrete action. Another participant called HR “cold” when dealing with serious issues like workplace harassment or discrimination, while others were frustrated by their HR departments’ failure to proactively solve issues and offer meaningful support to those who brought up obstacles such as pay inequity.

Ineffective Employee Resource Groups

ERGs can be sources of community and support for racialized women, but not when they are under-resourced, under-leveraged, and lack substance. In some cases, participants felt disillusioned because ERGs have moved away from serving the vital strategic function of providing equity-deserving groups with the space and power to advise and guide business strategy in an inclusive way. Many participants shared that the ERGs at their organizations had been reduced to planning events/ social functions or they had to tow the company line leading to a lack of quality programming and meaningful change. According to one participant, a senior leader at a company sidelined their ERG’s proposed initiative to amplify the voices of women of colour because it was deemed to be “too risky”. Other participants pointed out that their ERGs seemed to function just so the organization could prove to potential

candidates and clients that it prioritized EDI. ERG leaders were not compensated for their efforts and additional work, nor did they receive recognition in their performance review conversations, suggesting to participants that performative ERGs do not result in career acceleration.



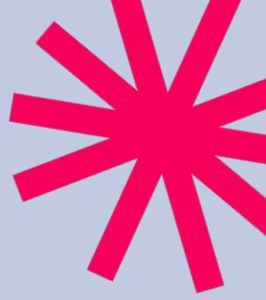


I think that white women aren't seen as outsiders. I think one reason for that is that [white] women have a lot more community support compared to racialized women, so they don't feel the same pressure and they don't have the same experiences. Something I've seen in my own company is that white women receive a lot more mentorship from white men than racialized women do. I would say in my personal experience, race has been a much more full differentiator compared to gender. I would say if I'm in a room and there is a white woman, and there's a man who's also an immigrant, if you look, I have more in common with that man than I do with a woman who is white. Obviously, I'm not denying that there's that [gender] hierarchy, but for me the difference has been way less for white women because they walk in the same environment as white men, so they know how to talk to them. They know how to communicate or how to work with them, because I haven't really had that experience a lot of times - I don't know what to do, or I don't know what to say - so they have more access to resources and more access to communities.

— **Racialized Sharing Circle Participant**

Promising Practices in the Workplace

This section presents a selection of promising practices that can support racialized women's career development, as experienced or witnessed by participants. It should be noted that not every promising practice identified here was experienced by every participant. These promising practices should be seen as examples of targeted approaches that may help an organization address a specific gap, if implemented properly; however, they are not intended to serve as fulsome solutions guaranteed to close all gaps.



Mentorship and Coaching

To increase the representation of racialized women and prevent them from leaving workplaces, participants suggested that organizations need to invest in robust mentorship and coaching for racialized women. These workplace development supports not only help racialized women develop leadership skills and advance their career aspirations, but they forge connections between racialized women and those in decision-making roles which can foster greater understanding of their needs and lived experiences. Participants spoke about the value of coaching as it provided a productive space to articulate thoughts, ideas, and struggles and receive tailored advice and encouragement from someone invested in their career development. Mentorship was also identified as a vital source to help increase racialized women's representation by providing structured time to have career development discussions, develop leadership skills, and expand networks and connections to land jobs or promotions. It should be noted that while participants did not explicitly discuss sponsorship as a tactic to increase racialized women's representation, many of their promising practice examples included sponsorship actions such as introducing racialized women to networks or advocating for their career development. These types of sponsorship, coaching, and mentorship actions can be impactful ways to validate the feelings and experiences of racialized women, help them eliminate self-doubt and self-limiting behaviours, reinforce that they are on the right career path, and discuss organizational power dynamics and culture.



Addressing Affinity Bias through Sponsorship

Alongside addressing affinity biases with education and training, building a formal sponsorship program can help organizations override discrimination by pairing racialized women with different leaders and decision-makers who are equally committed to the goals of these types of initiatives. Many participants shared that they had benefited from sponsorship because

their sponsor was invested in their growth and development, helping them increase their visibility at work and putting their name forward for promotions. For one participant, the relationship was mutually beneficial as they were able to contribute to projects being overseen by the sponsor and in return, the sponsor brought their name up during important conversations and advocated for them to be brought on to high-visibility projects. Establishing a personal relationship with a sponsor allowed some participants to feel more connected and understood by leaders, which can reduce affinity bias and result in enhanced career outcomes.

Holistic and Tailored Career Development Opportunities

According to participants, instituting well-designed workplace development supports that respond to the needs of racialized women can help address issues of performativity and respond to calls for more tailored career development offerings. Some participants shared the value of having participated in career development training and supports that prioritized participant feedback and were built within an organizational culture that supports learning and development. Examples of this type of career development training and support shared by participants included offering educational stipends for courses and resources, providing in-house training to upskill or learning about topics like inclusive leadership, giving employees time to complete certifications or professional development courses, and job shadowing to expose employees to new areas of the business.

Inclusive Leadership

Employing managers who have empathy and people-skills can ensure psychologically safe work environments that enable and empower racialized women. Participants shared that inclusive managers actively fostered trusting relationships, encouraged them to talk openly about their experiences (including with racism, microaggressions, and other workplace issues), and built their confidence by recognizing their potential. Additionally, participants valued managers who held regular career conversations or mentored/ sponsored/ coached racialized women to help them develop or display leadership skills. Taking a tailored approach to people management was pointed out by participants as an especially effective method because the needs of each racialized woman can differ depending on their personal and professional priorities. For example, new parents or those with family caregiving responsibilities may require more accommodations, newcomers might benefit from more check-ins to help them navigate language and cultural differences, and young professionals may seek coaching to accelerate their career development.



It's pretty evident that managers can have a really strong influence on your experience with the team and the kind of growth you have. I would also say I've had a bit of a mixed bag, but in my last placement I ended up working under a manager who was by far the best manager that I have ever had the chance to work with. And the key thing I pulled out from that experience and relationship was that working with her made me feel more confident in my own skills and my own abilities, and made me more comfortable in asking for more leadership opportunities. I think that a really good manager will make you feel like you don't have any issues communicating with them in terms of what your desires are for growth and what you hope to accomplish in that role. And that was the first time I had ever had a chance where I worked with someone who felt genuinely invested and interested in me and my interests as a person and felt so confident in my own competence. It made me feel like I was competent and that wasn't a feeling that I was very familiar with, and I ended up growing an incredible amount in that placement because she was willing to put so much trust in me despite me not having a lot of experience and encouraging me to fail while giving me safety nets.

— **Racialized Sharing Circle Participant**

Addressing the Unique Needs and Lived Experiences of Racialized Women

In order to build workplaces that understand the needs, experiences, and values of equity-deserving groups, according to participants, there needs to be more racialized women in positions of power to help break systemic barriers and advocate for greater inclusion from a place of power. Participants highlighted the positive impact that supportive racialized women leaders had on their careers as mentors (exposing them to opportunities, initiatives, and networks), as sponsors (ensuring their work was visible with other leaders), and as changemakers (serving as inclusive role models) at their organizations. In general, participants' experience at organizations that employed more people of colour was that racialized women felt more psychologically safe and were encouraged to pursue advancement because there were more people they could relate to who may be willing to help their careers.

Addressing Misogyny and Sexism

While it is critical to enforce a zero-tolerance policy on sexism and misogyny and actively work to eliminate these obstacles, participants shared that it can also be helpful to discuss their issues and seek advice from those with similar lived experiences. Building a network of supporters, both internal and external to the workplace, to deal with challenging situations and mistreatment at work was identified by participants as a powerful way to foster community, connection, and mechanisms for coping and identifying strategies.

Inclusive Human Resources Practices

To make HR more inclusive, the principles of EDI need to be embedded throughout the employee lifecycle from hiring, pre-boarding, onboarding, development and performance management to promotion and advancement. Participants stated that organizations should remove biases from the hiring process by preventing those with connections to candidates to sit on hiring panels, and implementing skill-based hiring criteria which prioritizes experiences and expertise. Participants also indicated another promising practice they have experienced is when HR conducts 360 feedback on leaders and managers from their direct reports, anonymously, to assess if the leader is making their employees feel comfortable and promoting inclusivity within their teams.



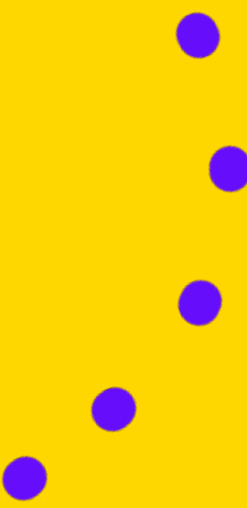
Inclusive Employee Resource Groups

To ensure ERGs are functioning in ways that support racialized women, they must be well organized, have access to resources, create a safe space for participants to discuss their career development, and operate with the goal of helping members of equity-deserving groups ascend to leadership positions. Participants who were part of effective ERGs shared that they can be beneficial to those dealing with personal issues because participants can share their feelings and experiences with those from similar backgrounds, which is integral for racialized women working in white dominant workplaces. They can also provide participants with the opportunity to work on interesting projects, learn about relevant roles/positions, and connect with others in the organization that they do not typically work with, allowing for greater professional exposure and connections.

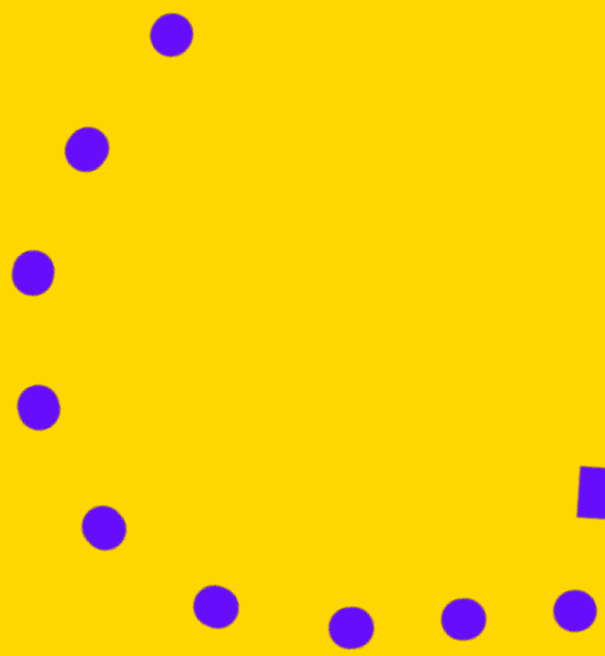


I'm a big proponent of ERGs because the first one I joined, I remember I was pretty miserable in one of my roles. It felt very repetitive and it was working with individuals that would bring a lot of their own family strain and personal issues to work because it was sort of like an older environment. And so the ERG was sort of my safe space. This was more of a fun committee if anything, it wasn't really like an affinity group. But being able to work on more interesting projects that were outside of my day-to-day added a good reason or motivation to stay with the company. But also, it introduced me to people outside of my core group that was a bit of a negative bubble, and so it was just good to have more positive interactions, and disrupt my day-to-day.

— Racialized Sharing Circle Participant



Insights from Interview Participants



About the Interviews

From May - August 2023, Accelerate Her Future's research team held a total of 59 semi-structured interviews with individual research participants with the intention of getting a better sense of how workplaces understand and address the career development needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. Interview research participants encompassed HR and EDI professionals, people leaders, ERG chairs, and career coaches and advisors.

The research team's objectives were to explore interview participants' understanding of barriers experienced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in Canadian workplaces and their perceptions of the actions being taken in terms of corresponding career development initiatives and programs. Similar to discussions held in the sharing circles, interview participants were asked questions regarding the barriers, gaps, and promising practices for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's career development in the workplace, along with recommendations.

The interviews were designed to hear from those working directly in career development functions to see if there is alignment between how organizations understand and then approach Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's career development. They also provided space for interview participants to reflect on their lived experiences in the workplace since many identified as Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.

In many cases, interview participants' lived experiences helped them understand the career development needs of other Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, and it informed their decision-making as HR or EDI professionals.

The interview insights presented in this section include both perspectives: career development barriers, gaps, and promising practices that interview participants have witnessed over the course of their careers, and those they have experienced as members of equity-deserving groups.

The following section provides a thematic analysis of interview insights for four key groups: Indigenous, Black, racialized, and white interview participants. While the criteria to participate was open to individuals of all genders and racial/ethnic backgrounds in these roles, the majority of research participants identified as women (with a smaller portion identifying as gender-diverse), and as Indigenous, Black, racialized people or white. See **Appendix B** for a demographic breakdown of research participants.

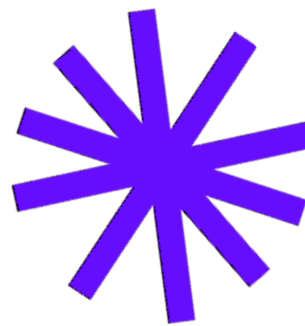
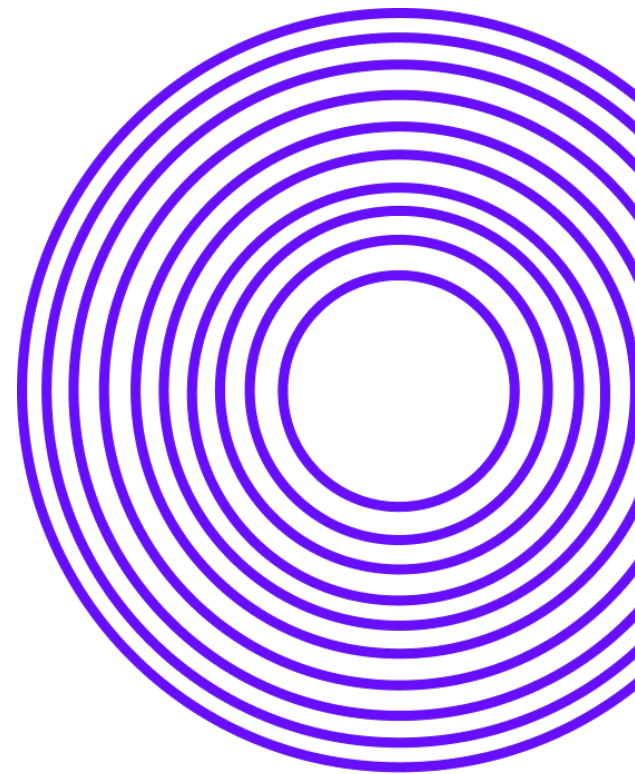


A small number of interview participants identified as white; therefore, it should be noted that the data set for white interview participants was significantly smaller than the other three sets despite broad recruitment efforts. Anecdotally, there appeared to be a level of uncertainty or discomfort participating in a research study where white HR and EDI professionals felt their voice was not part of the majority, or hesitation to contribute based on limited experiences with career development efforts tailored to equity-deserving groups. Some may have wanted to avoid taking up space that could be provided to Indigenous, Black, and racialized HR, EDI and people leaders. All of these factors may explain the smaller cohort of white interview participants.

The key points shared by interview participants are introduced here following the same presentation categories as the sharing circle discussion, beginning with barriers, followed by gaps, and then promising practices.

In many cases, the barriers, gaps, and promising practices shared by interview participants are congruent with those identified in the previous sharing circles section. In order to avoid repetition of themes and key points, the insights from interview participants shared here have been presented with less supporting context and research. For an analytical comparison of sharing circles and interview insights, please see the **Discussion** section of this report.

Throughout this section, we refer to the research participants as “interview participants” (or simply “participants”) to clearly identify their voices. It should also be noted that participants utilized a range of terms to describe their perspectives but for the purposes of this report, we have used consistent and official terms where possible (e.g., imposter phenomenon instead of imposter syndrome).



Interview Insights from Indigenous Participants



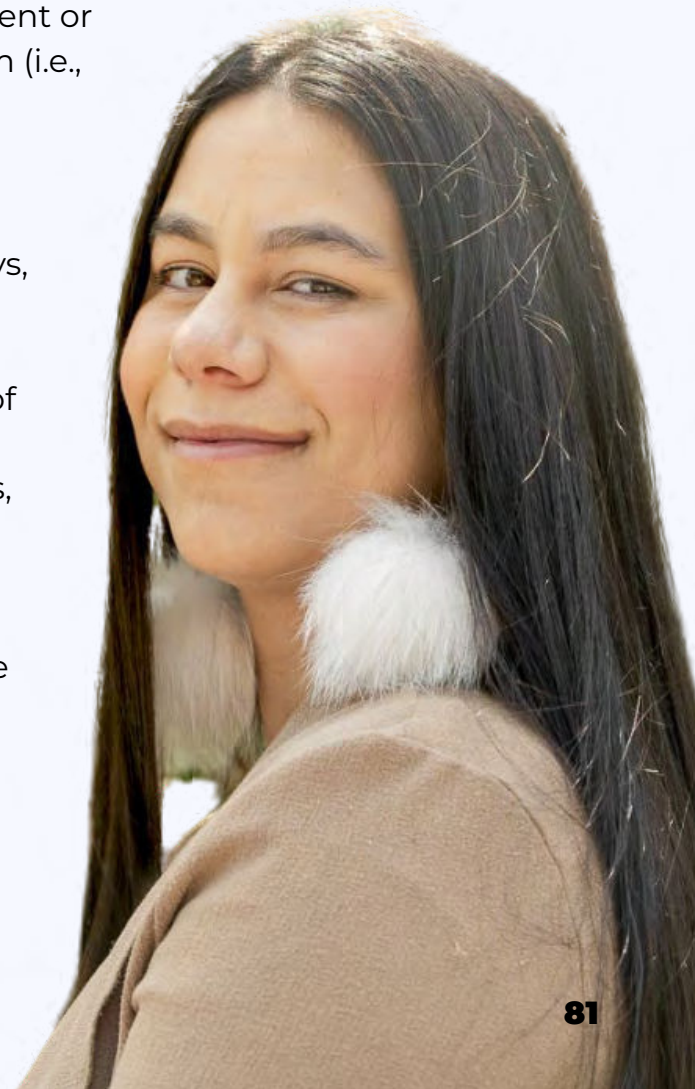
Barriers to Career Development

Indigenous interview participants identified four key barriers to the career development of Indigenous women: tokenization and othering, imposter phenomenon, consciousness of being white presenting, and self-directed career development.

Tokenism and Othering

Interview participants noted that Indigenous women are often tokenized and othered because they believe that their organizations want to be seen employing Indigenous Peoples for optics. For example, there are only a few Indigenous Peoples employed within many organizations, and also only a few opportunities provided to Indigenous Peoples for employment or advancement within many organizations. In addition, participants noted that many organizations do not actually listen to Indigenous Peoples to implement meaningful changes or opportunities that would attract, retain, and advance Indigenous Peoples based on their diverse needs as employees. As a result, participants believed that Indigenous women may question whether they are offered opportunities for employment or advancement based on their merit, or if it is tokenism (i.e., diversity hire, meeting a diversity target).

They also noted that in some cases, Indigenous women are tasked with being a representative for all Indigenous Peoples in tokenistic or stereotypical ways, or they bear the burden of having to educate their peers on Indigenous customs, history, culture, or spirituality when that is not a specific responsibility of their role. One of the repercussions of tokenism and othering in the workplace, as defined by participants, was that Indigenous women felt uncomfortable being in certain spaces or taking up space when it is for optics, even if they recognized it is important to have a seat at the table where there would otherwise be no representation. They may also experience imposter phenomenon due to internalized bias.





A lot of the time, it's riding that fine line between being hired as the tokenistic Indigenous Person for diversity, and being hired as someone who can effectively make a difference within whatever parameters that the organization is looking for in terms of Indigenous success. I think for me, growing up, a lot of it was always feeling like you had to do more to be recognized because there was that baseline of, you're just an Indigenous kid or you're just an Indigenous woman, what can you bring? You know, there's always that inherent bias for yourself that you feel like less than other people. It's a well known experience that Indigenous women are hired tokenistically for organizations and simply because they need to hire somebody for diversity or they're looking for something public rather than the actual intrinsic value that an Indigenous Person has for the organization.

— Indigenous Interview Participant

Feelings of Imposter Phenomenon

While imposter phenomenon may be the result of tokenism and othering, it is also a significant barrier in itself. Participants shared that the underrepresentation of Indigenous women in workplaces may cause individual Indigenous employees to lack confidence or feel that Indigenous Peoples are undervalued, which can amplify imposter phenomenon.

Experiencing imposter phenomenon may also lead Indigenous women to doubt their skills and qualifications which has ramifications on their ability to grow professionally. For example, one of the consequences of imposter phenomenon is that fewer Indigenous women receive promotions since they are not actively advocating for themselves for advancement or promotion, or because when they do advocate for themselves, their value and skills are not recognized by the organization.

Conscious of Being White Presenting

Interview participants, notably those who identified as white presenting, were also cognizant of the differing experiences of Indigenous women in the workplace depending on whether or not they believed they were white presenting (regardless of how others perceived them). Participants noted that Indigenous women who believe they are white presenting may face career development barriers because they may opt out of opportunities in the hopes of enabling the careers of non-white presenting Indigenous women.

In some cases, the subtext of these discussions suggested that participants also acknowledged that Indigenous women, who are non-white presenting, may also be seen as closer to their Indigenous culture, communities, and teachings, which may further distinguish them from white presenting Indigenous women in the workplace. In addition, some participants noted that Indigenous women who perceived themselves to be white presenting, benefited from privileges and advantages due to their closer proximity to whiteness, which enabled them to advocate for change to improve the experiences of Indigenous Peoples in the workplace.



Self-Directed Career Development

Self-directed career development in the form of seeking career coaching and informal mentorship, and volunteering internally (i.e., ERGs) and externally was identified by participants as a significant barrier to Indigenous women's professional advancement, not because self-directed career development is always negative, but because there are no other ways for Indigenous women to access career development opportunities, gain recognition, and advance their careers within their organizations, unlike their white peers. Participants recognized that many Indigenous women face the burden of having to self-advocate and find their own development opportunities, which removes the responsibility for career development, growth, and advancement from an organization and places it on the individual. According to participants, Indigenous women may also have to rely on self-directed career development because they experience fears related to job security in psychologically unsafe workplaces; however, confronting these fears can result in increased personal trauma related to the burden of self-advocacy within a dominant workplace culture that does not align with or understand Indigenous cultural values, worldviews, and lived experiences, complicating the entire process of self-directed career development.



For me, to feel really like I can flourish and excel... there needs to be more cultural awareness and there needs to be more inclusive opportunities so that we feel safe to express ourselves and we feel safe to amplify issues that we see that are unique to us as Indigenous women, to see that others maybe cannot understand. That it's not going to affect us in our careers. I want to be able to bring up something in a meeting like, 'this is inherently not good or inherently racist or the system is very biased against Indigenous students' and have that not affect me at the end of the day whether or not I get a promotion.

— Indigenous Interview Participant

Workplace Gaps

The following section introduces gaps identified by Indigenous participants based on their experience or observations in the workplace. It should be noted that not every gap identified here was experienced or witnessed by every participant, nor will these gaps show up the same way in every organization. Instead, this section presents common gaps shared by participants that all organizations should be aware of, but it is not intended to serve as a fulsome list of all gaps experienced by Indigenous women in the workplace.



Underrepresentation of Indigenous Women

Similar to discussions in the Indigenous sharing circles, interview participants pointed out the underrepresentation of Indigenous women at all levels, but especially as leaders, senior staff, mentors, sponsors, and role models. Participants believed that a lack of representation of Indigenous women in those types of roles may reinforce barriers when it comes to their advancement.

Participants also noted that when organizations employ fewer Indigenous Peoples, they subsequently have a small selection of Indigenous candidates who are eligible for promotion or advancement, especially when the focus is to promote or advance internally. They also shared that underrepresentation can have broader ramifications since organizations may not offer Indigenous focused supports, initiatives, or ERGs if they employ fewer Indigenous Peoples.

Lack of Holistic and Tailored Career Development

A lack of tailored and holistic career development supports that meet the needs of Indigenous women, including mentorship, leadership development programs, and training, was also identified as a significant gap by participants. Many Indigenous participants pointed out that they lacked basic access to career development resources and supports, and they often find that non-Indigenous people are given more opportunities to participate in existing career development programs. Participants also noted that because career development programs are currently designed as one-size-fits-all, these supports may not be suitable for Indigenous women who require different supports, benefits, and accommodations (e.g., wrap around support). Participants also shared that traditional career development options lack a culturally informed lens, and as such, they find the programs to be ineffective in providing meaningful career



development training and support. For example, one participant revealed that leadership development programs are designed to conform Indigenous women to dominate workplace norms that prioritize the needs of white men. Even when standardized career development programs focus on women's professional development, they tend to mainly cater to white women, failing to address diverse needs, values, and intersectionalities. These types of gaps suggested to Indigenous participants that they need to change their values, behaviours, and practices while in the workplace to experience professional success, instead of adapting workplaces to better reflect the needs of Indigenous Peoples.

Inadequate Understanding of Indigenous Women's Unique Needs and Lived Experiences

Participants shared the belief that the underrepresentation of Indigenous women in corporate spaces often indicates that an organization may also lack awareness and understanding when it comes to the needs, values, beliefs, histories, and lived experiences of Indigenous women. For example, participants shared that organizations tend not to understand and recognize intersectionality and the diverse lived experiences of Indigenous women, which means they may not appropriately acknowledge intergenerational trauma and its impact on Indigenous Peoples.



You can't just create a program or set of programs that support leadership development without interrogating the pre-existing culture. Because that is just a band-aid - you've got to challenge the system. You've got to challenge the organizational structure. Because otherwise, there's an inherent assumption with that mindset that the organization is not the problem, but the organization is the problem or you would have Black and Indigenous people succeeding within it.

— Indigenous Interview Participant

Other Indigenous participants noted that their voices were not being heard or recognized in the workplace, especially by colleagues who failed to understand or represent their perspectives which made participants feel like they were wasting their time trying to advocate for their needs. Participants also shared that attempts by organizations to support their needs fall flat because there is a misalignment between organizational cultures and Indigenous values. For example, capitalistic, white-dominated corporate cultures that prioritize profits over community and shareholder value over their employees run counter to the values of Indigenous Peoples.



Participants shared that workplaces sometimes offer Indigenous focused learning opportunities to employees, however, they try to tailor the training to support broader corporate goals, instead of taking the opportunity to meaningfully uplift Indigenous perspectives, teachings, and values and offer transformative learning opportunities.

Due to differing values and a limited understanding among some non-Indigenous people of the lived experiences of Indigenous women, participants shared the perspective that workplaces are not psychological safe spaces. Since Indigenous women are unable to bring their whole selves to work, they may, according to participants, feel fearful to self-advocate for change to better reflect their values or the needs of Indigenous Peoples in organizations where they lack psychological safety. Participants also pointed out that Indigenous Peoples contend with the emotional tax of having to go above and beyond typical workplace duties and responsibilities by advocating for and representing all Indigenous Peoples, calling out equity issues, and educating their non-Indigenous colleagues which can lead to increased rates of burnout. The emotional burden associated with a lack of psychological safety, coupled with experiencing racism and microaggressions in the workplace, means that Indigenous women often face compounding hardships.



The western business model... it's very focused on profit margins and how [an organization] could generate income or push their business to the next level. Whereas Indigenous People were focused on community wealth - how we can support everyone, lift everyone, make sure that there are opportunities for everyone around the table, that everyone's voices are included. Whereas the western business model is like they'll do it, but only if it's actually gonna help them make money.

— Indigenous Interview Participant



Perceived Performativity and Lack of Meaningful Action

Participants shared that deep-seated beliefs and assumptions about Indigenous Peoples are hard to overcome, especially in white-dominant workplaces and organizations that are often resistant to change. Oftentimes, instead of pursuing actionable changes that better support the needs of Indigenous women, organizations will pursue disingenuous approaches that do not actually improve inclusion in workplaces (i.e., EDI checkbox activities). Participants noted that widespread gaps in knowledge related to anti-racism, anti-oppression, and cultural competency exacerbate the lack of meaningful action taken to support Indigenous women in workplaces.

Another significant factor influencing performativity, as shared by participants, was that leaders do not support, engage with, show allyship for, or understand Indigenous women because they fail to recognize and acknowledge their privilege and may hold superiority mindsets. Performativity was also identified as an issue in HR departments.

For example, interview participants noted that HR departments have not meaningfully integrated formal frameworks for reconciliation such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Call to Action 92, which can demonstrate to Indigenous Peoples that the organization is apathetic, complacent, or resistant to change.



I think just being an Indigenous woman, showing up in the workforce is a struggle. And every day that I show up in a room where I wasn't previously welcomed, that's how I'm engaging in reconciliation. It's not something that I get to turn on and off every day. I also wear the hat of having to educate people all the time because they just expect that because I'm an Indigenous woman in that space, that I'm gonna take on the job of educating them on how they can be more inclusive. Why they're not able to recruit Indigenous people, why they can't do this or that, how do you give tobacco? The questions I get asked just for existing on a daily basis. I think the things that are unique to me - I imagine they probably happen with other ethnic groups as well, but I think right now that it's been more of a conversation across Canada - I think it's literally been every day. It's hard for me to think where I wasn't asked one of those questions lately, and I think the mental workload of having to carry all of that in addition to my regular duties.

— Indigenous Interview Participant

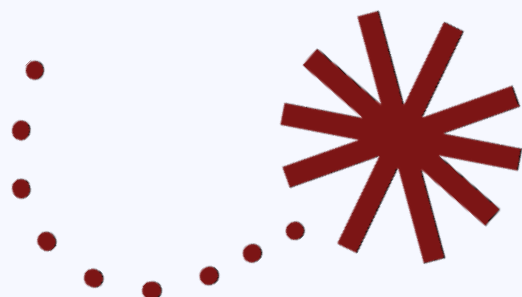
Issues with Human Resources

Interview participants also pointed out several gaps when it comes to HR functions like hiring and retaining Indigenous employees, succession planning for Indigenous women, and the collection of employee data. They also noted that these processes seemed to be a checkbox activity instead of having a long-term focus on building a more inclusive and meaningful approach that is culturally informed. For instance, participants spoke about the ways that exclusionary language (e.g., “hold down the fort”), especially when it comes from leaders or HR, can signal to Indigenous women that their organization does not care about them.

Additionally, participants discussed obstacles with self-identifying as an Indigenous Person; namely, that they were distrustful of data collection processes and practices which lacked transparency especially around issues of data ownership. For instance, participants brought up issues with companies collecting data from Indigenous Peoples consensually, and questioned whether those collecting data ensured data sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples (per UNDRIP). For Indigenous participants, these feelings of unease and distrust were justified because Indigenous Peoples do not want to be seen as just a diversity hire nor do they want to have their information used. They also felt unsafe reporting self-identifying data to HR as they were not sure how the data would be used, who would have access, and the risk of doing so leading to experiencing microaggressions such as racism.

Ineffective Employee Resource Groups

Participants identified a number of gaps related to support for Indigenous ERGs, including being under-resourced and under-recognized. Participants took issue with the voluntary unpaid work that Indigenous women contribute to ERGs, which oftentimes requires members to train and educate non-Indigenous colleagues or bear the burden of handling Indigenous-related incidents and issues to address harms and concerns at work without organizational support or guidance. Furthermore, often when non-Indigenous ERG members are involved, they may not listen to Indigenous Peoples in the ERG and end up taking up space rather than making space and being a true ally. For example, one participant spoke about an experience where white allies took over an Indigenous ERG and instead of showing allyship, they minimized Indigenous voices resulting in Indigenous employees dropping out/opting out of the ERG. There were also discrepancies among ERGs in the workplace, according to participants, where Indigenous ERGs did not receive the same support as other ERGs, and when Indigenous ERG members sought to provide this type of feedback to leadership, there was no channel to communicate how their organization could better support the Indigenous ERG.





Indigenous incidents happen and they [the incidents] just come to us [Indigenous ERG]. It feels wrong, because we're a volunteer group of people. It feels wrong to be putting the labor on the group of people who themselves may be working through some difficult thing that's happened impacting our career development as well. The direction of the relationship is going the wrong way.

— **Indigenous Interview Participant**

Promising Practices in the Workplace

This section presents a selection of promising practices to support Indigenous women's career development that participants experienced or identified from their workplaces. It should be noted that not every promising practice identified here was experienced by every participant, but these promising practices should be seen as examples of targeted approaches that may help an organization address a specific gap, if implemented properly; however, they are not intended to serve as fulsome solutions guaranteed to close all gaps.



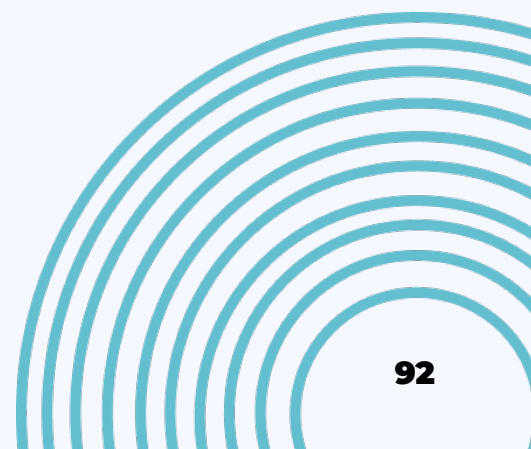
Indigenous Women's Representation

Participants shared that improvements to the hiring and retention of Indigenous women could be addressed by organizations through offering culturally inclusive benefits like childcare and family supports, mental health and wellness options, and flexible work arrangements. One participant noted that Indigenous-led organizations can serve as models for these types of arrangements because they build culturally informed practices directly into the fabric of their workplaces, such as observing dates of significance, offering professional development opportunities that are Indigenous focused and led, producing tailored social media campaigns and marketing that celebrates Indigenous women, having a commitment to work-life integration and policies that support it (e.g., bereavement leave), recognizing and celebrating Treaty Days and other days or events of significance in the community, and being involved in and building connections with local Indigenous communities.



I love my [Indigenous-led] workplace. This is the first place where I feel actually super safe. I can walk in, I get treaty days, I get community days, I get bereavement days, and my hours are very flexible. Our goal with our offices: family first, work can always wait. Not to say that you can't do your work, but today, I can come home, I can do it from [home] if I need to get stuff done. They're very willing to work with me; we also do a lot of community building.

— Indigenous Interview Participant



Holistic and Tailored Career Development Opportunities

Another promising practice that interview participants shared revolved around the type of career development programs and initiatives being offered in their organizations. Participants believed that training and upskilling programs are important for continuous skill development, and that mentorship programs should be offered to Indigenous early talent as well as informal mentoring options that were specifically focused on Indigenous Peoples. Additionally, some participants noted that funding for professional development had a positive impact on Indigenous women's ability to network and enhance their professional skills. According to participants, engaged and inclusive leadership, especially as formal and informal mentors and sponsors, was also key to Indigenous women's career advancement and growth.

Inclusive Employee Resource Groups

Indigenous participants discussed the impact of ERGs when they are well-funded and set up to offer support. Participants shared that ERGs could be a vehicle for Indigenous women to learn about career development and mobility, expose themselves to networking, participate in mentorship, and engage with non-Indigenous Peoples in a supportive and safe space. Some participants noted that ERGs benefit Indigenous women the most when they have leadership buy-in and financial support that includes flexible methods of accessing budgetary support.



Interview Insights from Black Participants



Barriers to Career Development

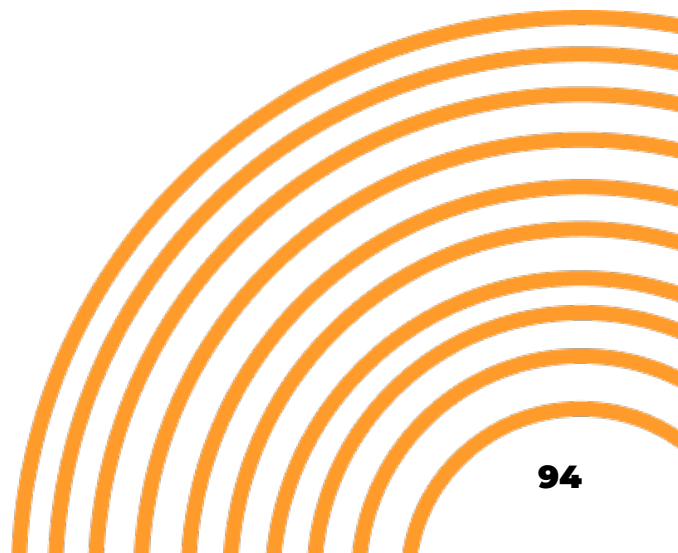
Anti-Black Racism and Mistreatment in the Workplace

Black interview participants divulged that they had experienced anti-Black racism and mistreatment in the workplace that included stereotyping (e.g., Black people are considered lazy when they are unresponsive or quiet, but aggressive when they speak up or confront inequity), microaggressions, harsh judgements based on their race, and biases due to their newcomer status, accents, ethnicity, or nationality.

According to participants, this racism and mistreatment may arise because Black women are not taken as seriously as their white or Canadian-born peers, or because there are stark differences in, for example, some African cultures and behavioural norms in Canadian workplaces (e.g., eye contact, tone of voice, working relationships with leaders). They shared that experiencing anti-Black racism or mistreatment in the workplace can increase Black women's rates of burnout, negatively impact career development, reducing opportunities for promotion or advancement, and reinforcing the reality that Black women have to work twice as hard as their white peers to advance.

Feelings of Imposter Phenomenon

Participants highlighted imposter phenomenon as a barrier for Black women who are the only Black person in their organization or in a senior role, and/or for those who feel the need to assimilate to the working culture of white dominant spaces. Black participants also shared that despite their qualifications for roles, they were often told that they needed more experience or had to justify their qualifications. According to participants, these experiences can reinforce imposter phenomenon, leading Black women to question their value and place at work, believe that they need to work harder to get ahead, and feel more self-doubt, self-blame, disempowerment.





One of the things that I notice immediately is that they're [Black women] very high achieving, but they carry the most imposter syndrome, and I think that's because they have constantly had to justify their qualifications. There's this learned behavior of 'I have to be the best of the best.' But then you're also hearing sub-messages like 'you need a little bit more experience,' or 'you need to get this qualification,' and that comes from a lot of times white cis men, or white women, or you're working in a predominantly white space. People come to me, and their resumes will be spectacular, their professional experiences spectacular, but based on how they view themselves, you would think that they were just a baby coming right off campus.

— **Black Interview Participant**

Visibility, Humility, and Code Switching

Participants noted that many Black women are unable to show up authentically in their workplaces impacting their ability to grow professionally. According to participants, Black women can feel uncomfortable having to balance their career ambitions, which requires high visibility in order to receive promotions, with contradictory cultural teachings to “not make waves or ask for what you need”, being humble, and not bragging.

Feeling forced to be inauthentic may also take the shape of code switching, the adjustment of speech and behaviour to align with dominant workplace norms determined by white supremacy culture. Participants shared that Black women’s career advancement may be hampered because they have to maneuver in work environments that are defined by white supremacy culture and therefore, are not psychologically safe spaces. To protect themselves and “fit in”, some Black women may hold back their opinions and ideas, avoid negotiating, and purposely not ask for more from managers and their organization in terms of compensation. Participants also pointed out that Black women who code switch were more likely to progress at a faster rate than those who elected not to, but they may risk losing themselves in the process.

Family Expectations and Immigrant Experience

According to participants, for some Black women, challenges with authenticity in the workplace stem from their family’s impact on their career. Participants acknowledged that corporate environments prioritize individualism and self-promotion which often differs from collectivist beliefs and values that Black women have been taught from their families and communities, such as “keeping your head down and working hard”, not bragging or boasting and instead, letting their work speak for them. This barrier is amplified for newcomers or Black immigrant women (i.e., from Africa or the Caribbean) who must navigate corporate spaces in Canada with no Canadian work or education experience, fewer network connections and support systems, differing levels of English proficiency, and markers of a foreign background (i.e., their name). Participants noted that immigration status can be a significant barrier to Black women because they may be unfamiliar with hidden Canadian workplace standards of professionalism and inherent racial biases in hiring and promotion processes which results in Black women being taken less seriously as candidates than their non-Black peers. To break into the job market, Black women immigrants may have to take an additional step of seeking community with other Black immigrants to learn how to navigate Canada’s labour market and corporate sector.





Understanding how to actually navigate these spaces is often not really ingrained in us. My dad [would say] put your head down, work hard, stay loyal for as long as you can, and that's how you get ahead. There's a lot of informal education of how to navigate these spaces, and a lot of it's opposed to what we've been taught in the collectivist, high power hierarchy societies many of us were raised in. Those differences in career education and cultural norms are so often overlooked, not just from an HR perspective, but also from learning and development, and with your informal coaching, or your direct manager relationships. Understanding that difference in cultural awareness is a big part of it.

— **Black Interview Participant**

Feelings of Burnout

In general, participants spoke about Black women experiencing burnout regardless of whether or not they were formally tasked with EDI focused work. Black participants identified a number of reasons contributing to their burnout: being overworked and underappreciated, being subjected to microaggressions, racism and stereotyping, not having direct managers vested in their career growth, not having access to career advancement opportunities, and not feeling like they can show “weakness” in the workplace. When a EDI leader does identify as a Black or racialized person, they often experience burnout because they are tokenized, they are not given the authority needed to make meaningful changes, or they have to prove racism and inequity exist in their organization. Many Black EDI professionals reported that they were hired or promoted to senior positions following the murder of George Floyd, but they are now experiencing burnout because it has become clear their organization does not actually want to change. Black women experiencing burnout may feel, according to participants, that they have no choice but to leave their organization, either permanently or through a leave of absence, to find relief from the pressure they face at work.



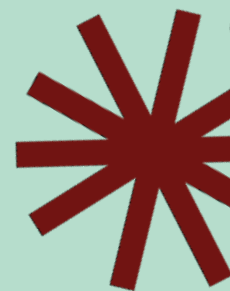
Probably since the murder of George Floyd, I would say that I have seen far more postings for equity, diversity, and inclusion roles, and quite often in senior positions, that resulted in me seeing racialized individuals getting those roles. I remember at the time saying, ‘whoa, this is good.’ People would put up on LinkedIn ‘Happy to announce that I’m now the Director of EDI at such and such organization’ and very often it was racialized people. I was worried that it’s like right, left, and centre all these postings and everybody wants one, but what’s gonna happen a couple years later. So now it’s a couple years later and I have to tell you, people that I talked to who are Black EDI professionals, they’re telling me that they’re either nearly done in the sense that they’re tired of fighting these battles. They brought me on to bring about change, then they don’t wanna change. They’re tired, they’re fatigued. They are burnt out because they were told to solve the world... make my organization look good, but don’t change me, because I’m okay. They’re constantly convincing and influencing and it’s tiring. I mean, there’s a number of them that are just not even sure they wanna do it anymore.

— **Black Interview Participant**



Workplace Gaps

Interview participants identified several gaps in organizational practices and policies that negatively impact Black women's ability to access and benefit from career development initiatives in the workplace. The following section introduces these gaps, as identified by Black participants based on their experience or observations in the workplace. It should be noted that not every gap identified here was experienced by every participant, nor will these gaps show up the same way in every organization. Instead, this section presents common gaps shared by participants that all organizations should be aware of, but they are not intended to serve as a fulsome list of all gaps experienced or witnessed by Black women in the workplace.



Underrepresentation of Black Women

For many interview participants, the underrepresentation of Black women as managers, in senior roles, and leadership positions was flagged as a significant barrier. Specifically, participants shared that the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership roles sends a message to Black women employees or prospective candidates that their ambitions to reach an executive level may be unattainable or that there are no opportunities for career advancement, which can lead to higher rates of Black women leaving workplaces or feeling that they do not fit in. Furthermore, given the high demand for Black mentors and sponsors in the workplace, this lack of representation in senior roles can negatively impact retention, advancement, and growth for Black women.

Lack of Holistic and Tailored Career Development

Black participants pointed out that many organizations fail to offer tailored supports that meet their needs. Participants noted that one-size-fits-all programs for leadership development, career coaching, mentorship, and sponsorship do not take into account intersectionality or individual needs and career goals which renders them ineffective for Black women. Black participants shared that, oftentimes, these programs are not designed “by us, for us”, nor are they trauma-informed to prioritize psychological safety. Participants also noted that these types of career development programs lack transparent impact metrics to track and measure the benefits or outcomes (i.e., promotions). They also spoke about the value of sponsorship but in many cases, these programs fail because the sponsors do not prioritize this work (e.g., they are performative, cancel meetings, too busy to provide support) or they are unable to offer helpful advice because they cannot relate to Black women's career journeys or aspirations.



Interview participants pointed out that organizations do not clearly communicate professional development programs, resources, tools, or advancement opportunities to Black women and do a poor job ensuring that they are encouraged to participate. Internal advertising for career development programs can be uneven which leads to gaps in knowledge for Black women. Additionally, the nomination process for these programs is often unclear, and it can be challenging to navigate the application and participation process without guidance. Black participants also shared that since succession planning is rarely transparent and many organizations do not communicate performance-based criteria for advancement, they lack clarity on viable career pathways within their organizations unless their manager proactively discusses their career development (which is rare). In many cases, participants noted that career development opportunities or stretch projects were not communicated to those in early career or middle management positions, preventing Black women from progressing to senior roles.

Interview participants also pointed out that when career development initiatives are designed specifically for women, the fixation on gender-only concerns rarely includes a racial lens. Black participants divulged that career development programs and ERGs that have been created to support women are designed for and mostly benefit white women because they lack an intersectional lens. This gap is problematic and one of the contributing factors to the lower glass ceiling experienced by Black women.

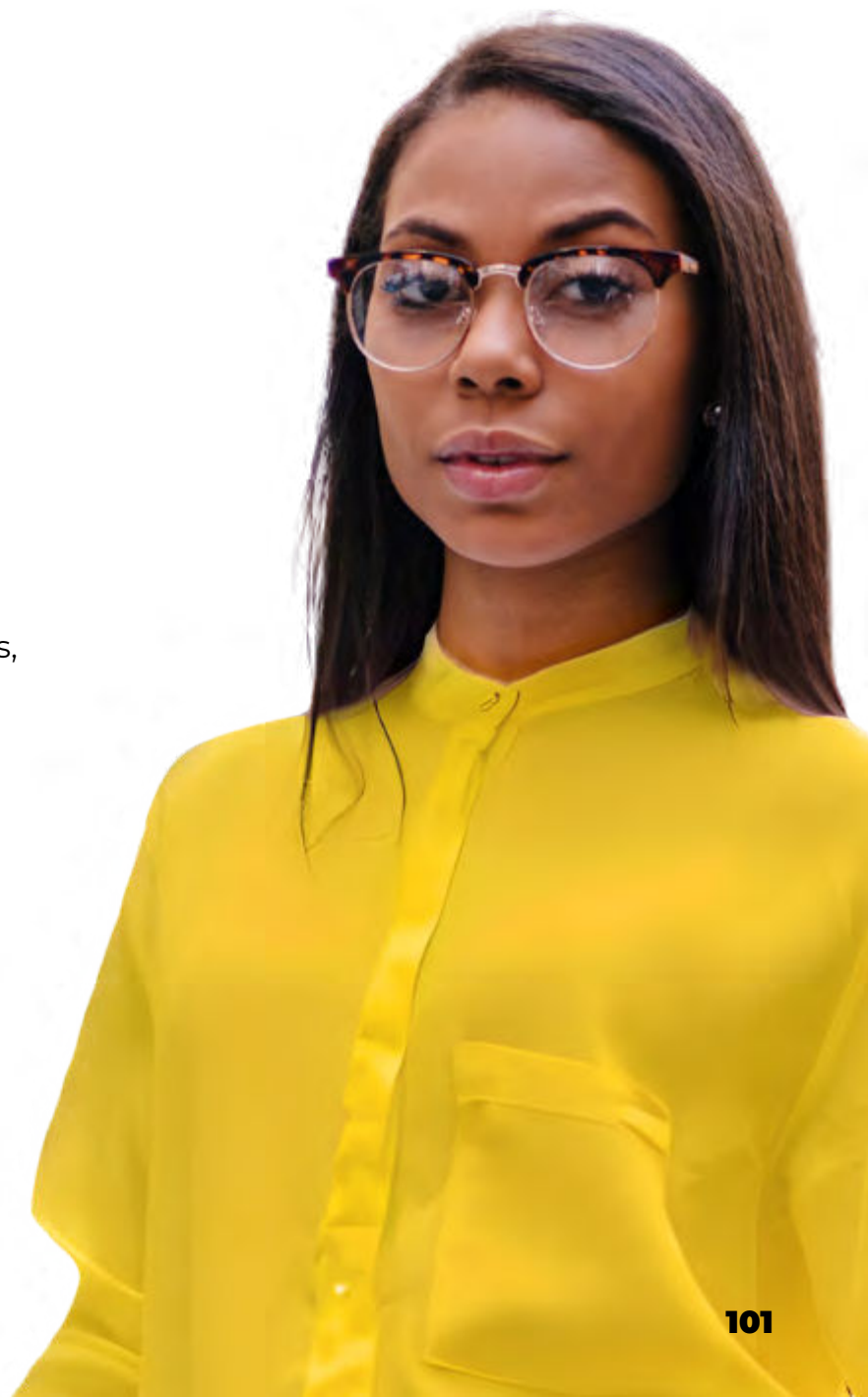
Direct Managers Can Hinder Career Development and Growth

The power of direct managers over career progression was a common theme brought up by participants. Many shared that direct managers could “make or break” experiences: supportive managers who acknowledged systemic barriers and worked to empower their direct reports often enabled career development and advancement, while unsupportive managers reinforced biases and blocked or stifled career growth. Participants pointed out that managers are in positions of power and have the discretion to uplift and promote those they favour or, conversely, hold back those they do not favour which leads to inequities. For example, participants highlighted that Black women are commonly told they need more work experience or additional skills or qualifications to receive a promotion. However, when they attempt to justify their credentials and skills, their managers may gaslight them or tell them they “just are not ready” without providing clear, actionable feedback.



Black participants noted that they often do not receive critical feedback that can assist their career development and advancement (e.g., how to grow skill sets, developmental needs towards advancement, performance-based evaluation) because direct managers do not want to come across as racist or discriminatory, which impedes Black women's career advancement and growth. This lack of meaningful feedback negatively impacts progression, growth, and advancement because Black women are unsure of what to improve or how to do it. One participant also referenced the power of hiring managers to determine salary offers and direct managers to determine pay raises which can lead to wage gaps for Black women due to racial and gender bias. The fact that Black women have a large wage gap despite having similar experience and qualifications compared to their peers has drastic implications for their career development journey since compensation affects job selection and financial stability.

Lastly, according to interview participants, managers tend not to understand the unique needs and experiences of Black women in the workplace. Working for managers who do not invest in your career growth, see your potential, listen or support, understand the impacts of intersectionality, and who gaslight, can, according to participants, hurt the confidence and wellbeing of Black women, leading to other complicated obstacles related to motivation.





I've found a lot of women of any dimension of diversity, when they do speak with their manager, they have expressed that they would like to go into management or they've been taking courses on their own. They're really showing initiative. It's about having a great people leader who will see that drive and determination and will move that person forward.

There are some leaders who definitely understand the barriers that Black, Indigenous, and other racialized women go through (queer women, disabled women, neurodiverse women, as well). They know that there are those barriers, but they're still open to and will be opening doors so that she can go through and start a management training program, be promoted to another position, move further in the organization because they see the drive and determination of that person. It is the leaders themselves who see the determination of that woman, and will say 'I know of the barriers, they are systemic, but we're trying to break them down.'

Then there are other [people leaders]... who don't want to develop a person because of their own biases, because of their deep rooted issues. They haven't tackled their anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. And if it's a woman leader trying to push aside another woman, then it's internalized misogyny. I've seen great people leaders who acknowledge that 'yes, you have the skills, you have the competence, we want to develop you because we see you staying here at this company'. While there are others, who I've witnessed - and not just with myself, but with other women on my team who are moving toward management and above - where our careers have been stifled to the point where we had to leave that organization just to receive the recognition and respect that we deserve.

— **Black Interview Participant**

Affinity Bias and Unequal Benefits

One of the main reasons for barriers experienced by Black women in workplaces identified by interview participants was the prevalence of affinity bias. Participants believed that affinity bias creates barriers to Black women's career development because their white and/ or Canadian-born colleagues cannot relate to Black people. One participant noted that affinity bias affects the perceived likeability of Black women and thus, their access to career development tools and opportunities. Another participant spoke to how affinity bias can impact sponsorship, where, for example, a white leader may be more likely to build rapport with a white colleague who attended the same school as their children. A number of participants pointed out that white women do not face the same challenges accessing and benefitting from career development opportunities such as leadership development and sponsorship because, unlike Black women, they can navigate organizational politics, feel comfortable asking their managers for support, and openly discuss their gender-based victimization or vulnerabilities without repercussions.



It requires dismantling certain systems within the organization, starting with acknowledging the presence of white supremacy and colonial frameworks. It also means recognizing individuals who are actively hindering progress and creating harm. I think many organizations have people in very senior roles often more than we'd like to admit, who are actively impeding progress.

Accountability is key, and it needs to exist not just at lower levels but at the very top. Too often, senior leaders aren't held to the same standard and are allowed to opt out, even saying, 'I don't believe in this,' with no consequences simply because of their executive or senior title.

— **Black Interview Participant**



White Privilege and Defensiveness

The broader context to the discussions on affinity bias revolved around white privilege and how participants have witnessed white leaders getting defensive when confronted with racism or other systems of oppression. More specifically, Black participants shared that white leaders often do not recognize their own privilege and uphold tenets of white supremacy because they benefit from it. Therefore, white leaders are less likely to create space for Black people or establish personable relationships with those in lower positions, and due to this bias and discrimination, they block Black people from accessing career development programs to maintain their power status and privilege. In general, participants reported that leaders do not support their colleagues' executive aspirations because they believe they have had to figure it out and make it on their own to earn their positions, so they assume others should do the same. In some cases, participants noted that these sentiments were expressed by Black or racialized leaders who had to navigate white supremacy culture to achieve their positions and believe other Black or racialized people need to make it on their own, too. Interview participants also noted that, if an organization employed Black or racialized women in leadership positions, they tended to form a tight-knit community and supported one another, which may come at the expense of other Black or racialized women employed in lower-level positions looking for upper-level support.



It's the comfort that all of them [white men and women] have within - the benefits of white supremacy. [White women] have historically and continue to uphold those tenets of white supremacy [as] they are protected by white men. If you're in a cocoon and protected by something, chances are you are going to stay in that comfort zone unless you know that you need to make a change. And it's so very important for white women, especially, to jump out of that comfort zone because white supremacy hurts all of us. It even hurts white men if they're not wealthy. It's the understanding that white women specifically say, I'm a feminist. That's great, but if that feminism is only for a white woman, it's of no benefit, really. It's really upholding the tenets of white supremacy (and usually white feminism does), so it's about taking themselves out of the equation and taking out that self-centredness.

— **Black Interview Participant**

Perceived Performativity and Inaction

Critiques about career development program design and delivery also often included broader discussions related to organizational inaction or performativity in the EDI space. Interview participants lamented that many organizations do not want to change the status quo (i.e., white supremacy culture, colonial legacies, anti-Black racism) by acknowledging racial and gender barriers in the workplace because they do not believe obstacles exist or they do not want to invest time and resources to dismantle systems that support white dominance. As such, Black participants noted that organizations implement performative initiatives for public relations purposes that make their brand look good (e.g., committing to a diversity pledge, setting an unambitious diversity target, having potlucks for different cultural days), or they focus on short-term initiatives that avoid real change or do not challenge control of their power. Participants also shared that organizations avoid tackling complex issues like racism and its impact on equal access to career development opportunities because it is either seen as a distraction from “real” work, it creates discomfort, or they do not admit that it exists in their workplace.

Additionally, according to Black participants, EDI roles are often filled by affluent, able-bodied, white women who have benefited from racist systems of oppression and therefore, lack knowledge and understanding of anti-Black racism and the lived experiences of Black individuals. One participant pointed out that some organizations slotted HR professionals into EDI roles when demand grew for these positions, but HR personnel

were not trained in EDI and many lacked an understanding of intersectionality and how it can impact career development as well as the lived experience of those they sought to represent (not being racialized themselves).



Having tough conversations, the ones people don't feel comfortable having. It's much easier to say, 'just do this training instead,' or 'this person didn't intend to harm you,' right? What I think stops folks from engaging in these conversations is that feelings get hurt and instead of approaching it with, 'hey, we still need to make the change anyway,' it becomes about, 'everyone is feeling uncomfortable, this is becoming a distraction, and it's not important, let's just move on.'

The idea of something being a 'distraction' is used so often now, and it prevents organizations from doing the actual work. What people need to understand is that this is the work. This is hard work. I think for a lot of organizations it's much easier to say, 'let's have a diversity potluck,' than to have the real conversation that acknowledges white supremacy in the organization and how it's harming our people.

— Black Interview Participant

Issues with Human Resources

Some of the issues raised by participants with advancement and promotion processes speak to larger gaps with HR functions. For some participants, HR focuses disproportionate attention on recruitment and compliance as opposed to managing employee engagement, retention, and advancement, and there are numerous gaps with the hiring and recruitment process. To begin, it can be challenging to navigate recruitment policies and practices when organizations are not transparent with application status updates, nor do they provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants. Additionally, job postings that have diversity statements encouraging equity-deserving groups to apply can be performative when the hiring methods are not inclusive or the hiring manager already has someone in mind.

Predetermined hiring decisions based on pre-existing connections (i.e., a network referral, a child of an employee, someone who attended the same school as a hiring manager) is considered **nepotism**, which can disproportionately benefit white and Canadian-born people with extensive networks, traditional education and career paths. Black participants also noted that hiring pools lack diversity because of affinity bias. According to one participant, affinity bias rears its head when African or other racialized sounding names are dismissed at higher rates than white sounding names, or if they do receive an interview, a lack of diversity on panels creates barriers for Black candidates. Elitist credentials may prevent Black women from applying to jobs or result in hiring someone who attended the same school or is a member of the same club.

Black women who are able to overcome these barriers and gain employment still face issues with HR's self-identification policies and practices. Black participants shared that they sometimes feel uncomfortable being asked by HR to self-identify in voluntary demographic surveys because there is a lack of transparency around who has access to the data and how it is used. Some pointed out that since the data is not intersectional or humanized, (i.e., presented in a way that is mindful of its attachment to real people and their lives), it can be reductive or lead to a lack of executive engagement and accountability to improve diversity practices.





A lot of times employers will create a standard on their website saying, ‘we are open to individuals across the board’, but that’s only one aspect of it. One of the things that I often find when I have conversations with employers is they’re still using that statement, but they’re not necessarily changing the methods of how they’re recruiting us. They’re still posting in the same area they don’t necessarily need to. What I also find interesting is that once they get those people [diverse employees], they don’t have the capacity for their resources to be able to sustain. You thought through this whole recruitment finding process, but at the end of the day... there’s more to it than just hiring the person - making sure that that person is comfortable, that they’re able to authentically show up as themselves, and they don’t feel that they need to be different.

— **Black Interview Participant**

Ineffective Employee Resource Groups

Participants spoke about ERGs and their inadequate policies and practices, namely their extractive, non-reciprocal nature, the lack of resources, and the under-recognition of members' contributions. Additionally, according to participants, members do not tend to have allocated time to complete ERG tasks within their core work hours, which means it becomes "side of desk" work, substantially increasing workloads without the benefit of recognition or compensation and positive contribution to their career advancement. Participants shared that systemically marginalized employees of ERGs are burdened with the creation of solutions to inequity challenges that impact career development, but they are not appropriately funded, supported, consulted for their input on aspects of the employee lifecycle like onboarding, and recognized by leadership. Yet, inadequate support for ERGs coupled with high expectations may result in members' burnout or have negative impacts on Black employees' access to meaningful tools, initiatives, and networks that impact their ability to positively navigate their workplace and career development. In another case, a participant pointed out that an ERG for Black employees was run by white allies which took away space from Black ERG members and made them uncomfortable.

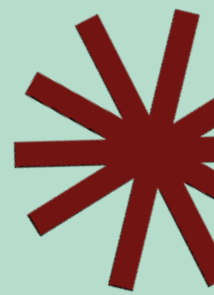


A lot of ERGs have popped up in the last three years. At the time, there was a lot of excitement and energy and fervor. And frankly, a lot of marginalized employees feeling like not a lot was happening and taking the onus upon themselves to create the solutions. And now, no surprise, three years later, they're essentially being under-resourced, underappreciated, and under-consulted or engaged. A lot of these ERGs have burnt out or petered out, and we're seeing this really weird shell of what ERGs could be and are supposed to be because there's been such a heavy reliance on them, without the support. From the outside, many organizations have ERGs, but once you get in, they're not effective, and they're usually not actually performing in any meaningful way because the folks who started them three years ago tend to be disenchanted by this point or completely burnt out.

— **Black Interview Participant**

Promising Practices in the Workplace

In response to the obstacles and gaps identified above, interview participants shared some promising practices that they have witnessed in their workplaces or over the course of their careers. This section presents a selection of promising practices that can support Black women's career development, as experienced or identified by participants. It should be noted that not every promising practice identified here was experienced by every participant, but these promising practices should be seen as examples of targeted approaches that may help an organization address a specific gap, if implemented properly; however, they are not intended to serve as fulsome solutions guaranteed to close all gaps.



Holistic and Tailored Career Development Opportunities

Interview participants focused discussions on the positive impact of tailored and inclusive career development opportunities, including mentorship, sponsorship, and career coaching. Mentorship programs for Black women were mentioned by participants as an important way of offering tailored leadership development and networking opportunities. In addition, it was noted that when mentors, especially white leaders, were properly trained in cultural competency, it positively impacted how they connected with and supported Black employees. In general, training for leaders on inclusivity, emotional intelligence, and collaboration was upheld as a promising practice by participants. Notably, several participants mentioned that white men acting as mentors and sponsors to Black women was effective because they did not see Black women as competition or “in a position to take their power away”. Participants also spoke about the significant value of internal and external career coaching opportunities with coaches who shared their lived experiences, as the coaches



In my career, the persons who have really helped to open the doors for me (and not only mentor but sponsor me) have been white cis-hetero men. I think part of that really has to do with me being a Black woman, I am not in a position to take anyone's power. If a white man mentors me, he doesn't lose anything. He's not gonna go around - I mean, some people do - but he doesn't go around bragging about how many Black women he's mentored today.

— Black Interview Participant

tended to take a more holistic approach to career development. For example, participants shared the positive impact of career coaching with Black coaches, access to therapy with Black healthcare professionals, and/or group meditation alongside more traditional conversations around leadership development and navigating challenging workplace scenarios.

Allyship from Privileged Peers

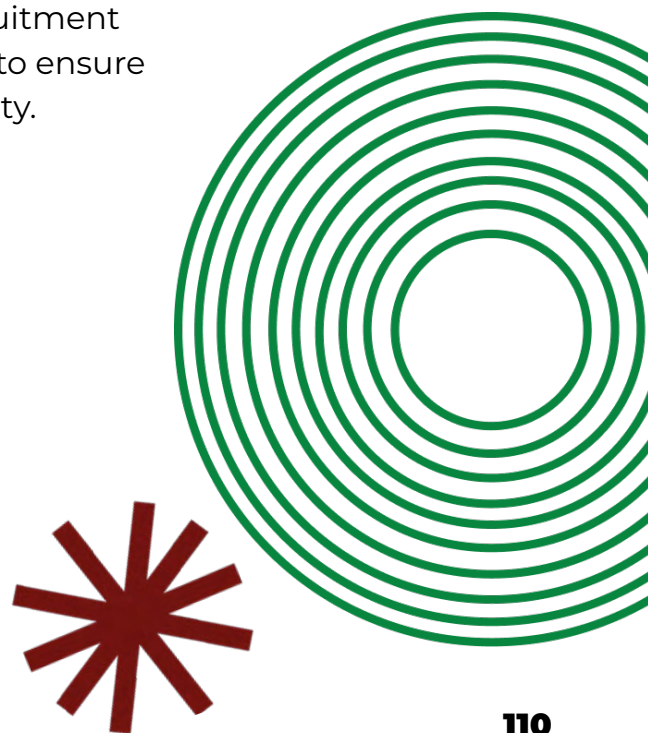
When asked about promising practices that contribute to career development and growth, participants spoke about the ways that leaders, direct managers, and HR personnel can better support Black women at work and in their careers as allies. Participants shared that allies for Black women can include leaders who are aware of their privilege and proactively sponsor Black women, recommend them for conferences, or provide resources to elevate the voices of equity-deserving groups. Participants identified these types of actions as a significant way to build a more inclusive organizational culture with zero-tolerance for racism and mistreatment that can hamper career development.

Inclusive Leadership

While a culture of allyship is important, participants also focused on the critical importance of direct managers who genuinely care and are invested in their career development and growth. Examples shared by participants included a direct manager who provided a job shadowing opportunity to a Black woman to develop her executive presentation skills, and another who provided advice on navigating workplace politics to a newcomer. Specifically, participants shared that Black or racialized direct managers made a significant difference in the career advancement of Black women. Several participants noted a Black or racialized direct manager had instilled in them a level of comfort because they knew their direct manager shared their lived experiences and understood their needs. Other participants identified positive experiences with

Black women leaders and managers who taught them how to navigate the corporate world without compromising their values, or who prioritized career development conversations and provided opportunities for increased visibility and skills development. Another participant highlighted a racialized male leader who informally created a leadership development curriculum for racialized team members, which included how to deliver presentations to senior leaders.

Participants also noted that they witnessed Black talent managers and recruiters who were particularly effective at creating change and advocating from the inside. For example, one participant shared that their talent development team is led by Black people and their programming provides Black women with leadership development opportunities. Another participant noted how a Black member of the recruitment team encouraged Black and racialized women candidates to negotiate their salaries in the recruitment process to ensure pay equity.



Inclusive Human Resources

HR personnel and the policies they enforce can also bring about positive experiences for Black women. Participants shared that it is a promising first step when leadership proactively signs a diversity pledge or sets an ambitious goal to increase Black representation at a specific hierarchical level where numbers begin to drop (i.e., middle management). Participants also shared that when it comes to diversifying the hiring candidate pool with more Black representation, promising practices included focusing on candidates' transferable skills (i.e., skills-based hiring) and partnering with networks or organizations that can more broadly reach prospective Black candidates.

Discussions related to Black employee retention and talent management centred on proactive practices such as maximizing awareness of career development opportunities through well designed internal communication strategies. Other examples included offering education or skill development stipends, scholarships, and courses for equity-deserving groups, as well as learning and development advancement programs specifically tailored for Black or racialized employees in partnership with ERGs or EDI personnel. Participants also shared the following positive practices for HR that impact career development and encourage a culture of open feedback: implementing engagement surveys, holding one-on-one meetings that explicitly focus on microaggressions, and bringing in external consultants to analyze self-identification and engagement data with the aim of offering recommendations to address inequities. Additionally, participants spoke about how offering culturally supported policies and benefits may attract more Black candidates or help retain Black employees. For example, Black women's healthcare needs can be better addressed if they have easy access to Black doctors, therapists, mental health practitioners, and other care providers.

Inclusive Employee Resource Groups

Lastly, interview participants pointed to the power of well-run and resourced ERGs as a promising practice supporting Black women's career development. They noted that ERGs can be safe spaces for Black women to gather, build community, have candid conversations about their experiences and perspectives, as well as host strategic events (e.g., panels, lunch and learn) with colleagues about the challenges and barriers that Black and racialized people face in the workplace. In general, participants shared that ERGs are essential to facilitating advancement opportunities for Black women.



Interview Insights from Racialized Participants



Barriers to Career Development

Racism and Mistreatment in the Workplace

Interview participants discussed how experiencing racism and mistreatment in the workplace can make racialized women feel unsafe, uncomfortable, and fearful, hurting their self-confidence and preventing them from showing up authentically (e.g., feeling the need to assimilate to dominant workplace culture and values, filter opinions or comments to avoid being penalized). Racialized participants spoke about the racism that they have experienced and how it can manifest in stereotyping, misogynistic comments, harassment, unconscious biases, assumptions, gaslighting, microaggressions, and exclusion. For example, participants shared that they have struggled with self-blame and internalized mistreatment, questioning whether they did something wrong to warrant their mistreatment or if there is anything they could do to better handle microaggressions. One participant noted that different racialized women were expected to fall in line with different stereotypes (e.g., Black women are stereotyped as aggressive, Asian women are stereotyped as the “model minority”), and if they do not fit these stereotypes (even if they are harmful and negative), they risk being invisible or excluded. Another racialized participant discussed how a Black early-career woman experienced unjust and escalating discrimination based on their race in a male dominated work environment, being perceived as a physical threat for raising her voice and having the police called to deal with the situation when this individual had never had any issues in their academic institution with professors or peers.



Tokenism and Othering

Participants spoke about the tokenism and othering experienced by racialized women in workplaces. When organizations do not foster capacity for inclusion it leads to the tokenization of racialized women who are expected to represent their entire racial group and be EDI change-makers. For example, having a woman of colour in a leadership role but she lacks authority and direct reports, or having a racialized woman on a board but not including her in all conversations. Experiencing tokenization goes hand in hand, according to participants, with career stagnation because when you are seen as a “diversity hire”, you are not given the appropriate resources to grow or a seat at decision-making tables. Additionally, according to participants, tokenism can lead to amplified feelings of imposter phenomenon as racialized women begin to doubt themselves and their skills, feel discouraged, and question why they are being left behind or excluded. Participants noted that overcoming these complex feelings can be challenging which may lead racialized women to opt-out or feel like they do not deserve career development supports like mentorship. It can also make them focus on personal growth (i.e., eliminating internalized bias) instead of career progression like their peers.



There might be 20% [of racialized women] that have gone into those positions and really become a revolutionary change agent for themselves as well as the communities that they represent. I think that's a very small denomination of those tools and changemakers. The 80% of the population that is a victim of tokenism or token hires are given seats, but then are hushed. They are not given the resources to grow, they are not given the resources to utilize their voice and expand the horizon on which they were hired. You are setting them up for stagnated growth, because that's where you want them to finish. You don't want to see them at leadership tables, you don't want them at the Boards and the Advisory Councils. You wanna add that middle management level, where they're always going to be the folks that are going to receive the directions and never pass them on. I've seen multiple cases where people have had seats... But what is the value of that seat at the table? If they cut your limbs and voice off the table, you're really not at the table.

— **Racialized Interview Participant**

Cultural Values, Family Expectations, and Immigrant Experience

According to participants, cultural and familial expectations can impact racialized women's experience in the workplace in many ways, especially for those who are also immigrants. Many participants shared that racialized women are expected to excel academically which can be challenging to achieve for young, racialized women who also have domestic or caregiving responsibilities (i.e., they are expected to care for siblings or gain employment in order to contribute financially to the household income). Additionally, racialized women with caregiving responsibilities experience additional barriers to finding a job or career advancement due to cultural or familial gendered expectations related to childcare and domestic duties. Participants noted that because they needed flexibility to perform caregiver and household duties, they have felt the need to stay employed at jobs they disliked, leave promising jobs, or decline advancement opportunities due to the additional workload that would be required.

Participants also noted that racialized women tend to be taught to keep their heads down, not speak up, avoid disrupting norms, and blend in to be professionally successful, which may not align with expectations from employers. The dissonance between these cultural or familial values and corporate culture often means that racialized women face difficulties balancing their own values with the need to be highly visible, opportunistic, and self-promoting to advance at work. Additionally, racialized participants shared

that they often experience self-doubt when self-advocating because they feel invisible, underestimated, or like they do not fit in which impacts their status as high potential employees looking to advance.



I'm the first individual in my family to be born in Canada, and I do notice in myself where the cultural norms are not necessarily the attributes an organization determines as being successful. And so, there was learning and development for me moving into the corporate world, and the primary example I would have of that would be having an executive who helped develop my skills for articulation and communication and speaking up in meetings. Whereas culturally, I was often told as a girl, 'you should not speak up, you should respect your elders. You should do what people tell you to do.' And so it's breaking through that. I think that as a society, we value skills like articulation, challenging norms, providing feedback, being direct, and I don't think that those are attributes that are natural for people of different cultures.

— Racialized Interview Participant

As evidenced by participants, some young immigrant racialized women find themselves alone in a new country, unsure of how to navigate the transition from post-secondary school to the workforce because they lack guidance on how to present themselves as a viable candidate in job interviews. Others shared that immigrant racialized women face barriers to securing employment because their international credentials and experiences are not recognized or valued in Canada, or if they find jobs, they are excluded and overlooked for advancement opportunities. For some, these challenges are almost insurmountable, leading racialized women to opt out of career development opportunities or forcing them to start over by re-entering school or working entry level roles.

Many participants pointed out that their Canadian-born colleagues implicitly understood unspoken work rules and informalities (e.g., small talk) more than racialized women brought up outside of the country and/or in a family with no corporate experience. Some divulged that racialized immigrant women may require earlier exposure to corporate codes of conduct, including identity politics in the workplace and the self-promotional tactics required to succeed professionally (e.g., developing presentation skills, understanding how to access professional development funds, learning how to answer interview questions effectively) used by their Canadian-born counterparts, however this should not come at the cost of needing to assimilate to dominant workplace culture and values. Others noted that racialized people are not a monolith and as such, the needs of

newcomers, first- or second-generation racialized women will differ from one another. For example, a newcomer racialized woman might require more help adapting their resume and setting up a LinkedIn profile, but they often lack access to a network of supporters to provide effective guidance. Participants elaborated on the challenges that come with having no network or support system, especially a lack of family or friends in senior corporate roles, which is the case for many racialized women who are immigrants, or whose friends and family are all immigrants, too. One participant shared that these struggles made them feel like a second-rate Canadian.



If I think about my parents and their friends, they would be all immigrants coming into Canada, doing their 9 to 5 and providing for me. Me, being first generation, all of my network of individuals who I would lean on would be from there. And if I compare myself to somebody else whose father has a network of all these individuals who are maybe CEOs of organizations and things like that, their career path looks a lot different than mine; it's accelerating at a higher rate because of that access to that privilege.

— **Racialized Interview Participant**

Code Switching and Assimilation

Several racialized participants also shared that in many workplaces, to blend in or fit into a narrowly defined mold of what it means to be professionally successful, they had to assimilate their practices and behaviours to that of white supremacy culture. One example of this, often made worse when an organization lacks diverse representation, is code switching. Participants shared that when racialized women feel psychologically unsafe or work at an organization that ignores cultural or social issues impacting racialized women (i.e., traumatic world events or when expected to fit a “mold”), they may code switch by hiding visible markers of their cultural identity such as cultural accessories. However, one participant shared that, as a senior leader, they made a point to wear cultural attire to feel more authentic at work and spark conversations about inclusivity (while this sends a powerful message to others, especially racialized women, it should be noted that this decision was also facilitated by their privileged hierarchical position within the organization).

Self-Directed Career Development

Racialized participants identified having to rely on self-directed career development given the lack of support and access to robust networks. Participants shared that in order for a racialized woman to advance, they need to independently learn how to navigate these systems in real time, self-advocate to access opportunities, and go out of their way to build a social network or community, whilst facing systemic barriers that their white counterparts do not have to endure.



I kept cultural types of things specific to my racial and ethnic background hidden. I think people still do it. Code switching is like you have a more white version of yourself at work. I didn't change my name, but I still expected to be called by my name, not whatever variation you think my name is. But I was less willing to talk about my culture, unable to show up as my true self and second guessing the information you're going to share. Then also the cultural struggles like when the world or your community goes through something traumatic, and we're all watching it at home on TV, and when you come to work, it's not acknowledged.

— Racialized Interview Participant

Participants shared that in general, organizations do not support or prioritize the career growth and development of racialized women. As the onus for career conversations often falls to employees instead of managers, there is a lack of consistency when it comes to performance reviews and access to information about career development options and career pathways are not equitably shared. To receive support, racialized women have to self-advocate for their voices to be heard, or look for help outside of their workplace.

For example, racialized participants indicated that they often have to find their own mentors and sponsors because their potential and achievements go unnoticed. To overcome this, racialized women will volunteer to take on additional responsibilities, administrative work, or stretch assignments without pay raises, title changes, or promotions.



Last time I had a performance review, it was a year ago. It's really on me to make sure I'm very clear about it - career development is on me. There's a lot of self-advocating that I have to do to ensure I grow at the pace I'd like. It's kind of hard because you'd think the supports are ongoing; they are so focused on priorities that they forget their people.

— **Racialized Interview Participant**

According to participants, relying on self-directed career development can result in career delays and make it necessary for racialized women to consider leaving organizations where they have no future. For example, one participant shared that racialized employees are often seen as easily replaceable because their organizations do not understand the value they bring. Another participant mentioned that a racialized woman had to move sectors to find a job that would allow them more professional exposure and experience. Self-direction of career development can also lead to non-traditional career paths, which means that racialized women often have unique career trajectories that may not be linear or smooth (i.e., taking roles that are lateral moves, stepping back from advancement, taking on opportunities outside of organization). Participants mentioned that racialized women recognize that they face challenges to advancement, such as non-linear career paths, but because these are complex, compounding, and reinforcing, they are unsure how to go about breaking these barriers.



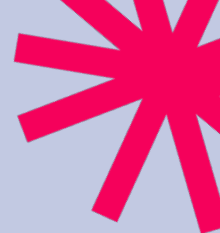
Workplace Gaps

Interview participants noted various gaps in organizational practices and policies that negatively impact racialized women's ability to access and benefit from career development programs and initiatives in the workplace. The following section introduces gaps identified by racialized participants based on their experiences or observations in the workplace. It should be noted that not every gap identified here was experienced or noted by every participant, nor will these gaps show up the same way in every organization. Instead, this section presents common gaps shared by participants that all organizations should be aware of, but they are not intended to serve as a fulsome list of all gaps experienced or witnessed by racialized women in the workplace.

Underrepresentation of Racialized Women

The underrepresentation of racialized women in workplaces, especially in senior or executive roles, was noted by participants across sectors and industries. One individual shared that their organization has 7% racialized women in their workforce who are mostly at lower levels. Racialized women face a glass ceiling that prevents them from advancing to positions of power, while their white colleagues fill top positions having benefited from company policies, practices, and traditions for decades that have prioritized their advancement. Driving this point home, participants shared that racialized women are expected to show gratitude simply for being employed and for advancing to positions beyond entry level roles.

Participants shared that since organizations often do not prioritize racialized women's advancement, the lack of representation in more senior levels makes it significantly more difficult for them to access mentors or sponsors who can advocate for them, help them navigate workplace politics, and model career pathways. Participants expressed that witnessing underrepresentation affects one's sense of safety and belonging at an organization given there is no one to look up to in senior roles and no one at decision making tables to advocate for them. In addition, when efforts are not made to address the underrepresentation due to biased hiring and promotion practices that predominantly benefit white candidates, it can demonstrate to equity-deserving groups that an organization is not willing to change.



Lack of Holistic and Tailored Career Development Opportunities

Participants identified various ways that racialized women are excluded from organizational career development programs, and they also pointed out that these initiatives often fail racialized women who want to participate because these programs are not designed to meet their needs (i.e., provide psychological safety to share challenges and how to overcome them, lack of intersectional focus thus catering to white employees). Exclusionary examples shared by participants included a standard career development program that only promoted traditional career pathways and perceptions of success, a one-size-fits-all program that lacked a tailored approach to leadership development for racialized women from different cultural backgrounds, and programs that did not focus on fostering psychological safety for racialized participants. These types of initiatives fail to recognize that the development needs of racialized women are different or varied.

When it comes to access, one gap noted by participants was that many organizations simply do not offer career development initiatives because they do not feel responsible for their employees' professional growth, or leaders do not believe these initiatives are important. Others pointed out that career development programs were not designed for mid-career professionals, or they were only geared towards senior leadership roles, which may disproportionately exclude racialized women who have been systemically blocked from advancement to these positions. Even when organizations offer professional development options, racialized individuals may not be given adequate information by their organizations on how to participate, or they may lack understanding about what programs are aligned with their career development goals.

When it comes to representation in career development programs, participants noted that there is a lack of racialized women mentors, sponsors, and coaches, which is an important consideration for them because they want to learn from someone



If I'm gonna be quite honest, I would say I've seen quite a few women in leadership programs, but not women in leadership programs that targets Black, Indigenous, racialized women. So often the benefactors are people who are closer to what we deem as cultural success, and so you do see more white women that end up succeeding through those programs because they're the ones that are closer to what the qualifications might already be.

— **Racialized Interview Participant**

who understands their lived experiences and the nuances of their intersectional identity. A number of participants noted that they were unable to find a racialized mentor or coach within their organization who shared similar lived experiences, which made it challenging to share openly about their career experiences and barriers to growth and development. Others observed that while sponsorship existed for white employees, racialized communities were not benefiting from it. Ineffective or an absence of evaluation/impact measurement (e.g., evaluation based on number of participants instead of their satisfaction or subsequent career growth and advancement) for these career development programs also indicated to some participants that these programs lacked accountability and may be ineffective. For example, some participants shared that mentorship programs were often ineffective because mentors were not genuinely interested and invested in their mentee's advancement and some mentees were "ghosted" by their mentors.



I think that if you asked any leader, CEO, senior leadership team, or even manager this question - what do you think the career needs are, or the development succession plan for your Black or your Indigenous employees - they wouldn't know. And the reason why is because we're asking the wrong people.

— **Racialized Interview Participant**

Participants shared that when managers lack training on how to manage, develop, and promote diverse talent or a belief in the benefits of EDI, it can hinder racialized women's career development and growth. Some participants spoke about the impact toxic managers had on their experiences in the workplace, often causing them to leave workplaces or focus on day-to-day survival instead of advancement. For instance, one participant spoke about how their manager, a white woman, would constantly question their ability and skills, while another participant with a white woman manager shared that her manager made derogatory statements but considered these to be compliments, not understanding that these were acts of stereotyping or microaggressions. For others, their direct manager was not equipped to address discrimination or microaggressions in the workplace, an issue often made worse when racialized women reported to male managers who exhibited sexist beliefs about women's work or behaviours (e.g., women should not be ambitious). In these types of cases, racialized women's concerns were often not addressed by HR or leadership. Other participants noted that if racialized women did not have a strong relationship with their direct managers, they may not feel safe

speaking up or self-advocating which can have lasting impacts on their professional growth.

It is clear that direct managers can either make or break racialized women's career development by providing access to resources, opportunities (e.g., impactful mentorship, sponsorship, and professional development), or by taking a genuine interest in their professional growth. However, participants shared several stories illuminating how direct managers failed to support racialized women's career development. For instance, multiple participants shared that direct managers did not nominate them or denied them the opportunity to join career development programs, despite their explicit requests to participate. Others expressed that some managers did not recognize the ambitions and potential of racialized women, and therefore, did not provide them with meaningful and actionable feedback geared towards career development and growth. The lack of recognition of racialized women's work was highlighted



A lot of the time, we promote people and they don't have any experience in anything. We can't just throw them into the role... but we don't focus a lot on that soft skill piece - empathy or emotional intelligence. I think that we can start building more emotionally intelligent leaders who will start to think about some of this stuff, too. Providing more of that EDI training and background. There's a lot of people who just don't know what they don't know and until people start questioning or talking to them about it, they're not going to learn, right?

— **Racialized Interview Participant**

by some participants who expressed that they were told to heighten their exposure at work when they were already serving on voluntary committees, implementing high-visibility initiatives, or were nominated for awards. Others mentioned that they received negative performance reviews that only focused on milestones and tasks with no clear or actionable feedback to help them improve. This lack of feedback perplexed participants who were denied promotions or pay increases without discussions, and it led them to question what their career path could look like if advancing was not possible.



I've had some leaders tell me 'I see you being a high potential person in this corporate environment,' and no other piece of feedback as to what that actually means - that being really detrimental because what does that even mean and what can I do with this? Can I leverage your voice in other calls or does this mean you'll advocate for me?... And I've also had some managers be like 'you're not doing well, and you don't show a lot of potential in this company, and I don't know if this is the right fit for you' to which I'm also like, does that mean I should quit or are you going to help develop me?

— **Racialized Interview Participant**

When it came to promotions or succession planning, racialized participants spoke about favouritism, subjectivity, a lack of transparency, and inequity when it came to being identified as high potential by their managers. Some participants shared that managers do not consider soft skills (e.g., empathy, how you treat others) when identifying individuals for advancement opportunities, focusing instead on technical or communication skills (i.e. extroversion). They also pointed out that trying to maintain work-life integration, something that is important to many racialized women, was often seen as a negative characteristic for future leaders. For example, one participant pointed out that racialized women may receive negative performance reviews because they are quiet, do not feel comfortable asking questions, or communicate the same as their white colleagues, despite delivering on or surpassing all the requirements (i.e., key performance indicators) for their job. Other participants noted that racialized women are only able to ascend to C-suite roles when they have demonstrable experience in that specific role within the same industry (i.e., their career path must be linear within one industry) while men are named to executive roles based on their potential and their experience in different industries. Being sidelined for promotions and excluded from succession planning by managers, according to participants, can result in increased mental health issues and high attrition rates.

Affinity Bias and Unequal Benefits

According to participants, one of the reasons for inequitable support from managers for racialized women is the prevalence of affinity bias, which leads to situations where white men and women benefit from upholding systems of white supremacy. Participants shared that white people appear to be more comfortable navigating corporate spaces because workplaces are inherently white dominated; that is, white people have extensive professional networks, they see themselves represented, and their achievements are celebrated, especially when they self-advocate or share their perspectives, which can propel their careers forward. As workplaces are built for the needs and values of white people, racialized people are expected to assimilate to affinity biases to fit the profile of a successful or high potential employee. According to some participants, white men, in particular, often lack cultural competency and may demonstrate discomfort around racialized women, preferring to work with other white men who share their interests and backgrounds. White women, it was noted, benefit from gender-first EDI initiatives and therefore, are often unaware or overlook the additional career barriers faced by racialized women, which can be particularly troubling when white women also hold HR positions.



On the other hand, racialized women are often judged for being different (which can make focusing on work difficult) and have to work extra hard or justify their credentials to be seen in a positive light. These unconscious biases limit the professional potential of racialized people, while white people benefit from the biases. For example, participants demonstrated that white applicants have an advantage when applying to roles with white hiring managers, and white employees have more access to career development information and opportunities which can result in rapid career advancement. Affinity bias also impacted racialized women's access to sponsors, with participants sharing that white women were more likely to be sponsored by leaders who looked like them, while racialized women often spend significant time and energy finding their own sponsors which can have significant consequences for their career development and growth. At the same time, participants noted that racialized women can be reprimanded or penalized for speaking up or self-advocating for their career development, which can lead to negative performance reviews with senior leaders who lack discernment.

Inadequate Understanding of Needs and Lived Experiences

Participants noted that one of the factors that reinforces affinity and unconscious biases in workplaces is that leaders are not knowledgeable about EDI and the experiences of racialized women, which trickles down to other employees who also do not understand the depth of issues faced by equity-deserving groups. Participants shared that many

organizations lack cultural understanding and sensitivity, and even organizations that believe they are progressive have policies and practices that lack an intersectional lens (often just focusing on gender). According to participants, racialized women have unique needs due to the ways their gender, race, ethnicity and other identity factors intersect, but they are still seeking growth and development opportunities like their non-racialized colleagues.

It was noted that many senior leaders, executives, and direct managers cannot speak to the career development needs of racialized women, and nor do they acknowledge the presence and impact of systemic barriers. For example, participants spoke about how relationship building is difficult for racialized women who feel like outsiders and cannot relate to their colleagues' cultural references, while others noted that racialized women who are introverted and seek harmonious work-life integration may not be recognized as potential leaders. North American standards of competencies for leaders (e.g., extroversion, assertiveness, directness) are seen as negative qualities in racialized women (e.g., assertiveness is categorized as aggression), and leaders with these qualities tend to reinforce white supremacy, individualism, and competition (especially amongst women) in the workplace which goes against the values of racialized women.





I also don't have to feel like I need to compete with other women. I think that's something that we talk about, but maybe not always associate with white supremacy culture. Because of this divide and conquer strategy, I think between women oftentimes we come to this mindset of scarcity, saying, 'there's only two spaces open on the leadership table for women, and I'm gonna compete with her.' And hence, I'm gonna maybe vilify her for not assimilating as much as I have. I've had to assimilate, how come she hasn't assimilated, and she gets to keep her name? And that sort of jealousy, that competition starts to foster amongst women which just further alienates anyone, but especially women of color trying to navigate.

— **Racialized Interview Participant**

Perceived Performativity and Inaction

According to participants, leaders often do not understand nor acknowledge the needs, values, and lived experiences of racialized women. When leaders fail to understand and acknowledge systemic barriers experienced by racialized women, it can reinforce organizational inertia and performative approaches to EDI since there is no pressure from the top to make meaningful changes. Participants shared that organizations tend to cater to the comfort of their executives which means they avoid pressuring them to discuss challenging topics like white privilege or racism. As such, EDI conversations are reduced to data points (i.e., tokenistic representation targets and metrics without corresponding action plans that embed EDI into an organization's culture and strategy), or they sign on to an external initiative or celebrate significant cultural days that looks good (i.e., Truth and Reconciliation Day), but do not translate to meaningful change.

These types of performative actions indicated to racialized participants that EDI is often pursued solely for positive public relations, not because organizations actually care about addressing systemic barriers experienced by equity-deserving groups. In fact, when organizations do acknowledge inequity, participants pointed out that they tend to focus on fixing individuals (i.e., racialized women) instead of the system or organization, which is shifting the blame away from those in power to those experiencing discrimination. In these cases, change is actively stymied because white leaders do not want to lose their autonomy and privilege, or they misconstrue equity initiatives with reverse discrimination. In general, participants spoke about a lack of leadership accountability for building an inclusive culture and how racialized women often advocate for stronger EDI initiatives or take on additional work to ensure these initiatives are not performative, such as combating resistance to unconscious bias trainings, ensuring career development program design is inclusive, or pointing out policy flaws that may lead to high attrition rates for racialized women. Participants noted that performativity is a systemic barrier to career development and growth that must be addressed so that meaningful changes occur, and work environments welcome and provide meaningful opportunities for racialized women.



Providing better supports that fit people's needs is one step, but then at the end of the day, there are systemic things where you can provide better supports and services, and if the root cause is still there, then the root cause is still there.

— **Racialized Interview Participant**

Issues with Human Resources

Participants highlighted a number of issues with HR policies and practices, including hiring and promotions, that promote white supremacy culture and actively work against the career advancement of racialized women. When it comes to recruitment and hiring practices, participants shared that they experienced or witnessed deep biases, both conscious and unconscious, and tokenizing practices. For example, one participant who identified as an Asian woman was told that she would not be hired because the organization already had an Asian employee and needed a Black employee. This type of brash tokenism happens, according to participants, because organizations treat EDI as a “short-term game” as opposed to a long-term priority that can enhance innovation and retention. Other participants noted that they did not receive feedback after a recruitment process which left them bewildered as to what they did wrong and how they could improve.

A lack of diversity in candidate pools was also brought up as an issue, as organizations do not take additional steps to publicly advertise open roles with the goal of increasing awareness and applicants from diverse communities. Even if organizations partner with outside firms that specialize in inclusive recruitment or have connections with equity-deserving groups, they are often unprepared to welcome candidates because they have not invested in creating cultures that prioritize psychological safety and inclusion. Issues with exclusionary language, qualifications, and

competencies used in job postings were also identified as harmful recruitment practices. For example, one participant noted that at one point, experience should outweigh demands for a degree (e.g., possessing 15+ years of experience in a role/function should be more important than having an MBA). Others shared negative experiences when interviewing for roles, with one participant describing a situation where interviewers were surprised that they were racialized since they did not speak with an accent, and another shared an ageist and misogynistic experience where a racialized woman was questioned about the age of their children to determine if they were an “empty nester”. Participants also noted that many hiring managers lacked accountability to justify their decisions and displayed affinity bias because they were unaware of equal opportunity practices.

Participants also noted that racialized women experienced discrimination and biases from HR after they were hired. In some instances, HR departments were seen by racialized women as mere executors of policy compliance, not agents for transformation, with some participants divulging that organizations often do not want HR to rock the boat because they want to maintain the status quo. Participants mentioned that organizations often lack funding and support from HR specifically for racialized women’s career development once they have been hired.



They also noted that some HR professionals skip career development conversations with racialized women during onboarding, or they only promote these opportunities to specific employees who tend to be educated at reputable Canadian schools.

According to participants, some organizations are aware of hiring and succession planning biases and try to eliminate the obvious risks but fall short when it comes to targeting unconscious bias and problematic leaders (i.e., HR professionals or leaders who do not speak up when they see inequity). One racialized participant shared that they asked a senior leader to assess the makeup of their team since white men were overrepresented in the organization, but the leader did not see an issue and other senior leaders backed them up. Another participant mentioned that HR collects, stores, and shares data but does not actually take action to support employees. Data collection in general, specifically self-identification data and metrics related to promotions, competency skills building, and learning and development, was brought up by participants as it tends to lack disaggregation, integration into HR systems, and does not account for employee satisfaction. Participants working in HR functions shared that they routinely received questions from racialized women about what HR was doing with this sensitive data and who had access to it. The lack of transparency from HR caused one participant to remark that finding an organization with a competent and supportive HR department was like “winning a business lottery”.



I have found the impact to be positive when organizations start from the top down, which is very difficult. For example, one of my previous organizations that I was at, they really wanted to have a Black diversity officer, which is fascinating to state out loud because many people were very unhappy, but they were able to explain why, for the unique needs of this organization. Inherently after hiring that person, it increased the representation of the hiring pool that we had coming through for the folks that were open to filling up the demographic survey upon applying. We received so many more applications from other Black-identified candidates.

— **Racialized Interview Participant**

Ineffective Employee Resource Groups

One of the specific career development initiatives that participants identified as a gap was ERGs. It was noted that when ERGs are underfunded and their members lack support, they do not lead to meaningful career growth and development. Some participants pointed out that ERGs may create space for members of equity-deserving groups to discuss similar lived experiences. However they can also create a sense of separation and exclusion because conversations that occur within ERGs do not translate to meaningful changes that connect with career development or create psychologically safe environments for racialized women. Simply creating space for ERG members is inadequate, and participants shared that ERGs are suffering from a lack of support and recognition. For example, ERG members not being compensated for the additional work they perform, operating without adequate financial support or leadership buy-in, and getting asked to perform complex work such as delivering anti-racism training. Some participants shared experiences where leaders prevented ERGs from growing too powerful because they feared “employee revolution”. Others pointed out that ERGs lack intersectionality and collaboration with other ERG groups, which can lead to siloing of voices.



[ERG group for Asian employees] has been receiving requests from others in the organization asking to deliver anti-Asian racism training, but the group refused to do it... It's not our job, we're not getting paid to do this, we don't have the expertise to do it.

— **Racialized Interview Participant**

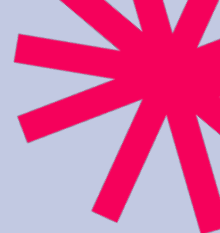
Promising Practices in the Workplace

This section presents a selection of promising practices that can support racialized women's career development, as experienced or witnessed by participants. It should be noted that not every promising practice identified here was experienced by every participant. These promising practices should be seen as examples of targeted approaches that may help an organization address a specific gap, if implemented properly; however, they are not intended to serve as fulsome solutions guaranteed to close all gaps.

Tailored and Holistic Career Development Opportunities

Participants shared that racialized women benefit from access to tailored career development programs that respond to their needs and are aligned with succession planning. Several participants shared that, although not a common practice, they have seen engagement of employees from equity-deserving backgrounds to better understand what is working, what is not working, and what they wish to see in terms of career development enablers to go beyond blanket one-size-fits-all approaches that, for example, cater to all women. One participant mentioned that when their organization linked participation in career development programs to succession planning it helped build a pool of diverse, highly qualified candidates for promotions. Some participants mentioned that mentorship and sponsorship for racialized women at all stages of their employment lifecycle (i.e., students, new hires, middle-managers, leaders) was beneficial. They also noted that leadership development training was a useful tool to retain racialized women who were ambitious but encountered a glass ceiling. In particular, participants shared that effective mentorship occurred when racialized women were paired with racialized senior leaders/executives or white leaders who receive prior training on fostering a mentoring relationship through an anti-oppressive and anti-racist lens.

Where mentors and sponsors took steps to build trusting relationships grounded in psychological safety, racialized women were able to speak more openly about their career



development experiences and goals. Participants noted that when mentorship and sponsorship are done well, they can point to specific actions their mentor or sponsor is doing to advance their career or help them grow professionally, such as advocating for racialized women, bringing up racialized women's names for high visibility projects, supporting racialized women during role transitions, and helping racialized women pursue certifications and training. Some participants stated that mentorship and sponsorship opportunities for racialized women are enhanced when racialized leaders from various departments participate, helping to broaden connections between employees with similar lived experiences who otherwise may not have the chance to interact day-to-day in the workplace.



I have seen a women's leadership track that was excellent... I worked at a corporate university and it was excellent. There was a waiting list for this leadership, but it was integrated into your succession plan so you couldn't be considered for succession if you didn't go to it. How smart... When they looked at women moving on, they would look into this pool.

— **Racialized Interview Participant**

Allyship from Peers

Active allyship that is grounded in acknowledging and eliminating systemic barriers and amplifying the voices of equity-deserving groups was noted by participants as a promising practice that helps work against performative EDI efforts. Participants shared examples of active allyship that they had witnessed, such as a senior leader who made a microaggressive comment but acknowledged their mistake and apologized, or a racialized woman who brought up allyship in workshops to provide space for people to ask questions and share stories to better understand what allyship entails. Several participants also stressed that when professional development and skill training opportunities are extended to leaders, they result in better support for racialized women. For example, participants mentioned that equity coaching was offered to leaders where they could discuss people management issues in a safe and confidential space so that they can be better allies to racialized women, or inclusion training with onboarding responsibilities so that these fundamental practices are executed by direct managers with a tailored approach that fosters psychological safety. One participant noted that there is a growing trend for individuals to partake in self-awareness journeys where they acknowledge that they have not been effectively supporting equity-deserving groups, or to discuss equity instead of equality, which can help build capacity in organizations for a more nuanced understanding of EDI principles.

Inclusive Leadership

Participants discussed the ways that effective managers can positively impact the career development and growth of racialized women, with some placing emphasis on positive experiences they had or witnessed, especially with racialized direct managers. In general, supportive managers or supervisors demonstrate trust, create psychologically safe spaces for racialized women to share the challenges they face in the workplace, provide accommodations, and advocate for their needs. Participants also shared examples of people leaders who helped break systemic barriers for racialized women, such as a manager who ensured a racialized woman received a substantial pay raise when they received a promotion and a leader who partnered with HR to ensure racialized individuals had exposure and were being considered during talent

conversations. Another positive feature shared by participants was transparency by direct managers, especially around what it means to be considered a high-potential employee and pathways for career advancement, which can occur during regular performance review conversations or set discussions on professional development.

While some participants witnessed or experienced positive non-racialized direct managers, many expressed the value of having the opportunity to report to a racialized manager. Participants shared stories where racialized direct managers inherently acknowledged racialized women's skills, provided feedback to help their direct reports grow, and proactively brought up career development which removed the burden of having to self-advocate as racialized women.

Additionally, participants highlighted examples of racialized women in positions of power using their hierarchical privilege to advocate for other racialized people, challenge senior leadership to improve inclusionary policies, and call out problematic microaggressions. For example, a racialized woman working in HR sought out positive relationships with other racialized employees and practiced inclusive recruitment by ensuring candidate pools were diverse and job posting language was inclusive. Participants noted, however, that it can be easier for Canadian-born racialized women in leadership roles to speak out

against discrimination compared to immigrant racialized women in senior positions due to their enhanced exposure to the corporate sphere and network connections. Participants also shared that racialized leaders were more likely to promote tailored career development supports for equity-deserving groups without tokenizing them or intensifying their exclusion. As one participant summarized, there is a marked difference between managers and leaders who only do the bare minimum, and those who recognize their direct reports' potential and provide growth opportunities without putting their own interests first.



I think the biggest thing that I have done throughout my career is, when I'm in spaces that are surrounded by white women, calling a lot of it out, or when I'm in conversations with leaders, calling it out because it is a lot easier to not say anything. I remember during Covid when the murder of George Floyd happened, there were a lot of conversations, but there was very little action. And so, I remember having conversations saying, 'we can't keep saying that we're gonna do things, and then not actually following through because that's worse'. As an organization, you have to stand behind what you say and if you're just saying stuff and it's hollow, that's 10 times worse... if we are going to be responsible, let's do it correctly. I'm not saying it necessarily made a difference, but I was using my role, and again, using my kind of privilege to be able to do that.

— **Racialized Interview Participant**

Proactive Approaches to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Participants spoke about evolving corporate environments that increasingly (albeit imperfectly) recognize the impact of, and seek to address, EDI issues both within and outside of the workplace, such as anti-racism and race-based hate crimes. Others mentioned specific industries that are making strides to improve diversity, eliminate biases, and strengthen policies (e.g., parental leaves, successions planning), which can encourage organizations to follow suit.

Participants identified promising practices that have enhanced the retention and promotion of racialized women. For example, establishing clarity on role expectations, especially for new hires or during role changes, helps build manager accountability for retaining top talent and ensures that employees are clear on how to deliver value. It was also mentioned that a buddy system was an effective way for new racialized women employees to build connections during onboarding, which can help them transition, navigate the workplace, and feel like they belong.

Participants mentioned that attractive policies like remote or flexible work have helped retain racialized women who may need more opportunities to step away from work for personal reasons, or because they need a break from workplace politics and potentially traumatic situations (i.e., experiencing racism). They also noted that, when there is representation, circulating new job postings to internal employees can allow them to work towards a promotion or other career development goals.

Several participants indicated that tracking data throughout the employee life cycle, such as recruitment and promotion information, can help to identify gaps. For example, identifying direct managers who may be suppressing the advancement of their direct reports. Additionally, participants spoke about pulse-check surveys to assess employee engagement, satisfaction, and perspectives on their managers and workplace help to hold leadership accountable for building inclusive workplaces. Lastly, participants noted a promising practice where leadership in their organization has approached succession planning by actively trying to remove biases so that favouritism and subjectivity do not dictate who is considered as a candidate for a promotion.



In our talent practices we have embedded inclusion reflection for leaders... into our leader guides: stop and think about the person that you're identifying as your successor - what is their potential for in-group bias? Why is this person a good candidate? What attributes do you see? Are there other attributes that might be better?

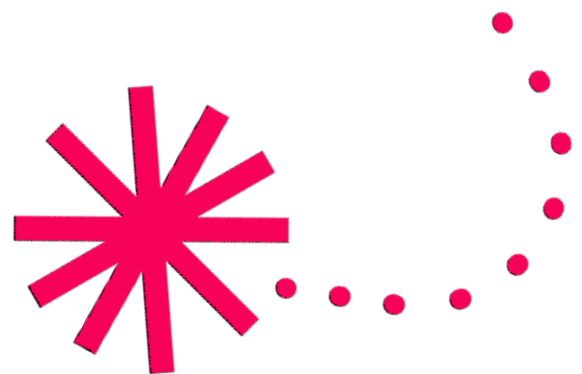
— **Racialized Interview Participant**

Inclusive Employee Resource Groups

While some ERGs may be limited to social gatherings and events, participants shared that when they are formed and run in a meaningful way to focus on career development, they are powerful mechanisms for growth and advancement. Some participants believed that ERGs have provided opportunities for racialized women to meet one another, especially from different departments in large organizations, and better connect with leaders. According to participants, ERGs also build inclusive community spaces for racialized women to empower one another, candidly discuss their lived experiences, seek career advice from others who understand their perspectives and challenges, and find advocates within their organization. For example, some participants shared that their ERGs put on targeted career development events to inspire new approaches to professional growth. One participant explained that their ERG was involved in recruitment efforts because their organization allowed them to voice opinions on recruitment strategies and attend campus recruitment events. While these types of initiatives are promising, participants shared that for ERGs to be effective, it is imperative that they have meaningful support from executive sponsors to leverage their influence to hold leadership accountable (i.e., attend and stay for the full duration of events, actively participate), and ask for resources.

Peer Networks and Community

Participants spoke about the value of having a strong network of supporters or being part of a community who share similar lived experiences. For example, several participants noted that in cases where a particular group of employees are underrepresented and there is not a critical mass for an ERG, their organizations provide stipends for employees to participate in external organizations dedicated to an equity-deserving group or to attend events. They also pointed out that building a network can take the shape of informal career development initiatives (e.g., participating in peer mentorship or informal sponsorship) because the voluntary nature of these relationships means they are meaningful, organic, and not performative. It can be more akin to growing a community of professional friends with similar backgrounds which creates a safe space to discuss experiences, debrief on career challenges, and share advice. Other racialized participants shared that they established connections with racialized women so they could uplift one another, validate each other's experiences and feelings, and provide encouragement over the course of their careers.





The idea of peer mentorship is very important whether you're in the process of climbing that ladder or you've reached a place where you're able to pull someone up and now you're finding yourself quite alone... I can relate to the darkest moments of my career when I was applying for all kinds of jobs, trying to do my best and work and just not getting anywhere, and having that group of women say 'do you realize that you're doing these things?', 'no girl, it's not you, keep trying.' ... And then to hear that they are also experiencing some of those struggles. Now for me to be in that helper situation, that really saved me, that saved my engagement with my work and my whole optimism.

— **Racialized Interview Participant**

Interview Insights from White Participants



Barriers to Career Development

When asked about the barriers Indigenous, Black, and racialized women face, white interview participants identified three main themes. It is important to highlight that several HR professionals indicated that they could not speak to the barriers given that they do not have the same lived experience or knowledge.

Lack of Visibility and Self-Promotion

The first barrier identified by white interview participants related to the tendency of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women to not engage in self-promotion, and instead, quietly do their work. Participants recognized that self-promoting or “bragging” about accomplishments may go against the attitudes, morals, and values of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. Participants noted that Indigenous, Black, and racialized women had to deal with a lack of role models to look up to at their organization. They also noted that limited opportunities for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women to develop their soft skills had negative consequences for their professional growth. As a result, the lack of self-promotion on the part of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women impedes their growth and advancement opportunities.



I think that depending on the group of racialized women, in my experience, there's a lot of racialized women who very quietly do their work and they're not very good at promoting themselves... that's not necessarily going to move you forward as quickly as you would like. I think that there's often a lack of soft skill development that I think those particular groups need to have assistance in. Here's how you promote your work without feeling like you're being braggadocious. You don't have to feel like you're pushing forward or anything like that. I think that's a skill that a lot of women in this particular group don't have access because the average white male just doesn't need those skills.

— White Interview Participant



Feelings of Imposter Phenomenon

The second barrier identified by several white interview participants was Indigenous, Black, and racialized women experiencing imposter phenomenon. While acknowledging that Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's career advancement is related to their self-worth and how others' view their work, white participants described this barrier as partially self-imposed because of these women's lack of confidence and subsequent decisions to opt out of opportunities despite being highly credentialed and educated.

White participants mentioned that some Indigenous, Black, and racialized women do not take advantage of professional development opportunities for a variety of reasons including lack of awareness around who the opportunities targeted or if they had the qualifications to take part. It was noted that these behaviours stand in contrast to the fact that men will apply for jobs or promotions regardless of whether or not they meet the qualifications. The notion of "if I can't see it, I can't be it" was also brought up by white participants as a significant factor impacting racialized women opting out of career development opportunities as they do not share the same lens.

Racism and Mistreatment in the Workplace

The final barrier identified by white interview participants can be summarized as mistreatment in the workplace in the form of racism, bias, stereotypes, and microaggressions. Participants believed that the consequences of experiencing racism and mistreatment in the workplace was that Indigenous, Black, and racialized women have to work twice as hard without benefitting from the same career advancement opportunities of their peers. When it comes to stereotypes, one participant noted that Indigenous, Black, and racialized women are expected to be outgoing and energetic as soon as they join an organization and if they are perceived as "standoffish" or introverted they are dismissed as not professional. Another participant spoke about how it can be challenging to articulate the benefits and value of EDI to leaders who do not care to learn, especially related to hiring decisions.



Workplace Gaps

The following section introduces gaps identified by white participants based on their observations in the workplace. It should be noted that not every gap identified here was witnessed by every participant, nor will these gaps show up the same way in every organization. Instead, this section presents common gaps shared by participants that all organizations should be aware of, but it is not intended to serve as a fulsome list of all gaps experienced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in the workplace.

Lack of Tailored and Holistic Career Development Opportunities

Interview participants noted that career development programs and initiatives are not meeting the needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women because they are not tailored or made accessible. Many were disappointed that organizations often lack internal formalized programs for women of colour, including mentorship and sponsorship, or external access to tailored career development options. One participant shared that women were expected to find sponsors organically which served as a barrier to their participation in career development initiatives, while another shared that affinity bias or complacency may prevent white leaders from serving as a sponsor for an Indigenous, Black, or racialized woman.

Even when an organization offered formalized or well-functioning career development or professional development programs, participants pointed out that these opportunities were often circulated to a small network which excluded certain employees, who may be interested and qualified. Additionally, participants noted that these types of programs were often

offered for senior levels where there were few or no Indigenous, Black or racialized women, perpetuating issues of access to and awareness of career development initiatives.

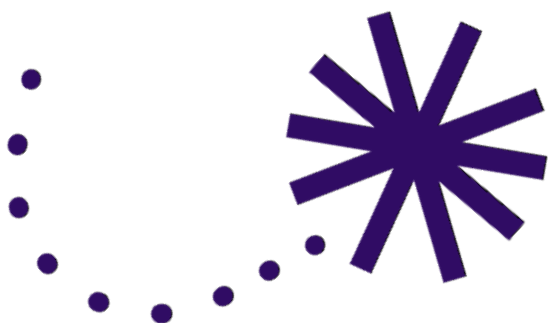
Direct Managers Can Hinder Career Development and Growth

Building on the previous theme, white participants expressed that career gaps are made worse by leaders and managers who perpetuate discrimination and enforce policies and practices that often only benefit white employees. Many participants shared that some direct managers lack leadership soft skills like empathy which can have a negative, long-term impact on Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. Participants also pointed out that some employees progress to the management level because they excelled at the technical aspects of their jobs, but they do not have experience, training, or the soft skills to manage people, which ultimately makes them a poor candidate for promotion to a people manager role.

Another example provided by one participant suggested that women of colour are often penalized for voicing their career needs, especially when workplaces lack formalized career development programs and structures. Notably, Indigenous, Black, and racialized women often advocate for their own career development because career pathways are not always clear and organizations are not transparent about advancement opportunities and decisions leading to promotions or work assignments. Additionally, since managers have extensive power over their direct reports' career progression, they can block access to opportunities, resources, and nominations if they are biased.

Affinity Bias and Unequal Benefits

Affinity bias was also noted by white interview participants as a barrier that can impede Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's career development. Participants noted that affinity bias against equity-deserving groups can flourish in organizations because hiring decisions are not transparent and the process for identifying high-potential employees often takes place behind closed doors. Participants shared that referral-based hiring practices often encourage affinity biases because people tend to recommend those with similar backgrounds and experiences, leading to a homogenous workforce.



It's familiarity bias. It's easier to connect with people who have a similar background to you, who have similar interests. I think it's, in some cases, laziness of not going out of your way to go, 'wait a minute, let me look at who I'm sponsoring in the organization.' And really think, 'am I being equitable with my privilege?'

— **White Interview Participant**

Inadequate Understanding of Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Women's Unique Needs and Lived Experiences

White participants highlighted that many organizations do not understand the unique needs and lived experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, and therefore, they lack adequate programs, policies, and practices that support their professional development. Participants shared that leaders and managers often do not understand the experiences or perspectives of Indigenous, Black, or racialized women and as such, may be more inclined to exclude members of these groups because they do not know how to connect or behave (e.g., nervous to use the wrong language when speaking about equity, hesitant to make broad statements about historical oppression in case they are incorrect).

For example, one participant shared that a Canadian-born manager may not understand that an immigrant woman new to Canada may need more time to settle professionally when they are adjusting to a new life. Other participants noted that, in particular, white men in managerial roles may not understand the challenges that come with being the only or the first person of your race and gender in a role or at a workplace (e.g., experiencing challenges of code switching or making connections with peers), and even if they value or support diversity, they still may not fully comprehend the pressure that an Indigenous, Black, or racialized woman feels at work. White participants made clear that when people managers do not have experience working with equity-deserving groups or understand their needs, they may fail to dismantle race- and gender-based career development barriers.

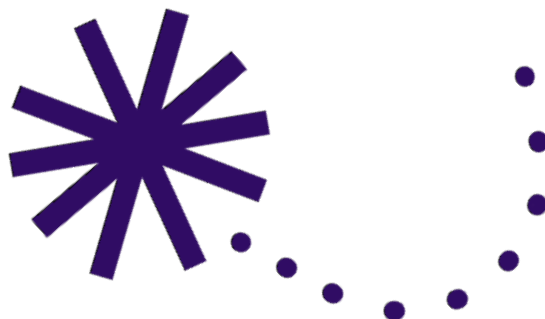


I've been in organizations where a lot of people managers are folks that have been in any sort of startup. They were there from the beginning and they kind of fell into people leadership, and they're not necessarily equipped from the people leadership side. They don't have the understanding of any sort of training. They kind of fell into it and they're doing it, but they're not experts. And it would be silly to almost assume that just because someone became a manager, they're good at it and they should be doing it.

— **White Interview Participant**

Perceived Performativity and Inaction

According to white participants, when organizations fail to understand the needs and values of equity-deserving groups and employ those with insufficient people skills in managerial roles, it can perpetuate performativity and disingenuous support for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. This gap occurs, according to participants, when EDI work is performative and impacted by strong organizational politics. One example given by a participant was when EDI is not built into an organization's foundation (i.e., mission, vision, purpose) because it is overseen by a generalist who works in HR or accounting, and it is considered "side of desk" or volunteer work. Another participant had witnessed their organization's retreat from active EDI work due to a leadership change, while others noted that senior leaders are the hardest to engage in EDI initiatives because they may be defensive when certain topics are brought up, including anti-Black racism and white supremacy. In general, disingenuous attitudes towards EDI creates barriers to career development because of the lack of investment of the time or funds required to support and set up Indigenous, Black, and racialized women for success.

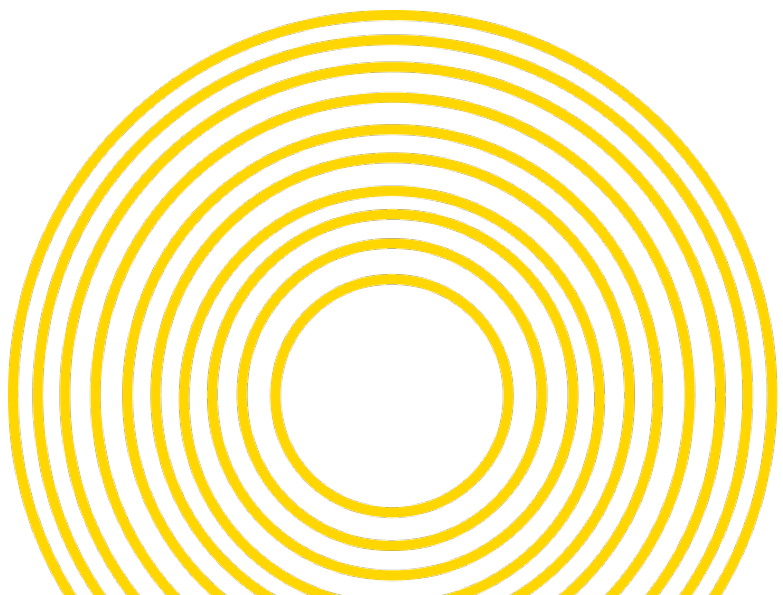


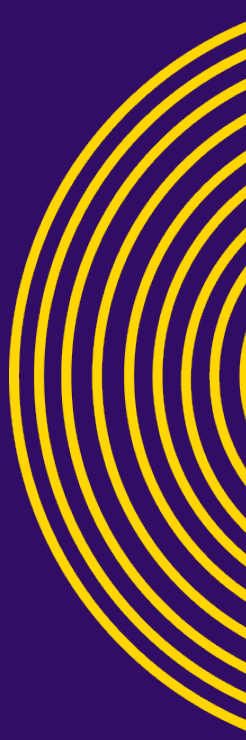
Issues with Human Resources

For a number of white interview participants, HR personnel and the policies and practices utilized by these departments are not working to support the career development needs of equity-deserving groups. These participants noted that HR departments have not fully integrated EDI into their processes, such as hiring or feedback loops, because they are more focused on enforcing compliance. They also shared several examples where HR leaders failed to behave in inclusive ways, such as those who do not understand the barriers experienced by women of colour, or those who remain silent in the face of bias and racism from leadership because they do not want to upset the power dynamics at work.

Ineffective Employee Resource Groups

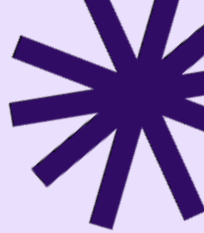
ERGs were also identified by white participants as ineffective in advancing career development when they were under-recognized, under-valued, and under-funded with those from equity-deserving groups leading them also not compensated. Participants shared that since ERG work is seen as a voluntary, additional responsibility that is often invisible work, it is not usually considered as evidence of leadership potential or experience when ERG members seek promotions despite the fact that members often demonstrate leadership qualities by advocating for their peers and presenting serious issues to their direct managers and leaders. One participant who was an ERG executive sponsor indicated that they were not provided with guidance on their role or responsibilities, so they did their best to create psychological safety and advocate for the group with senior leadership. An example shared by this participant was bringing up to leadership a perceived discrepancy with the number of Black employees let go during a period of layoffs. This participant used their privileged position to communicate to leadership the concerns of the Black employee ERG and open a dialogue about how these decisions can disproportionately impact or affect employees from the same equity-deserving group.





All of the onus is put on the [ERG] members to create the content, put on the events, etc., and they're not compensated in any way for that. And so, we're now asking racialized individuals and people of other genders, sexualities, etc., to educate other less or non-marginalized people, which doesn't sit right. It's great that we have these groups where people can go and have those conversations, and meet with other individuals with similar backgrounds and situations, but all the work seems to be put on them - if you want this here, go and do it, here's a budget, but that's really it. There's no reduction in their work hours, there's inconsistent recognition... It's a lot of work. It's above and beyond what their job is, great PR for the company, and the work doesn't seem to be consistently valued across organizations by managers. Some will think: 'Oh wow, that's great. We're gonna factor that in, they did all these things'. Other leaders are not, they're gonna say 'Well, that wasn't their job, so it doesn't count'.

— **White Interview Participant**



Promising Practices in the Workplace

This section presents a selection of promising practices shared by white interview participants that can support Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's career development. It should be noted that not every promising practice identified here was noted by every white interview participant. These promising practices should be seen as examples of targeted approaches that may help an organization address a specific gap, if implemented properly; however, they are not intended to serve as fulsome solutions guaranteed to close all gaps.

Culture of Learning and Development

White interview participants highlighted several promising practices designed to support Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's career development in the workplace. In general, fostering a culture of learning and development with a specific focus on EDI training (e.g., power and privilege, intersectionality, allyship, mental health, gender and sexual diversity, accessibility, race and ethnicity) was noted by participants to be an effective way to ensure everyone at an organization buys in to building an inclusive workplace. One example shared was an organization that created a voluntary coaching circle hosted by external facilitators for people leaders to talk through complex EDI issues and ask questions in a safe space.



We had coaching circles and they were voluntary, and it was a coaching circle for people who wanted to discuss how to manage complex issues related to DE&I. It was a space where we had [an external] facilitator walk us through a topic each week and we would all discuss it, and we would also bring issues that we as people leaders were experiencing and we would talk them through together. I think that was really powerful, that was really helpful and it was a safe space for people to ask questions that maybe they'd be afraid to ask without judgment... Having that safe space where we all recognize it's anonymous, we're not talking about anything outside this group, and you can ask whatever you need to ask. You can say whatever you need to say. I found that incredibly helpful as a people leader because we were able to mentor each other, and providing that safe space for people just allows them to ask the silly questions or 'I'm afraid this isn't appropriate, but I don't know why that is.'

— White Interview Participant

Career and Skill Development Options

White interview participants spoke about successful formal career development initiatives, such as mentorship, sponsorship, buddy programs, and ERGs, that have been proven to accelerate the advancement of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. It should be noted that they discussed the value of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women participating in general career development programs, not tailored, culturally responsive, or equity-centred programs. They also mentioned the value of informal support for skill and professional development such as providing time during work hours for skills development, putting on full-day skill training sessions for all employees (including senior leadership) on communication or having challenging conversations, along with career mapping initiatives for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women to help them understand where they may have skills gaps and how they can progress. One participant also shared that they were in the process of creating a career pathing framework for all employees to build greater transparency and competency development.

Participants noted that since employee efforts towards career development do not always align with what they actually need in order to advance, this framework has the potential to make things clearer and support more impactful career conversations. Additionally, several participants placed importance on communication between direct managers and their direct reports, suggesting that their organizations should provide the

tools and time for career conversations and dedicated professional development check-ins.

Inclusive Human Resources

Another method suggested to help build an inclusive workplace was the development of supportive policies. For example, offering remote or flexible work or reviewing parental leave policies to ensure non-birthing parents can take leave and that those who utilize leaves do not face repercussions like stalled career advancement. Participants also noted HR's role in building an inclusive work environment and suggested that engagement surveys be used to pinpoint which managers are proactively having career development conversations and building fruitful relationships with their employees. These surveys can also demonstrate which managers offered opportunities for development and pinpoint teams with lower scores. At the same time, employee surveys and self-identification data help identify internal engagement trends (e.g., employee satisfaction), as well as external gaps in reaching specific communities and demographics who may be candidates for open roles.



Research Discussion

Gaining Insights into Workplace Career Development Experiences



The research questions at the heart of this project were: what are the career development experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in the workplace and how do workplaces understand and address their career development needs? Further, is there alignment in what women are saying and what workplaces are doing? To gain insights into these questions, we listened and learned from the perspectives and experiences presented by sharing circle participants as well as the interview participants working in HR, EDI, career coaching, and as people leaders. The following section will provide an overview of significant research findings as well as an analysis of key thematic insights that impact our understanding of the career development ecosystem and the corresponding needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.

Sharing Circles Overview – Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Participants

The sharing circles provided a profound, community-driven lens to examine the lived experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, offering rich insights into career development barriers, needs, and promising practices. Across these groups, participants highlighted barriers such as tokenism, racism, microaggressions, and pressures to conform to white-dominant workplace norms as significant challenges to their career development. A recurring theme was the emotional labour women bear when navigating workplace cultures that undervalue their contributions, yet these conversations also revealed the strength and resilience of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women who continue to drive their career development. Discussions also emphasized the importance of culturally tailored career development options including mentorship, sponsorship, coaching, and ERGs, as well as access to leadership development programs that all help contribute to professional growth and advancement.



The sharing circles underscored the necessity of shifting workplace cultures from white-dominant norms to inclusive environments that celebrate diverse cultural strengths and provide psychological safety for all. While promising practices were shared, the discussions revealed that workplaces often fall short in addressing the unique and intersecting needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in a meaningful and sustainable way, leaving opportunities for creating equitable career development that has impact.

Interviews Overview – Indigenous, Black, Racialized, and White Participants

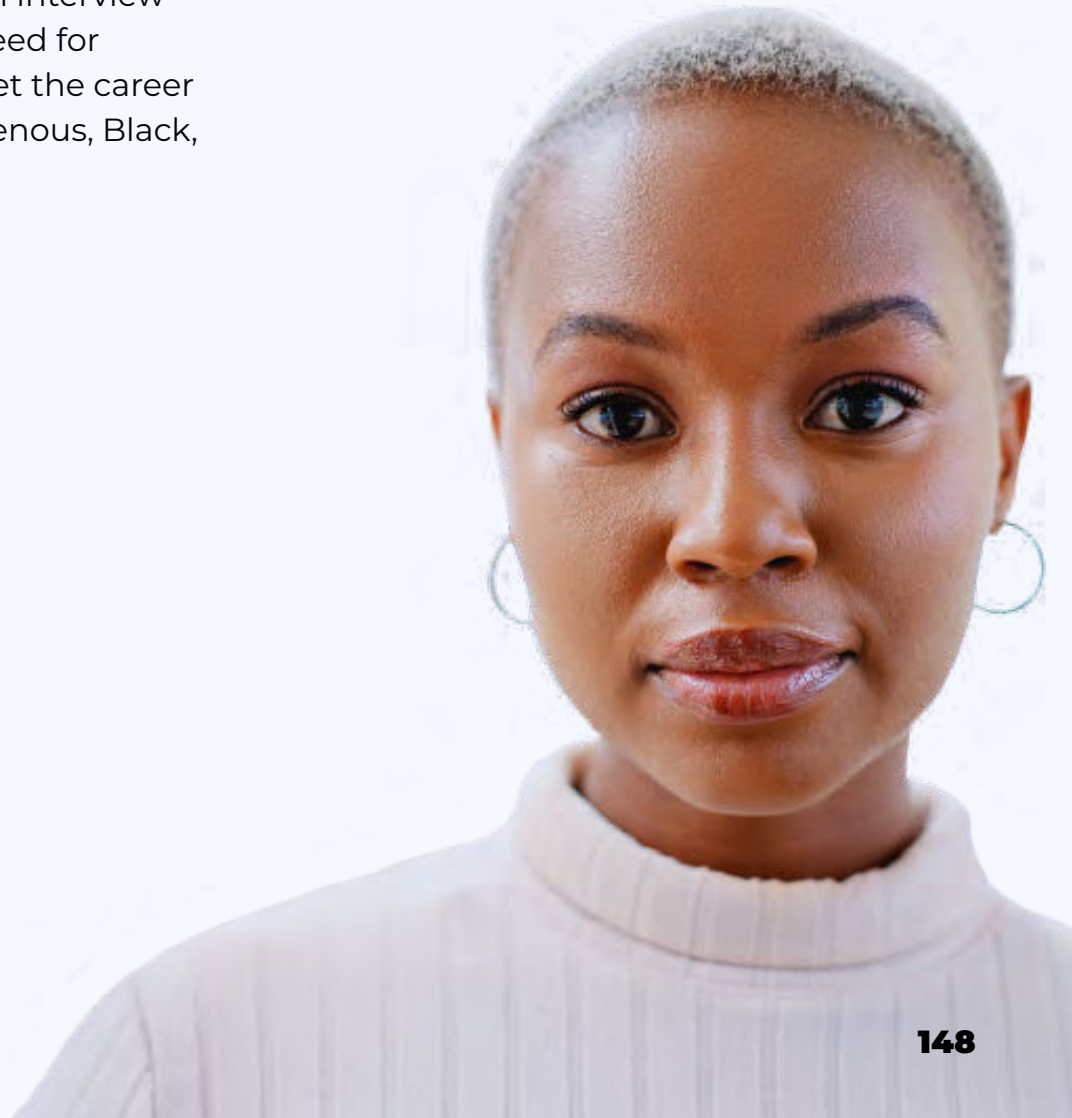
Interviews with participants across all groups, Indigenous, Black, racialized, and white, provided another layer of understanding to our research, revealing how systemic barriers manifest and are (or are not) addressed by workplace policies and practices. Indigenous, Black, and racialized interview participants in HR, EDI, ERG, and people leader roles articulated nuanced and lived realities that aligned with themes shared by Indigenous, Black, and racialized sharing circle participants. They demonstrated deeper awareness of the legacies of racism, colonialism, xenophobia, and patriarchy and how they manifest in workplaces, and they were able to identify clear examples of systemic barriers and corresponding recommendations to foster a more equitable career development ecosystem. In many cases, they described their efforts to implement inclusive policies, practices, and programs within their organization despite facing obstacles, limits, or resistance.

White interview participants in HR, EDI, ERG, and people leader roles demonstrated an understanding of the career development gaps experienced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, although these discussions reflected a more limited understanding that was focused on addressing individual behaviors rather than systemic issues. Despite good intentions, these knowledge gaps may prevent white HR and EDI practitioners from addressing the root cause of systemic barriers leading to unintended harm, particularly when



they may not yet have the necessary understanding to fully engage with the unique challenges and systemic barriers faced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. This reality is further reflected in representation within the HR field itself as only 14% of HR professionals in Canada identify as a racialized person, and just 2% identify as Indigenous in 2022.⁸⁵ These statistics underscore that, despite being positioned as decision-makers and trusted experts within organizations, white HR professionals comprise the majority of HR practitioners and some may not yet have the full range of knowledge needed to develop comprehensive, intentional solutions that effectively support the career development needs of systemically marginalized groups.

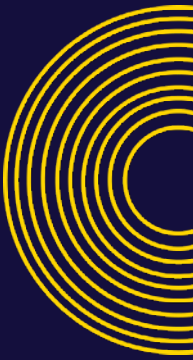
Together, these insights from interview participants reinforces the need for systemic change to truly meet the career development needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.



⁸⁵ Leger, 2022 HR Trends Survey: Total National Report, Chartered Professionals in Human Resources (2022), page 84.

Key Discussion Themes

The following section outlines seven key insights focused on breaking systemic barriers by creating more human-centric, intersectional policies and practices to support Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's career development.



Centring the Voices of Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Women in Career Development

Our research reveals that career development initiatives often fail to consider the different needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women because they are not involved in policy and program design. This exclusion creates gaps in understanding the intersectional challenges these women face, particularly the systemic barriers that force them to assimilate into dominant workplace norms to succeed. Too often, programs and policies are developed through a dominant lens that does not reflect the realities and aspirations of those they aim to support.

Gaps In Understanding Needs:

Indigenous, Black, and racialized women described a fundamental disconnect between their lived realities and how workplaces perceive their career development needs. For instance, white interview participants often spoke about self-advocacy and self-confidence as personal career development responsibilities rather than recognizing systemic issues that limit Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's ability or desire to self-promote (e.g., cultural values, internalized biases that dictate self-worth). As such, organizations risk designing their career development initiatives with the goal of fixing women's deficits instead of recognizing the need for tailored, responsive, and inclusive initiatives.

A significant gap also emerged in how Indigenous women's career development needs are understood by workplaces. The majority of non-Indigenous interview participants lacked knowledge of Indigenous values, worldviews, and career aspirations. These gaps manifest in one-size-fits-all career development initiatives that conflate Indigenous People's needs with those of other equity-deserving groups. In reality, our conversations with Indigenous women emphasized the need for stronger decolonization within career development, in tandem with offering culturally informed practices (e.g., Indigenous focused and led professional development opportunities, recognizing and celebrating Treaty Days and other days/events of significance in the community).

By proactively designing programs or policies by and for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, organizations can create more responsive career development opportunities.

Listen and Do Not Assume: Organizations can ensure that their career development programs are being designed for and by Indigenous, Black, and racialized women by actively listening, learning, and incorporating their feedback to design solutions that address systemic inequities. Paternalistic approaches that dictate what women need, without their engagement, or place the burden on them to adapt to exclusionary systems are not just ineffective, they actively uphold inequities. Amplifying individuals' voices in career development conversations is important because solutions that are effective for one equity-deserving group or member may not necessarily work for another.

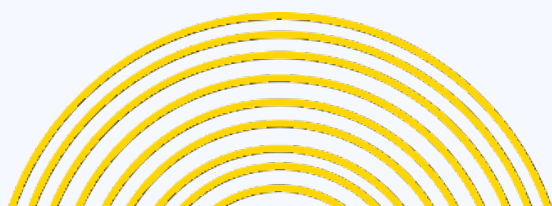
Reimagining a More Holistic Approach to Career Development

Traditional approaches to career development have long been shaped by one-size-fits-all models that fail to account for intersectionality and the lived realities of diverse employees in the workplace. This study found that traditional career development approaches are not aligned with the diverse needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. Our findings suggest the need to redefine career development, moving towards tailored, holistic, and intersectional approaches that actively disrupt systemic inequities and foster equitable pathways to success.

Tailored, Holistic, Intersectional Approaches: Effective and responsive career development approaches recognize that traditional, one-size-fits-all models fail to meet the unique and diverse needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. Likewise, initiatives designed to only address gender-based barriers to career development often exclusively benefit white women and alienate or fail to resonate with women from equity-deserving groups. This does not mean that organizations should indiscriminately reject traditional career development programs such as mentorship, sponsorship, and coaching, but that these initiatives need to evolve to centre the needs of equity-deserving groups and must incorporate an intersectional lens.

Co-designing Career Development:

Redefining an approach to career development that is meaningful to Indigenous, Black, and racialized women should be done with their input, creating a process that centres their cultural values, lived experiences, and diverse aspirations. Further, career development is not about “fixing” Indigenous, Black, and racialized women to fit dominant workplace cultures. Instead, it is about transforming workplaces to ensure women have the opportunities, support, and recognition they need to thrive. Career development should be an active, continuous, equitable, and co-created process leading to improved career outcomes where Indigenous, Black, and racialized women have ownership over their career trajectories and workplaces actively dismantle systemic barriers, foster inclusion, and create meaningful, tailored pathways for advancement.



The Critical Impact of Direct Managers

Direct managers and senior leadership play a critical role in shaping the career development experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. They can be gatekeepers to opportunities, resources, mentorship, and sponsorship, and their biases, whether explicit or unconscious, can hinder career advancement. This research underscores the profound impact that managers have on the professional trajectories of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, highlighting disparities in access, support, and accountability.

The Influence of Direct Managers:

Indigenous, Black, and racialized participants upheld inclusive managers and leaders as integral to their professional growth. The presence of a supportive direct manager can be transformative. Indigenous, Black, and racialized women who had managers actively advocating for their career growth, providing actionable feedback, and creating psychologically safe environments reported more positive career outcomes. However, many participants described experiences with unsupportive managers who either passively neglected their career development or actively created barriers. Unsupportive managers blocked access to promotions, training, sponsorship, and high-visibility projects. In some cases, managers dismissed or downplayed racism and microaggressions, leaving women to navigate hostile or unwelcoming work environments without support. Others used vague or unhelpful performance feedback, reinforcing barriers to advancement. For example, Indigenous women shared that unsupportive managers often lacked awareness of how colonialism and systemic inequities shaped their career experiences, resulting in a lack of culturally responsive guidance, mentorship, and meaningful support. Black women shared experiences of being overlooked for promotions despite

exceeding expectations, with some managers expecting them to work harder without additional compensation or recognition.

Representation and Accountability:

Many participants shared that increasing the representation of Indigenous, Black, and racialized managers and leaders could improve their career development outcomes by building a foundation of individuals who shared their lived experience and understood their needs. This idea was further supported by participants who highlighted specific behaviors and actions that managers could adopt to show concern for their teams' career and wellbeing, such as enthusiastically opting in to learning and development opportunities (e.g., training on anti-racism, decolonization, recognizing affinity bias). Participants also suggested attaching key performance indicators to leadership and management roles to hold them accountable for having career development conversations and reveal any discrepancies in who is receiving support. When managers receive culturally specific training and are invested in the success and wellbeing of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, they can play a pivotal role in eliminating biases that prevent equitable career development outcomes.

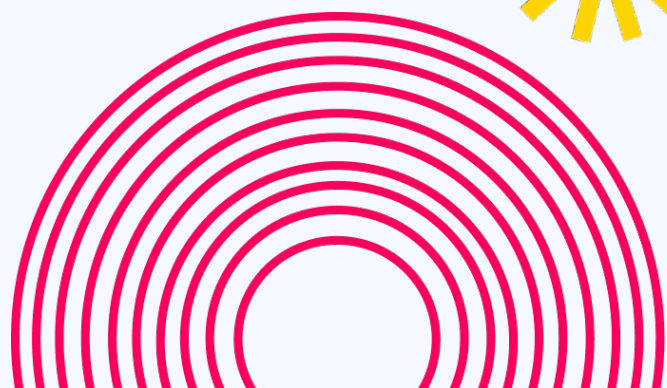


Feedback on Performance Management and Career Pathways

Indigenous, Black, and racialized women face systemic challenges in career progression due to unclear career pathways, biased performance management practices, and non-actionable feedback that limits their growth. Without intentional efforts to increase transparency, provide meaningful guidance, and ensure equitable access to leadership opportunities, these women continue to be excluded from career advancement structures designed for those with privileged access to networks, information, and resources.

Lack of Transparency: A recurring theme across participant experiences was the lack of transparency in career pathways, succession planning, and leadership development. Indigenous, Black, and racialized women reported that information about promotions and advancement opportunities was not widely communicated or equitably accessible. Many Indigenous, Black, and racialized women reported that they were left out of leadership development discussions, further reinforcing the inequities in career progression. Our research indicates that for many participants, advancement criteria often remain vague or lack transparency. Additionally, career progression often relies on informal networks and “insider” knowledge, benefiting those with existing relationships with leadership. Without clear criteria for advancement, many Indigenous, Black, and racialized women found themselves excluded from key conversations about promotions or leadership development. The lack of transparency around career development means that if these women want to advance, they must navigate the system alone through self-advocacy or by self-directing their career development. However, this expectation places the burden of success on individuals from equity-deserving groups rather than

addressing the systemic inequities and structural barriers that limit access to opportunities and career progression. When organizations lack transparency, the internal policies and processes inherently favour those with existing networks and “insider” knowledge, disproportionately hindering the advancement of women from equity-deserving groups who may not have access to influential networks. Moreover, unclear pathways benefit employees with traditional or predictable career paths (e.g., attending a Canadian university) which often excludes immigrants and newcomers with international experience and non-traditional or non-linear career pathways.



Lack of Actionable Feedback: Receiving clear, actionable feedback and career guidance is essential for professional growth, but our research demonstrates that racial and gender biases (including affinity bias, misogynoir, and eurocentrism) often result in Indigenous, Black, and racialized women receiving less or no useful feedback on their performance. Our research reflected that some managers avoid providing constructive feedback to racialized women, especially Black women, out of a fear of being perceived as racist or discriminatory, leading to incomplete or sugar-coated evaluations. Performance reviews often focus on personality (e.g., “too quiet” or “not assertive enough”) which reinforces stereotypes, rather than actionable feedback to improve. Racialized women were often told by HR to “upskill” despite already being well or overqualified for their roles. Without transparency, guidance, and actionable feedback, direct managers are essentially shifting the responsibility of career development to the individual. Indigenous, Black, and racialized women described navigating career development largely through self-directed efforts, seeking mentors, engaging coaches, building networks, and upskilling, without corresponding meaningful structural support from their direct managers and organizations. For example, being told to “speak up more” or “be more confident” shifts the responsibility of career advancement onto these individual women while ignoring biases in promotion and performance evaluations. Or being

told to “find a mentor” or “network more” without recognizing how affinity bias in sponsorship and leadership networks disproportionately benefits white employees and leads to career plateaus for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women who lack clear roadmaps for professional growth.



Career Development Through Community and Networks

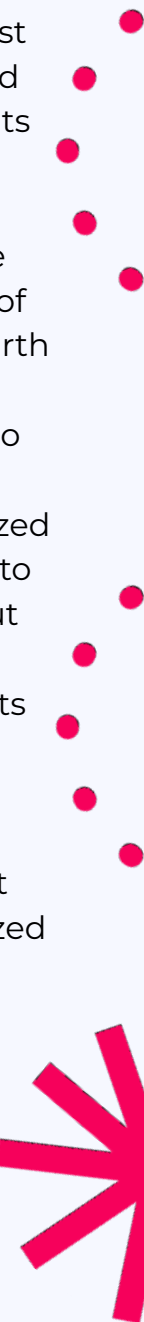
Building strong internal and external networks creates a sense of belonging and provides valuable opportunities for learning, sharing, mentorship/sponsorship while also opening doors to new prospects and collaboration. Given their underrepresentation in the workplace, Indigenous, Black, and racialized women often face structural barriers in career advancement that make access to professional networks, mentors, and sponsors critical for their growth. While ERGs and both formal and informal networks can play a transformative role in fostering career development, systemic gaps in access and support hinder their effectiveness.

The Vital Role of Networks: Our research demonstrates that workplaces may be underestimating the importance of having access to a network or community for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's careers. For example, Black participants shared that building networks with each other was a vital strategy to counter the isolation, burnout, and exclusion they experience in workplaces, but organizations are not fully leveraging the potential of expansive and diverse networks to support Black women's career development. Likewise, Indigenous participants pointed out that workplaces fail to involve and recognize the importance of Elders, a key figure in holistic and trauma-informed career development. Elders can provide invaluable mentorship and guidance, yet their contributions remain unacknowledged by those working in HR, career development, or people leader roles.

The Role and Limitations of ERGs:

ERGs have the potential to provide Indigenous, Black, and racialized women with essential career support, including mentorship, sponsorship, and a platform for advocacy. When adequately resourced and meaningfully integrated into organizational structures, ERGs can

serve as critical spaces that embolden career development. Our research reflected participants' desire for diverse networking opportunities to support their career development, with the most frequent option being collaborative and empowered ERGs. However, participants routinely described experiences with ERGs that were disconnected from career development goals. Some of the challenges that limit the effectiveness of ERGs include under-funding and a dearth of institutional support, no executive sponsorship, and lack of integration into business and leadership strategy. In addition, Indigenous, Black, and racialized women from ERGs are often expected to educate others on equity issues without compensation or recognition for this additional labour. Our research suggests that organizations have a significant opportunity to reconceptualize ERGs so that they are set up with the explicit goal of serving the career development needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.



White Supremacy and Proximity to Whiteness

Proximity to whiteness significantly shapes career development opportunities, influencing access to networks, perceptions of competence, and workplace culture. Participants shared that whiteness and white-adjacent identities often afford individuals advantages in leadership, sponsorship, and career progression.

Expectations to Conform to Dominant Workplace Cultures: Indigenous, Black, and racialized participants emphasized the need to suppress aspects of their identity to align with workplace norms, which are often shaped by white-centric cultural expectations. Many Indigenous, Black, and racialized participants recognized the need to internalize white supremacy culture and its inherent biases to build a career and navigate workplaces. Indigenous participants who identified as white-presenting shared feelings of privilege and guilt due to their proximity to whiteness, revealing how internalized colonial frameworks aim to divide Indigenous communities and generate competition between Indigenous women. Similarly, some Black and racialized participants demonstrated internalized white supremacy through code switching, or by leveraging their proximity to whiteness (e.g., skin colour, non-ethnic names, immigration status) to advance their careers. Indigenous, Black, and racialized women who utilized their proximity to whiteness for career advancement shared that they experienced amplified mental and emotional burdens, feelings of alienation from their colleagues and community, and grappling with self-doubt. This complicated dynamic reflects the hierarchy imposed by white supremacy and colonialism, where proximity to

whiteness can offer access to opportunities but simultaneously exacerbates other burdens and marginalizes those who do not conform to these norms.

The Benefits of Being a White Woman:

The expectation of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women to conform to dominant workplace norms in order to gain acceptance and opportunities in the workplace reflects an internalization of white supremacy as the standard for professionalism. This perpetuates affinity bias where white women often benefit disproportionately from career development programs as well as access to networks because they are not expected to adapt their norms to fit in at work. White women benefit from gender-focused career development initiatives, as these programs often prioritize gender equity without considering intersectionality, leaving Indigenous, Black, and racialized women behind. Further, since white men and women share cultural and social experiences, white men appear to be more comfortable speaking to and working with white women, and white women are more readily identified as having the right leadership material, benefiting from positive perceptions of their competence and likeability that are often denied to Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.



Transformative Cultural Change: Dismantling Structural Barriers and Power Imbalances

Workplace cultures and systems are often shaped by dominant norms that fail to equitably support Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. Despite organizational commitments to EDI, many career development structures continue to reinforce inequities rather than addressing them at a systemic level. To foster meaningful career development pathways, workplaces must move beyond surface-level diversity efforts and commit to structural and cultural transformation that creates truly inclusive and equitable opportunities.

Systemic Barriers to Career

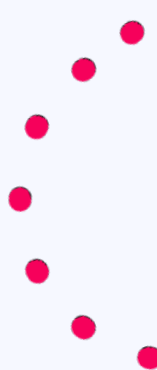
Development: The prevalence of racism, misogyny, and xenophobia deep within organizational systems creates structural barriers to equitable career development. Indigenous, Black, and racialized participants regularly spoke about how their values and beliefs, often marked by collectivism, community, reciprocity, and cooperation, put them at a disadvantage in workplaces that reward individualism, elitism, and competition. Employees who align with these corporate values, which are founded on principles of white supremacy, colonialism, patriarchy, and eurocentrism, are more likely to receive strong performance reviews, promotions, and career development such as mentorship, sponsorship, feedback, and stretch assignments. As it currently stands, many leaders, especially those who are white, uphold the status quo because it benefits their career progression, or because they had to navigate barriers within the current system and believe others should, too.

The individualistic and competitive design of workplaces reinforces structural barriers to career development experienced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, forcing them to conform to dominant corporate norms that go against their

values, beliefs, and cultural teachings to get ahead. For example, racialized participants pointed out that their preference for introversion and humility, rooted in cultural values of collectivism and respect, put them at a disadvantage as career advancement requires visibility and self-promotion. Our research reveals that attempts to conform to white-dominant workplace norms at work can perpetuate high rates of tokenism, imposter phenomenon, biases, and burnout among equity-deserving groups. Indigenous participants discussed how organizations tokenized them, valuing only their identity (e.g., being the spokesperson for all Indigenous Peoples) instead of their professional contributions or skills. Black participants also spoke about how being tokenized exacerbated their imposter phenomenon, and as a result, they experienced burnout which impacted their ability to focus on career development.

Decolonizing Career Development:

Our research reveals a significant gap in meeting the career development needs of Indigenous women as many organizations have yet to begin meaningful reconciliation or decolonization efforts and continue to overlook the compounded impacts of gender-, race-, and colonial-based



discrimination on Indigenous women's career trajectories. Despite general support for Indigenous inclusion, our research reveals a lack of knowledge about the specific systemic barriers Indigenous women face. Indigenous participants emphasized the need for a decolonized approach to career development that is grounded in Indigenous values such as kindness, reciprocity, collective growth, and community accountability. To create spaces where Indigenous women can advance on their own terms, career development must move beyond tokenistic inclusion to embrace a transformative, culturally informed framework developed in consultation with Indigenous women, communities, and Elders. This work must be tailored to local contexts, acknowledging the diversity of Indigenous Peoples and the need for sustained, respectful engagement to build trust and implement change that aligns with Indigenous teachings and priorities.

Transforming Workplace Culture

for Equity: To build workplaces where Indigenous, Black, and racialized women feel psychologically safe and supported, organizations must prioritize transformative change that centres on dismantling systems of oppression. Transformative change requires more than the modification of policies and practices; leadership needs to actively eliminate biased power structures rooted in principles of patriarchy, white supremacy, colonialism, and eurocentrism. This means rethinking how power is distributed within organizations, ensuring that career development initiatives do not reinforce existing inequities, and holding leadership accountable for systemic

change. For example, many leadership pipelines operate informally, relying on personal networks and subjective evaluations of "leadership potential", which disproportionately disadvantage Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. To actively dismantle this, organizations must implement structured succession planning that uses objective criteria rather than focusing on "fit", ensures members of equity-deserving groups are included and considered, and provides transparent leadership pathways with clear steps for advancement.

Participants communicated that they want to see inclusion woven throughout their workplaces and the elimination of discriminatory and harmful systems and practices. This can be achieved by embedding decolonization, truth and reconciliation, and anti-racism into organizational culture (e.g., adopting a reconciliation framework like UNDRIP). Genuine commitment to transformative change involves continuous learning and unlearning, accountability from leadership and managers, and the courage to disrupt entrenched power structures that perpetuate racism, sexism, white supremacy, and colonialism.

Concluding Remarks

When taken together, these key insights offer organizations a roadmap to create a more equitable and supportive career development ecosystem where Indigenous, Black, and racialized women are not left alone to navigate the challenges of career development. Organizations must aim to reduce the burden that falls disproportionately on Indigenous, Black, and racialized women to overcome systemic barriers and pave their own way towards professional success.

Too often, career development conversations are confined to skills development, upskilling, and reskilling, as if the only thing preventing Indigenous, Black, and racialized women from advancement is their own readiness. This narrow, individualistic framing fails to acknowledge the deeply embedded systemic and structural inequities that shape workplace and career development experiences. Without addressing these realities, organizations risk reinforcing a cycle where women are expected to “fix” themselves to fit into workplaces that were never designed for their success.

HR, EDI professionals, people managers, decision-makers, and leaders need to commit to ongoing learning about the barriers and gaps faced by equity-deserving groups. It is not enough to fall back on outdated knowledge or assumptions because this complacency perpetuates biases, discrimination, and stereotypes.

Centring the voices and experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women is not optional, it is imperative.

Organizations must actively listen to and co-design solutions with those who are directly impacted. This means rethinking leadership norms, reimagining career pathways, embedding accountability at all levels, and ensuring that career development systems are designed to remove barriers rather than reinforce them.

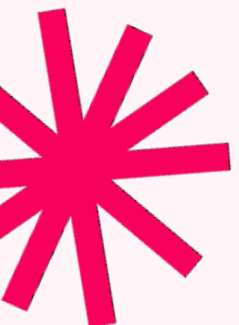
The goal is clear: a career development ecosystem that meets Indigenous, Black, and racialized women where they are, with whom they are, values their contributions, and ensures that they are not forced to carry the full weight of their own advancement. When organizations take this responsibility seriously, they do not just support women, they fuel a broader culture shift toward a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive labour market where all talent can thrive.



Recommendations Shared by Research Participants

Sharing circle and interview participants provided recommendations for individuals and organizations looking to enhance their support of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's career development. Some of these recommendations were based on promising policies and practices experienced by participants at their workplaces, while others speak to recommendations that they believed could help build more inclusive workplaces with responsive career advancement programs and initiatives. In many cases, participants identified similar recommendations for organizations that could benefit Indigenous, Black, and racialized women (among others), which demonstrates that some policies and practices have broad appeal for equity-deserving groups because they prioritize the inclusion of systemically marginalized people. However, participants also pointed out unique recommendations that may disproportionately benefit either Indigenous, Black, or racialized women which is an important reminder that tailored solutions are needed to address barriers and gaps for different groups or individuals, and that program design must feature an intersectional lens.

The following section outlines the recommendations shared by participants, first by highlighting advice that Indigenous, Black, and racialized women offered to women from their own communities, followed by recommendations for organizations. We have aligned the organizational recommendations with employee lifecycle categories: attraction and recruitment, onboarding, performance management, development, advancement, retention, and exit.



Recommendations from Indigenous Women to Indigenous Women

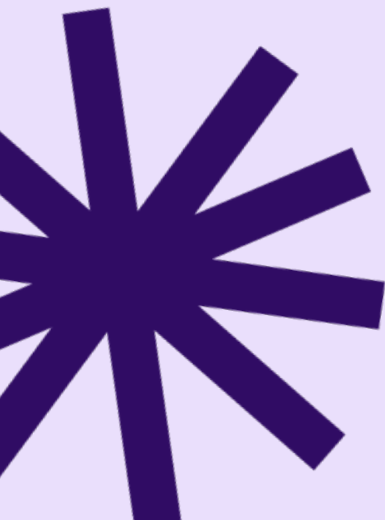
- 1 Take your career development in your own hands. Self-advocate to drive your own career development and open new doors of opportunity. Begin by building a strong personal brand to promote yourself and share your accomplishments.
- 2 Network and build relationships with mentors, peers, colleagues, clients, and suppliers to nurture career development, prospects, and growth.
- 3 Connect with Indigenous women and Elders. Build relationships with Indigenous women in your organization and community to foster a network of women with shared lived experiences.

Recommendations from Black Women to Black Women

- 1 Take your career development in your own hands. Self-advocate to drive your own career and seek out stretch experiences and learning opportunities. Be proactive and strategic about your career development. For example, during career conversations with your manager, ask about pathways for advancement and what skills you may need to develop to progress to the next level.
- 2 Be discerning in who you confide in, and do not be afraid to leave organizations that do not support your career development goals. Recognize and honour your potential and stay true to yourself. Listen to your intuition, especially if you are experiencing discrimination. Connect with your community to validate your feelings and address negative experiences.
- 3 Find community and mentorship opportunities. Connect with those with similar lived experiences or white allies who uplift you, prioritize your career development goals, and support your needs, especially related to mental health and preventing burnout.

Recommendations from Racialized Women to Racialized Women

- 1** Take your career development in your own hands. Self-advocate to drive your own career development by voicing your opinions, documenting your accomplishments, prioritizing career development conversations, and believing in yourself. This self-advocacy will help you reflect on your professional journey to overcome setbacks and figure out what you need to achieve your goals.
- 2** Seek opportunities even if they do not seem perfectly aligned with your goals. Personal growth can come from unexpected places so do not be afraid to explore different industries or roles and utilize transferable skills.
- 3** Proactively look after your mental health and wellbeing. Your company is not your family; you need to prioritize your mental, physical, and emotional health to drive your career.
- 4** Seek out mentors and role models of all genders and race/ ethnicities and foster these connections. Begin by understanding what you are looking to get out of these relationships to ensure meaningful interactions and find someone who will give you advice on your career journey. You may need to look externally to find a suitable mentor if your organization or manager is not supportive.
- 5** Get exposure to different people with unique career paths by attending events and using career services, especially if you are a newcomer or immigrant with a limited network. Be empathetic and seek to understand the different perspectives of those in your network.



Recommendations from Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Women to Organizations

Attraction and Recruitment



1 Implement equitable and inclusive recruitment policies and practices.
Examples include:

Removing barriers to job postings related to language, skills, and qualifications.

- Eliminate outdated qualifications for jobs and aim to hire for skills (including transferable), experience, and potential.
- Do not perpetuate bias against those with international degrees and/or work experience.
- Simplify job descriptions and allow for some degree of flexibility with meeting requirements.
- List transparent salary bands and total compensation on job postings.
- Offer compensation to candidates for participating in interview and recruitment activities.

Diversifying your talent pool.

- Partner with external recruiters, workforce development, or community organizations with diverse connections or experience with inclusive recruitment practices to attract Indigenous, Black, and racialized individuals.
- Consider removing names and personal details from applications to prevent bias.
- If your organization has representation of equity-deserving groups, aim to recruit internal candidates for advancement opportunities and encourage qualified candidates from equity-deserving groups to apply.

Diversifying your talent pool.

- Use data to ensure your recruitment practices are bringing in a diverse talent pool (e.g., data on number of candidates disaggregated by race and gender, data on the diversity of pipelines created for recruitment).
- Diversify your interview panels and hiring committees by including individuals representing different departments and functions within the organization who do not have connections to candidates.
- Provide education and training for HR, hiring managers, and panels on inclusive recruitment practices and preventing bias.
- Ensure women and other equity-deserving groups are represented in talent pools and on hiring committees to prevent affinity bias and signify to candidates that the organization is inclusive.

Creating a transparent hiring process and enhanced candidate experience that includes clear steps, expectations, and regular feedback.

- Feedback (or at the very least, status updates) should be provided to all candidates, including unsuccessful candidates (especially if they ask for it) as well as those who advance to different stages of the recruitment process.
- Empower HR to push back against hiring managers with bias and hold them accountable for more inclusive recruitment decisions.

Establishing hiring goals to increase diverse representation (e.g., targets for women and gender non-binary individuals, racialized individuals, Indigenous Peoples) without tokenizing candidates.

Establish a long-term Indigenous recruitment strategy that centres on respect, keeping promises, and building trust with Indigenous communities and candidates.

Setting up an internship or co-op program for Indigenous students, partnering with Indigenous HR personnel, Indigenous workforce development organizations, or an Indigenous recruiter who can match Indigenous candidates with the right opportunity, establishing an Indigenous recruitment office, or investing time into building your own meaningful and genuine connections with local Indigenous communities.



Onboarding



1 Create a sense of inclusion and belonging for new employees.

Regardless of the role, welcome and build relationships with new hires by making them feel comfortable, introducing them to other team members, and making sure they are aware of any useful career development programs or initiatives.

Setting up a buddy system for new hires, or using surveys to ensure Indigenous, Black, and racialized women are feeling safe and comfortable, especially if they are in white-dominated teams.



2 HR and direct managers collaboration to set new employees up for success. Key actions include:

Creating a policy that sets the terms for an inclusive organizational culture to ensure that new employees have clear guidelines and can reference and refer to it over their tenure with an organization.

Providing a detailed overview of HR policies and practices including employee supports and grievance mechanisms with actionable steps.

Establishing clear role expectations and discussing what this looks like in relation to broader organizational strategy and targets.

Starting career development conversations immediately so managers and employees share a strong understanding of goals, aspirations, and priorities.

Setting up and providing access to a career portal with professional development resources to provide transparency on pathways/career mapping, and access to professional development opportunities.

Performance Management



- 1** Establish expectations for leaders and managers to commit to supporting Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in the workplace and eliminating systemic barriers faced by these groups.

To support diverse employees, ensuring leaders and managers are guided by official policies and strategies (e.g., a Truth and Reconciliation Action Plan, a EDI strategy, HR policies), possess cultural competency, and aim to understand how identity factors and intersectionality can impact an individual's behaviour in the workplace and their career journey.



- 2** Ensure that people leaders take meaningful action on their commitment to support Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's career development and advancement.

Demonstrating buy-in and commitment to supporting the career development of women from equity-deserving groups by managers and proactively discussing career pathways, building culturally relevant career development plans, and openly recognizing the effort and achievements of their direct reports.

- 3** Build mechanisms for managers to regularly deliver productive, meaningful, and actionable feedback to Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, keeping in mind that equity-deserving groups face unique systemic barriers and biases that need to be acknowledged and addressed.

Holding frequent career conversations with strength-based, constructive, and structured feedback that supports a career plan that reflects the goals, ambitions, and potential of the individual.

Recognizing feedback as beneficial when delivered by managers in the moment to respond to ongoing tasks (e.g., receiving feedback about oral communication before giving a presentation, as opposed to after the presentation during formal performance reviews).

4

Formalize and diversify the performance management process to remove subjectivity and bias.

Clearly defining pathways for advancement (i.e., with a tailored career mapping tool), including what skills, knowledge, and experience is required to ascend to the next level.

Creating a formalized process, documentation, and tools for employees and direct managers to reference during performance reviews, that employees can also utilize to initiate career development conversations.

Allowing multiple people (e.g., managers, executives, HR, project leads, program chairs) to weigh in on performance reviews (sometimes referred to as 360-degree feedback) and subsequently, decisions for promotions or advancement so that these decisions are not dependent on one subjective manager's perceptions.

Expanding eligibility for leadership development programs to make them more equitable so that anyone can participate, learn, and advance.

5

Add key performance indicators (KPIs) related to EDI into senior executives' and management's performance reviews in order to establish firm goals and expectations that can cascade down and build accountability for progress.



1

Approach career development program design with an inclusive, holistic lens and tailor opportunities to meet the needs and values of different equity-deserving groups.

Ensuring that those for whom the program is being designed have a meaningful role and voice at program development decision-making tables without putting the full onus on them to do the work.

Bringing in external organizations with expertise to design and deliver programs where your organization does not have the organizational capacity.

Centring the voices of employees from equity-deserving groups to understand their career development needs and then incorporating these insights and a trauma-informed lens into program design.

Acknowledging the systemic barriers of racism, white supremacy, colonialism, patriarchy, and xenophobia in the workplace and eliminating them from your program design and implementation.

Recognizing that Indigenous, Black, and racialized women are not looking for charity by joining career development programs; they are capable, educated, and ambitious, and organizations need to invest in their potential.



Moving away from one-size-fits-all programs and instead, tailoring opportunities to the needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. Take an intersectional lens to career development and program design that considers race, ethnicity, education, citizenship, mental health, language, socio-economic status, etc.

Examples include:

- Embedding Indigenous practices and values into program design (including time and support for healing), and creating tailored leadership development and advancement programs that address the needs of Indigenous Peoples.
- Providing bridging programs and paid placements for racialized women who are newcomers.
- Creating job shadowing opportunities for Black women to explore different departments and engage with senior leadership.
- Offering career development initiatives that recognize the needs of those with non-linear career paths or supports those looking to explore non-linear paths.
- Considering wraparound support for equity-deserving groups that enables them to focus on career development including subsidies, mental health initiatives, childcare support, etc.

Creating leadership and career development pathways that target employees before they reach senior roles.

Ensuring that career training facilitators have a deep understanding of EDI and the barriers Indigenous, Black, and racialized women face. If needed, hire external consultants or companies to ensure facilitators have expertise and lived experience, and can offer tailored training and career development resources for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.

Integrating gender equity, learning and development, and succession planning to ensure a coordinated and responsive approach to women's career development needs.

Making learning and development more human-centred by incorporating storytelling and centring the lived experience of individuals (e.g., bring in speakers from equity-deserving groups to discuss their career paths and experience) to derive lessons learned.



Transparently sharing information on available career development programs (including the nomination or participation processes) to ensure Indigenous, Black, and racialized women are aware of these opportunities and can access them. Facilitate building connections via mentorship based on participants' interests, career paths, or career development goals, as well as their backgrounds and shared lived experiences. Direct managers should regularly communicate career development offerings that match the individual's area of interest or goals.

Where your organization does not have a dedicated learning and development group, establishing a designated internal person who is responsible for supporting an employee's career development so they can easily reach out with any questions or concerns on career development issues.

Setting aside a robust learning and development budget with support to ensure that it is culturally informed and responsive to the needs of equity-deserving groups. For smaller companies, this may mean partnering with external organizations to offer learning and development, or thinking of career development opportunities outside of the organization.

Using disaggregated data to inform succession planning and assessing the impact of career development programs based on established metrics (e.g., lateral and promotional advancements, retention and turnover, employee engagement and sentiments). These figures should be reported transparently to all employees.



Offer formal mentorship programs along with informal mentorship opportunities to develop talent and skills, not just as a leadership pathway for high-potential candidates. Consider the following when designing and implementing these programs:

Creating targeted mentorship programs for Indigenous, Black, or racialized women can help establish safe spaces to discuss workplace experiences, especially when mentorship pairings build connections between individuals with similar backgrounds. For example, Indigenous women receiving mentorship from an Elder or a mentorship circle comprised of Indigenous women.

Facilitate building connections via mentorship based on participants' interests, career paths, or career development goals, as well as their backgrounds and shared lived experiences.

Senior leaders, especially white leaders, making time to mentor Indigenous, Black, and racialized women to remove barriers, doing so without a saviour mindset.

Bringing in external experts to guide the development and implementation of a mentorship program to ensure it is structured and effectively supporting the needs of both mentors and mentees.

Creating accountability mechanisms to encourage mentor follow-through and proactive support.

Building reciprocal mentorship into the mentor-mentee relationship. This is especially powerful when pairing employees from different backgrounds (e.g., an executive white male mentor and an entry-level Black woman, or an older woman mentor and a young woman mentee).

Encouraging mentees to see themselves in manager and leader roles, and encouraging them to apply for those roles.

Offer impactful and active sponsorship programs for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. Consider the following when designing and implementing these programs:

Sponsors need to create safe spaces for their sponsee to show up authentically at work, not expect them to fit the mold.

Effective sponsorship programs include the active participation of executive leaders, but it is also important to create the conditions where Indigenous, Black, and racialized women can be paired with a sponsor who has similar lived experiences to ensure they feel psychologically safe.

White leaders can be powerful sponsors for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women but they need to recognize their privilege and understand how to override their affinity bias.

It can be useful to offer training on how to provide effective sponsorship, including any technology that may be required to facilitate sponsorship (e.g., platforms where individuals can find sponsors/sponsees).

Sponsors should be in a position to expand their sponsee's network and connections to senior leaders by providing access to events and private clubs.

Sponsorship can also take an informal approach, especially for small organizations, when someone in a position of power helps an employee to build skills, promotes them to others, and provides access to exclusive spaces.

Offer culturally informed career coaching programs and opportunities to encourage personal and professional growth for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. Coaching can be performed by qualified and knowledgeable managers or external coaches can be brought in who possess knowledge of the organization and the barriers experienced by equity-deserving groups. Coaching should be offered to individuals at all levels and supported with metrics and targets to measure its impact to ensure it is delivering outcomes for participants.

Offer ERGs that are well funded, resourced, and authorized to play an official and strategic role in career development.

Remunerating and recognizing ERG leaders for their work and contributions, including through performance reviews and opportunities for advancement.

Providing access to executives including an engaged sponsor who can input their recommendations especially around hiring, promotions, and policy development.

Providing clear role accountabilities for the executive sponsor to ERGs to include meaningful allyship, sponsorship, and advocacy.

Ensuring ERG supports key strategic priorities aligned with the employee life cycle, yet is not burdened with the sole responsibility of EDI initiatives of an organization.

Bringing an intersectional lens to Indigenous, Black, or racialized focused ERGs to ensure that gender concerns are also heard and addressed.

Provide funding and time for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women to participate in professional development or learning and development opportunities, including courses, online programs, job shadowing, and internal bootcamps to develop technical skills.

Offer relationship building and formal and informal networking opportunities (both internal and external to your workplace) for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women looking to make connections with other Indigenous, Black, and racialized women and leaders.

8

Offer career development opportunities to students from systemically marginalized groups. Exposure to various opportunities and work options through rotational or networking programs is valuable for those entering the workforce, and it can help your organization break down systemic barriers that prevent equity of opportunity in the labour market.

9

Provide training for managers and leaders, especially those who are non-Indigenous, non-Black, and non-racialized, to improve their people management skills and cultural competency. Training can focus on:

Understanding racism, white supremacy, and misogyny, and how these manifest in the workplace.

Recognizing unconscious bias and dealing with microaggressions.

Building knowledge from the top down on EDI, intersectionality, and recognizing privilege with a focus on solutions (not just barriers).

Developing skill sets around cultural competency, sensitivity, empathy, emotional intelligence, and inclusive leadership to better lead diverse teams.

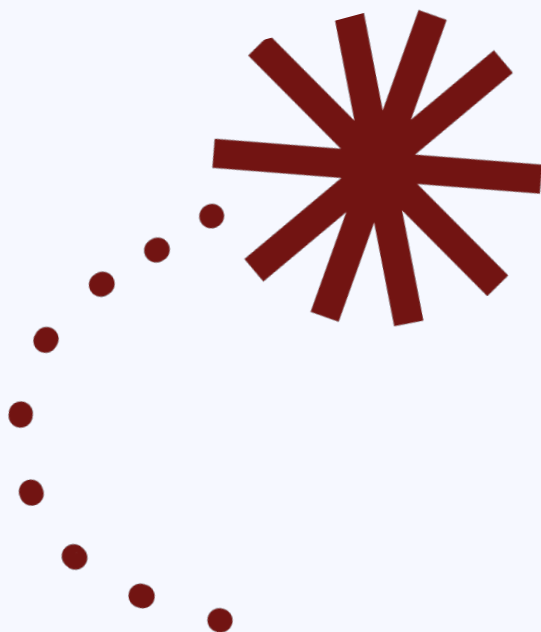
Providing active allyship to foster mindset and behaviour shifts.

Understanding that Indigenous, Black, and racialized women may need more career support to overcome systemic barriers, and corresponding tactics to help them succeed and grow.

Helping managers support their direct reports' career development by teaching them people management (i.e., having effective career conversations and performance reviews).

Providing ongoing training for all non-Indigenous employees. This can include company-wide training on truth and reconciliation and Indigenous protocols, history, and culture, as well as targeted training for people and senior leaders on how to address anti-Indigenous racism, and using their privilege to ensure equitable policies and practices.

Proactively communicate career development programs and opportunities to Indigenous, Black, and racialized women to ensure they are aware of these initiatives and their nomination processes. These opportunities and the criteria used to identify high-potential talent should be clearly communicated during onboarding, career conversations and performance reviews, and remain visible throughout an employee's lifecycle.





1 Provide opportunities for promotion and advancement to Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.

Acknowledging the lack of representation of equity-deserving groups (do not pretend the issue does not exist), and removing systemic barriers to advancement by focusing on increasing the representation of equity-deserving groups in senior positions or leadership roles.

Considering intersectionality when when it comes to succession planning, promotion and advancement.

Providing tailored advancement and progression opportunities that focus on building a pool of qualified diverse candidates.

2 Develop a transparent and inclusive succession planning process. Key elements include:

Clearly communicating career pathways to all employees so they know what steps and qualifications are required to advance, and ensure that the criteria is not a moving target that remains out of reach for equity-deserving groups.

Marrying succession planning, which is employer-driven, with career development, which tends to be employee-driven, to ensure that employees have a seat at the table.

Providing access to role models and supporters in the shape of mentors and sponsors, especially for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.

Creating multiple routes for advancement beyond the subjective opinion of one person (i.e., a direct manager) to avoid biased decisions.

Building career development programs to include competencies, skills, and behaviours in line with established succession planning processes and linking participation in these programs to succession planning pools.



1 Offer holistic and culturally inclusive health and wellness benefits and policies for Indigenous Peoples. Examples include:

Robust mental health options (e.g., access to Indigenous service providers or alternative health services, offering personal days).

Indigenous-focused benefits such as accommodations or leaves to attend cultural gatherings or ceremonies.

Recognizing Indigenous dates of significance throughout the year.

Remote and hybrid work options to allow Indigenous women to have a better work-life integration, especially for those living in remote or rural areas.

Providing access to spiritual support, such as Elders, within your organization to remove the burden of having to tap into one's own network.

Listening circles where Indigenous Peoples can speak openly and confidentially to others with the same lived experiences.

A smudging policy.

Access to spaces for cultural practices (e.g., smudge rooms).

Providing childcare in the building or an affiliate close by, or providing subsidies for daycare.

Supporting breakfast and lunch programs, or extending your benefits plan to include a broad range of family assistance.

2

Incorporate different practices and approaches to work, especially those that respond to Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's feedback, needs, and values. Alongside offering culturally supported benefits and HR policies, implement new practices and ways of working that are proposed by equity-deserving groups to address bias, discrimination, and racism, and allow Indigenous, Black, and racialized women to show up authentically.

Design inclusive HR policies and offer compensation and benefits that meet the needs of your employees, with special attention to Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. These policies and practices should focus on the workplace but also acknowledge that supporting employees outside of work will help them to excel at work. Examples include:

Conduct pay audits using disaggregated data to close wage gaps.

Providing access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) with counsellors for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women who understand their lived experiences and can better meet their needs.

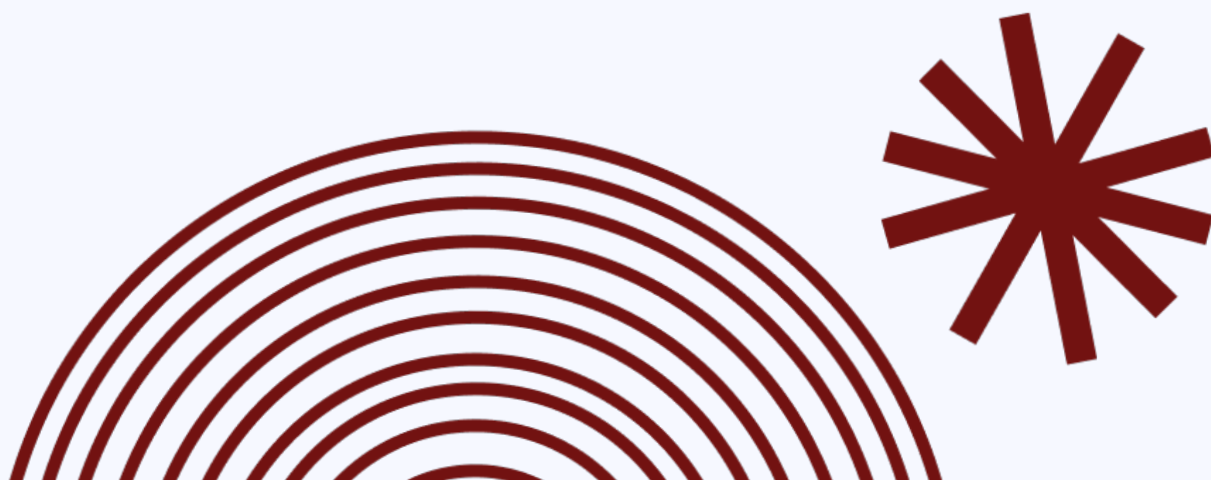
Acknowledging and addressing women's unique health care needs (e.g., design policies that support parents before, during, and after parental leave, provide parental leave top-ups, review policies to ensure those taking parental leave are not penalized, offer paid menstrual leave, provide free menstrual products in washrooms, etc.).

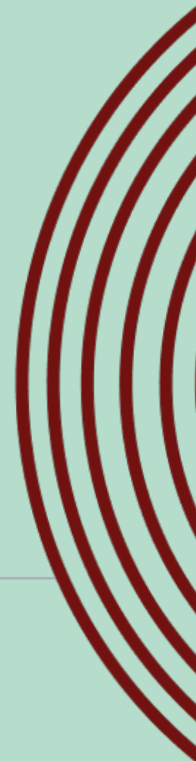
Offering resources and support for primary caregivers and ensuring that managers are understanding of life circumstances.

Offering flexible work options and personal/float days, as well as sick leaves and bereavement policies that accommodate differing family structures.

Providing targeted supports for Black and racialized immigrants new to the country such as paid childcare, subsidized transportation, language courses, etc.

Policy language that is clear, gender-inclusive, and expresses zero-tolerance for violence (e.g., physical, sexual, emotional, psychological), harassment (e.g., verbal, visual, physical), discrimination, and racism.



**4**

Collect disaggregated data related to the employee lifecycle (recruitment, hiring, promotion/advancement, turnover, etc.) and use it to inform goal setting. Ensure your data collection process protects members of equity-deserving groups who are asked to self-identify by bringing in a third party organization to analyze and safeguard the data, and align this process with data sovereignty practices, especially for Indigenous communities. To build psychological safety (which is necessary for self-identification), be transparent about why your organization is collecting data, how the data will be collected (including method and frequency) and stored, who has visibility and to what extent (i.e., aggregate data versus disaggregate data), and how the data will be used.

5

Managers and leaders need to demonstrate that they genuinely care about and understand the needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. To build authentic and productive relationships that support employees' career development and advancement, managers should consider the following:

Building strong relationships grounded in kindness, humanity, and empathy.

Taking a genuine interest in the career development of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women by offering advice, support, or feedback to nurture their talent.

Acknowledging that Indigenous, Black, and racialized women have unique cultural differences and lived experiences, and be understanding if they decide to share their experiences, including their personal lives.

Building trust with your direct reports by speaking honestly and being vulnerable, especially when discussing your own experiences.

Holding regular career conversations with Indigenous, Black, and racialized women that include discussions about workload, negative experiences in the workplace (e.g., bias, microaggressions), and their professional goals.

Recognizing that not everyone has the same career aspirations and adjusting your support to recognize the priorities of individual employees and their specific ambitions.

Refraining from putting the onus on Indigenous, Black, or racialized women to educate you or others.

Recognize the systemic barriers Indigenous, Black, and racialized women have to navigate in their careers by not placing the burden of career advancement solely on them.

6 Create psychologically safe workplaces where Indigenous, Black, and racialized women can show up authentically. Psychologically safe workplaces may include the following elements:

Ensuring there are no repercussions for those who speak out against microaggressions, inappropriate behaviour, or discrimination in the workplace.

Creating space for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women to self-advocate for their needs without backlash.

Establishing clear protocols with clear steps to protect Indigenous, Black, and racialized women and advocates/allies who file grievances, and hold perpetrators accountable through an external body where women can file complaints.

Conducting consistent and transparent pay equity audits with intersectional and disaggregated data (not simply aggregate data for men and women).



7

Leadership and management must build and nurture an allyship culture by recognizing their privilege, leading with a human-centric approach, modelling inclusive allyship behaviours, and participating in EDI initiatives. To avoid performative allyship, leaders – especially white allies – should address their own biases and be held accountable for this work through corresponding mechanisms, invest in the careers of members of equity-deserving groups, and speak out against those whose behaviour is not inclusive.

8

Establish safe internal spaces for equity-deserving groups in the form of ERGs so that they can candidly discuss their lived experiences and professional challenges to build a network and navigate workplaces. Encourage collaboration among ERGs to promote intersectional issues and joint initiatives that support the needs of multiple equity-deserving groups.

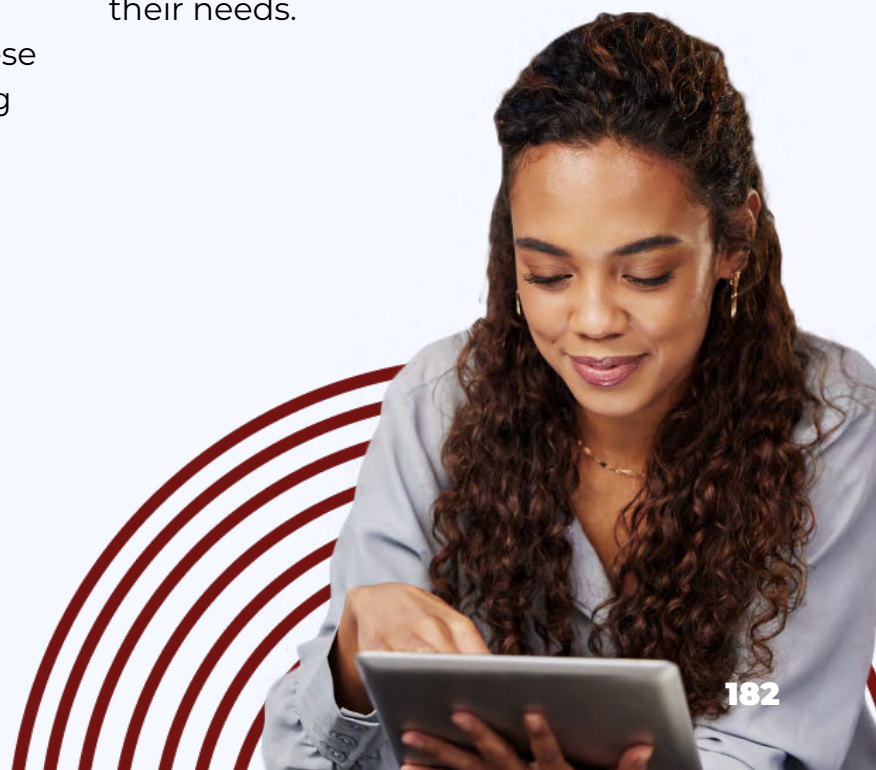


1 Create psychologically safe spaces for candid exit interviews held with a panel (including ERG leads) or by an external organization. Ensure that these conversations include time to discuss negative experiences, especially related to being a member of an equity-deserving group.

2 To better understand why Indigenous, Black, and racialized women are leaving, use qualitative and quantitative data to assess attrition rates and trends, including key performance indicators (KPIs) related to managerial performance and effectiveness. Take this data and build a case to address issues related to retention.

It is important to note that the recommendations provided by participants are not an exhaustive list of practices that individuals and organizations can take to improve career development outcomes for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. Breaking systemic gender- and race-based barriers requires coordinated, ongoing, and strategic planning that spans across all aspects of an organization. Instead, these recommendations represent promising actions shared by participants that, if

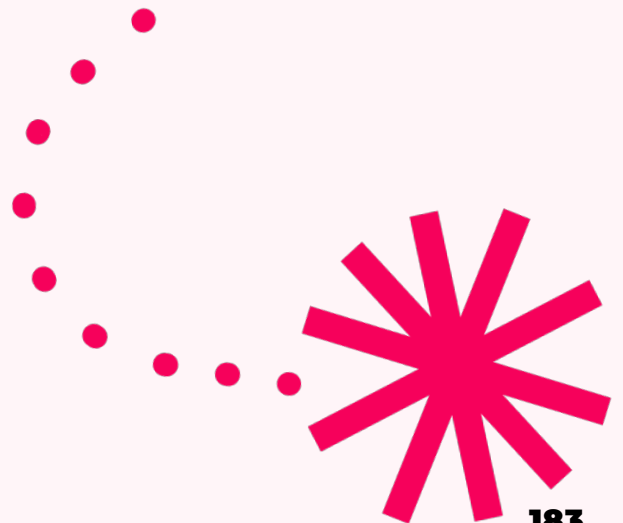
implemented properly, can help address certain barriers to equity and build capacity for more inclusive workplaces. To drive meaningful change, organizations must continuously work towards improvement and centre the voices of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in this process to ensure that policies, practices, and programs are meeting their needs.





Accelerate Her Future's Calls to Action for Individuals, Organizations, Academia, and Government

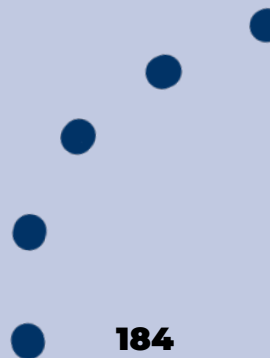
There is a role for everyone when it comes to closing career development gaps and meeting the needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. Individuals, organizations, academia, and government need to share responsibility. Moving from intention to action means working together to break systemic barriers, building capacity for change, and implementing more inclusive policies, practices, and programs that support the career advancement of equity-deserving groups. The calls to action that follow have been developed based on insights shared by research participants as well as the Accelerate Her Future's research team. They are meant to inspire reflection, and provide tangible steps forward towards reimagining career development.





Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Women

- 1** Be an active participant in your own career planning. Self-directed career advancement can be empowering so plan your career and its progression with your trusted colleagues, manager, community, mentors, family, etc.
- 2** Leverage your community and network, both internally at your organization (e.g., community-based ERGs) and externally. Find and take opportunities to build your network as this can be a safe space for you to share challenges and identify opportunities, mentors, and sponsors.
- 3** Seek mentorship, sponsorship, and career coaching for support and career development. Identify potential mentors and sponsors, including allies from other communities, to guide and advocate for your career progression. Leverage the support of career coaches, ideally those with shared lived experiences or cultural competency, to navigate workplace challenges, build confidence, and set clear career goals.
- 4** Enhance your visibility in professional settings. Balance your cultural values with strategies for self-advocacy and visibility such as strategically leveraging internal workplace relationships and owning your impact through storytelling and self-promotion.
- 5** Build self and collective advocacy. Educate yourself about bias, including internalized bias, as well as strategies for disrupting bias that is coming your way. Collaborate with others to advocate for systemic changes within organizations.
- 6** Advocate for more transparency in career advancement conversations with employers, and more accountability, structure, and support when participating in career development initiatives such as ERGs.





Leaders & People Managers

- 1** Leadership should model inclusivity and accountability on a daily basis. Take proactive steps to advocate for, mentor and sponsor Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, and provide opportunities for stretch assignments, visibility, and professional growth. Track and publicly share progress on equity goals ensuring individuals at all levels are accountable for creating inclusive workplaces and leadership pathways.
- 2** Reimagine what leadership looks like and entails. Instead of a top-down hierarchical approach, adopt a more collaborative approach that prioritizes shared responsibility, collectivism, and cooperation with peers and colleagues.
- 3** People managers must build trust, psychological safety, and foster an environment where Indigenous, Black, and racialized women feel safe to voice their career aspirations, seek and provide feedback, and share their challenges.
- 4** Prioritize transparency in all career development matters. Establish clear pathways for promotion and performance management that consider systemic barriers and diverse career trajectories. Direct managers need to provide actionable feedback for advancement, and make career development resources, tools, and offerings visible and accessible to all women.

HR & EDI Professionals

- 1** Use data disaggregated by gender, race, and other identity dimensions to identify how systemic biases shape recruitment, performance management, and promotion processes (e.g., a comprehensive needs assessment, an internal audit). HR can regularly collect and analyze disaggregated data, providing this process is aligned with data sovereignty, a trauma-informed lens, and privacy/confidentiality practices, to help your organization assess how systemic and structural barriers manifest uniquely within your workplace and industry, and set measurable goals to close the equity gap for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.
- 2** Invest in training and development by offering varied and responsive learning opportunities and encouraging or incentivizing participation in training and development.
- 3** Offering training to leaders and managers including anti-racism, intersectional gender equity, allyship, cultural competency, inclusive career development, and feedback conversations, especially for leadership.
- 4** Consulting with different groups to inform culturally informed policies and programs, including benefits, EAP, etc.
- 5** Implement inclusive and equitable recruitment and hiring policies to give all candidates a fair chance regardless of their status as immigrants or newcomers, or their lack of Canadian credentials. Use disaggregated data on applicant pools and hiring to track the effectiveness of these policies and adjust as needed.
- 6** Talent acquisition and talent management should build relationships internally and externally by engaging with Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities. Partner with community organizations and Elders to understand diverse perspectives and cultural nuances that should inform workplace practices and involve women from these communities in co-creating policies, career development initiatives, and talent strategies (by us, for us).
- 6** If HR is responsible for EDI initiatives, ensure that those in HR functions are qualified to implement inclusive practices that respond to the needs of equity-deserving groups. This may require EDI training for HR professionals and collaboration with internal and external EDI experts.

Employers & Organizations



1 Commit to building stronger relationships with and inclusive workplaces for Indigenous Peoples, developing a reconciliation and decolonization strategy with clear steps and accountability mechanisms. Align this strategy with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action #92 for Business and Reconciliation and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

2 Acknowledge the ways in which your organization and industry have discriminated against and harmed members of equity-deserving groups. As a step forward, focus on eliminating wage gaps and providing equitable compensation (e.g., salary, benefits, performance bonuses, promotions, pension, etc.).

3 Recognize that you need to fix how your workplace functions instead of presenting career development solutions that are built around "fixing" Indigenous, Black, and racialized women or expecting them to assimilate to white-dominant workplace norms. Decision-makers should commit to systemic change by integrating anti-racism, decolonization, and equity principles into organizational missions, business strategies, and policies while actively counteracting biases in talent management that may limit the advancement of equity-deserving groups.

Truth and Reconciliation Call to Action #92

"We call upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources. This would include, but not be limited to, the following:

- I. Commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships, and obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples before proceeding with economic development projects.*
- II. Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.*
- III. Provide education for management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations. This will require skills based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism."*

4

Adopt inclusive career development strategies that incorporate disaggregated data to identify and address disparities in advancement, retention, and leadership representation. Design and implement long term, sustainable career development initiatives tailored to the unique barriers and needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, ensuring alignment with their lived experiences and cultural values.

5

Offer specific professional learning opportunities for people managers on equitable and inclusive management and hold them accountable for completing this training.

6

Integrate ERGs more meaningfully into organizational structures, including career development initiatives, funding, executive sponsorship, and performance reviews. Ensure that ERG contributions are tied to broader EDI goals and performance metrics, and compensate or reward ERG members for their work so that the relationship is not extractive.

Educational Institutes & Academia

1

Continue to build on research applying an intersectional lens that is focused on career development topics including leadership development, succession planning, role of direct managers, performance management, etc.

2

Strengthen collaborative partnerships with Indigenous, Black, and racialized women on research projects and consult with these groups on research design and methodology.

3

Create research hubs with a focus on intersectionality and that support scholars conducting research that sheds light on the needs and gaps of career advancement for Indigenous, Black, and racialized people.

4

Develop curriculum and programming with a focus on creating inclusive career pathways for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.

5

Provide opportunities for Indigenous students to connect with Elders, Indigenous career advisors, and experienced career coaches over the course of their studies to discuss career goals and pathways.

6

Ensure diverse representation of faculty and students in faculties and career professionals supporting co-op/ internship opportunities.

Government

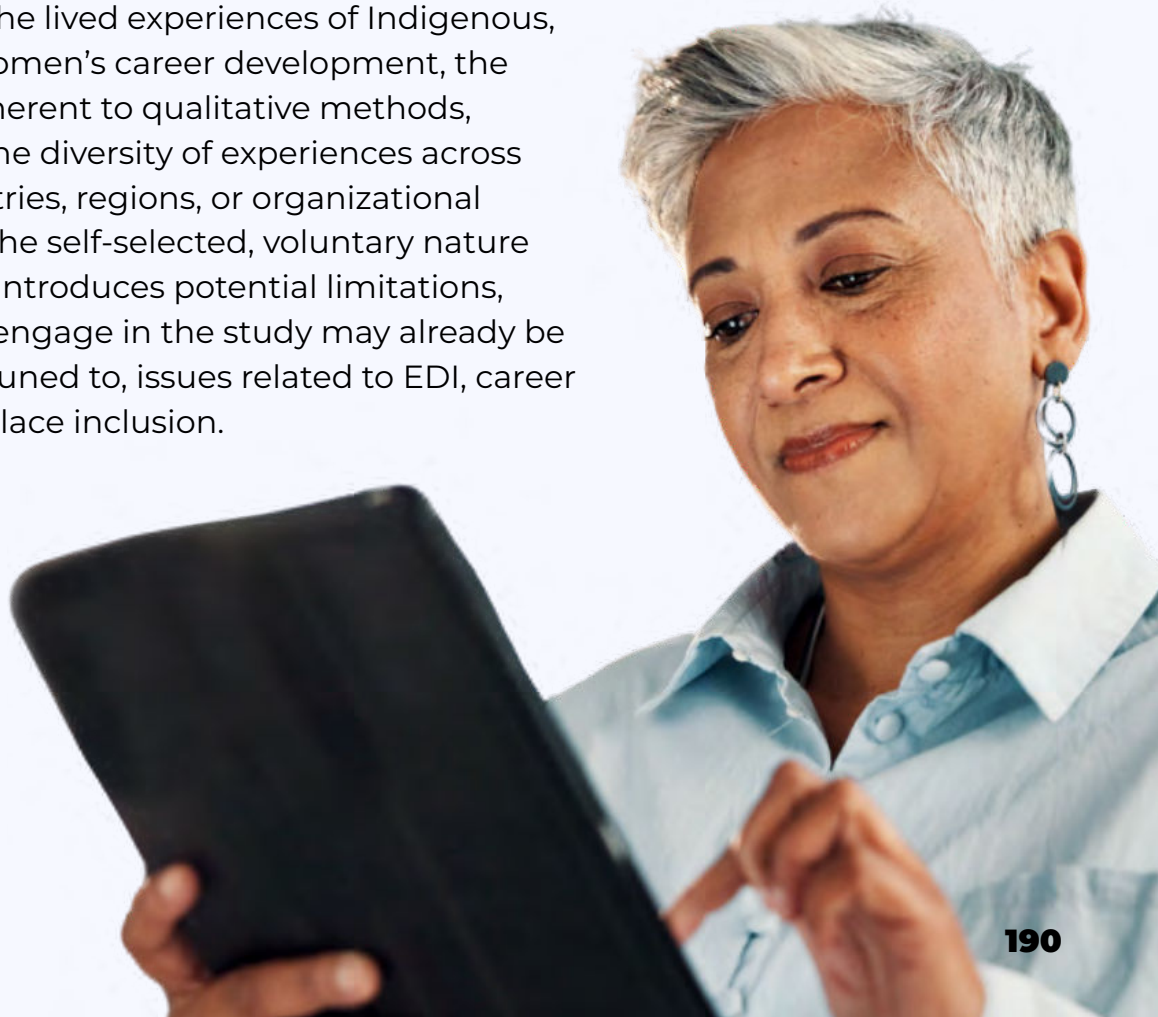
- 1** Continue to advance the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and UNDRIP. Provide guidance to organizations on how to align with these reconciliation frameworks.
- 2** Expand the Pay Equity Act to public institutions to enforce widespread pay transparency. Require companies and public institutions to disclose wage gaps by gender, race, disability, etc. and develop accountability mechanisms to close these gaps.
- 3** Set workplace equity standards for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.
- 4** Strengthen legal protections for whistleblowers reporting workplace discrimination or racism, and hold perpetrators accountable through an external body that receives and addresses grievances and complaints.
- 5** Fund multi-sector partnerships that examine intersectional barriers to career development as well as projects led by Indigenous, Black, and racialized organizations that focus on structural change and employ an intersectional lens.
- 6** Fund tailored and holistic career development programs, services, and assistance that adopt an intersectional and culturally informed lens for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.
- 7** Offer grants or fund career development programs that provide options specifically for international students and newcomers who are not citizens or permanent residents.
- 8** Ensure there are sufficient childcare spaces that meet parent/caregiver needs in terms of access, equity, cost, etc.
- 9** Fund internships/micro-internships for students from equity-deserving groups and newcomers regardless of age, especially those in high-growth or high-demand industries.

Conclusion

Limitations, Next Steps, and Further Studies

This research study focused explicitly on the career development experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in Canadian workplaces by hearing directly from these groups, as well as Indigenous, Black, racialized, and white participants employed in human resources, EDI, ERG and career development functions. While this research is desperately needed to improve our understanding of the career gaps experienced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, there is also fertile ground to extend the lens to include other systemically marginalized groups (e.g., Francophone participants), those with overlapping intersections, such as Indigenous, Black, or racialized women with disability, and intersectionality within a singular equity-deserving group (e.g., differences between Inuit, Métis, and First Nations, or nuances within the Asian community). Notably, participants from this study who represented multiple equity-deserving groups (i.e., racialized women with a disability) pointed out unique, compounding barriers and gaps which should be explored in more detail.

While the qualitative nature of this research provided rich, in-depth insights into the lived experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's career development, the smaller sample size, inherent to qualitative methods, may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across different sectors, industries, regions, or organizational contexts. Additionally, the self-selected, voluntary nature of the participant pool introduces potential limitations, as those who chose to engage in the study may already be more invested in, or attuned to, issues related to EDI, career development, or workplace inclusion.



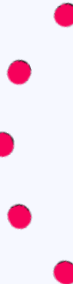
As a result, their perspectives may differ from individuals who did not participate in this study due to barriers such as time, access, or a lack of experience. These limitations point to opportunities for future research to build on this foundation by including additional participants, and to explore and expand on emerging themes identified in this report.

This research offers a snapshot of a particular moment in time, reflecting the fact that data for this study was collected in 2023, during a period when many organizations were actively investing in EDI initiatives. In 2025 when this report was published, there have been notable shifts in organizational priorities which, in some cases, have led to a retreat from EDI. As such, it should be noted that participants' reflections on career development were shaped by the specific societal and institutional dynamics of the time, which may differ from current or future contexts. The rapidly evolving nature of EDI highlights the need for ongoing research to capture how these changes continue to impact workplace inclusion and the career development of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.

Another subject that requires more research relates to the prevalence of white people in HR and EDI roles, or as people managers and how this intersects with the experience of people of colour. This research study suggested that white HR personnel may lack nuanced knowledge of the career development barriers experienced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, as well as experience with targeted solutions to address these gaps. However, this finding requires further targeted research as the white

participant cohort for this study was smaller than the other groups, and it lacked participation from those identifying as white men. In fact, men of all racial and ethnic backgrounds were not represented in this study as a whole, despite efforts to promote it with relevant communities (i.e., HR personnel). Further research could address this gap and examine men's role in HR and EDI, or their impact on Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's career development.

One theme that emerged from this research is the critical, yet underexplored, role of direct managers in the career development of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized women. Findings from this report suggest that white direct managers are often sources of bias and discrimination, revealing the persistent influence of systemic racism in common managerial practices and its impact on the career trajectories of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. There is an urgent need for further research to better understand these hierarchical dynamics and to identify effective interventions that can foster more equitable and supportive environments. At the same time, Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's experience with direct managers who are members of an equity-deserving group can, at times, reveal a complex dynamic. Participants described these managers as both sources of support and, in certain cases, obstacles, which underscores the need for deeper research into how shared racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds shape managerial relationships, and how Indigenous, Black, and racialized people in leadership roles have to navigate the pressures of advancing their own careers



within inequitable systems while also being expected to mentor, support, and advocate for others pursuing similar career paths. A specific issue that came up in this study that lends itself to further examination is related to the dynamic of racialized leaders and people managers with Indigenous, Black, and racialized women, including experiences with gatekeeping and misogyny. Research that centres these realities is essential to creating support systems in workplaces that acknowledge and address the specific challenges Indigenous, Black, and racialized women face. Understanding this layered experience is essential to developing policies and practices that genuinely support Indigenous, Black, and racialized women through all stages of their career development.

Ongoing research into career development barriers and solutions for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women is essential for addressing systemic inequities in Canadian workplaces. As this study has shown, Indigenous, Black, and racialized women face a unique set of challenges compared to their white and male peers, including dual forms of discrimination based on gender and race, a lack of meaningful access to career development programs, and limited leadership opportunities. These barriers not only impede their professional advancement but also perpetuate broader socio-economic inequity. By continuing to study these issues, we can better understand the intersectional factors that shape their career trajectories and identify targeted, effective solutions to promote equity and inclusion in the workplace. Research can inform policies and

practices that dismantle discriminatory structures, provide tailored support, and create more equitable opportunities for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women to thrive in their careers. Without ongoing examination, progress will stagnate and Canada's commitment to human rights, employment rights, and decent and dignified work may falter.



Appendix A: Research Team Bios

The research team encompasses Dr. Golnaz Golnaraghi (Principal Investigator), Dana Carriere (Sub-Investigator), Seema Taneja (Sub-Investigator), Deborah Eliezer (Research Assistant), and Natasha Sidi (Project Manager). This team's persistence, dedication, and expertise have been the driving force behind this research project and report.

Dr. Golnaz Golnaraghi

Lead Investigator & Researcher

Dr. Golnaraghi is an Iranian Canadian first generation immigrant and an award-winning social entrepreneur and leadership, equity and inclusion expert. On a mission to advance corporate representation and leadership of Indigenous, Black and racialized women at all levels in workplaces, she is the Founder of Accelerate Her Future, a leading career accelerator offering tailored programs by and for Black, Indigenous and racialized women while creating networks of solidarity, allyship and action. With an MBA from the UBC Sauder School of Business and a DBA from Athabasca University, Dr. Golnaraghi has held positions in marketing management with large multinational consulting firms and was a professor and scholar in the postsecondary sector for a number of years. Dr. Golnaraghi's research interests include racialized women in the workplace, racialized immigrants and the labour market. This project directly aligns with Dr. Golnaraghi's hopes and goals to advance Indigenous, Black and racialized women in their careers of choice while addressing the gap in career developing research through an intersectional lens. A key insight Dr. Golnaraghi has had from this project is the critical need for people leaders, senior leaders and organizations to understand and acknowledge the unique experiences and barriers faced by Indigenous, Black and racialized women and take meaningful actions through allyship, sponsorship, and solutions that create more equitable outcomes.

Dana Carriere

Sub Investigator & Indigenous Researcher

Dana Carriere, a proud Swampy Cree/Métis woman from Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation with a strong connection to her Cree culture, values, and worldview. She is the Indigenous Engagement Lead at Accelerate Her Future. She is also the Director of Indigenous Business Education and Engagement at the Edwards School of Business. Through her work, Dana hopes to inform and empower individuals to be socially conscious professionals that advance their commitments to truth and reconciliation and engagement with Indigenous Peoples and communities in meaningful, authentic ways. A key insight Dana had from this project is realizing that her experiences in the workplace as an Indigenous woman are not unique, and that there are many Indigenous women and women of colour with similar lived experiences. By coming together as Black, Indigenous and racialized women to share our experiences, this project aligns with Dana's hopes and goals to use our voices to create awareness and make a difference.

Seema Taneja

Sub Investigator & Researcher

As a senior researcher, Seema Taneja is a community-based consultant that works to advance a balanced understanding of people's experiences and needs through research, metric development, engagement, and evaluation. Seema combines both her training in community psychology and her experience with diversity in communities to find new meaning and perspectives. She owns Taneja Consulting Inc., a consulting firm that prioritizes

both qualitative and quantitative research while keeping the needs of the stakeholder at the centre of its work. Through her work, Seema aspires to bring people together; to bring a newfound appreciation of people's experiences that can be weaved into community-based approaches in programming, planning, and policies. This project directly aligns with Seema's hopes and goals of advancing a nuanced understanding of the needs of Black, Indigenous, and racialized women for employers to engage with. A key insight that Seema had while participating in this project is the need for employers to be responsive, accountable, and targeted in advancing women's careers. Employers are at the centre of developing the careers of racialized women and it is essential that they sponsor these women so they can get a seat at decision-making tables.

Deborah Eliezer

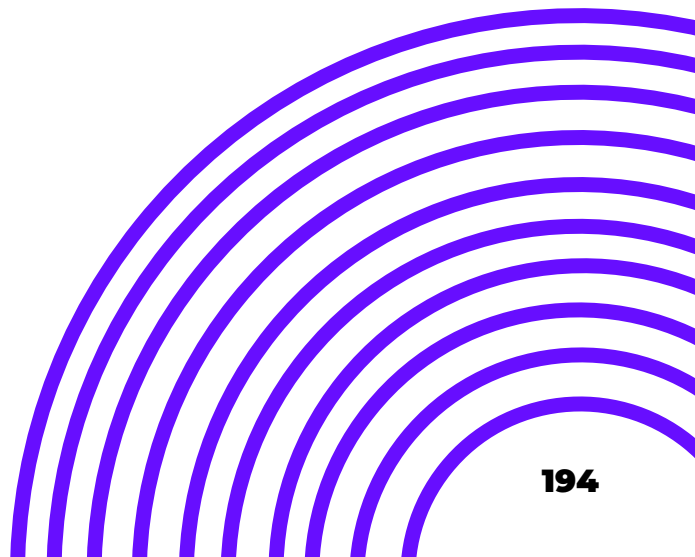
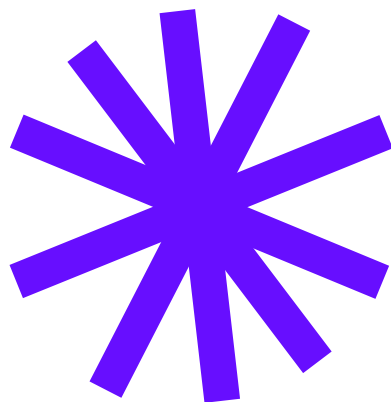
Research Assistant

Deborah Eliezer recently graduated from the Bachelor of Commerce program at MacEwan University with a focus in marketing. She joined Accelerate Her Future in 2021 and is currently working as a Research Assistant. She values utilizing her research skills to deepen her and other people's understanding of the various barriers equity-deserving groups face due to power structures, and how we can all promote equity. This project directly aligns with Deborah's hopes and goals to advance the understanding of the lived experiences of Indigenous, Black and racialized women, breaking down barriers and advocating for change. A key insight Deborah had from participating in this project is the urgent need to humanize workplaces and foster cultural shifts away from individualistic mindsets.

Natasha Sidi

UX & Project Management

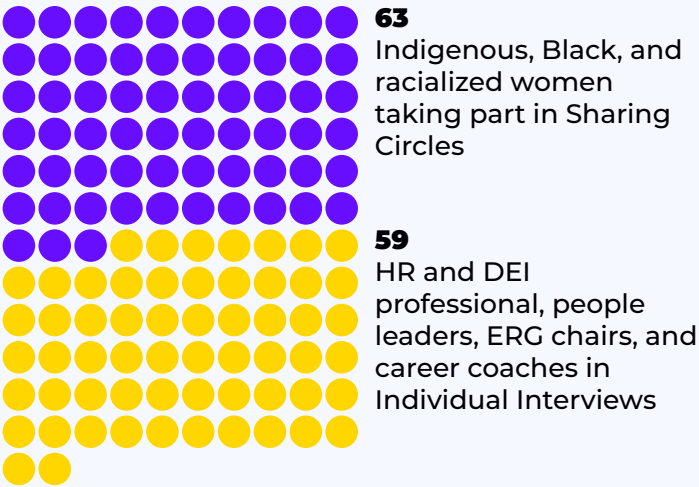
Natasha Sidi is the Operations and UX Lead at Accelerate Her Future. An advocate for gender and racial equity, she began her career as an educator and further pursued her advocacy work in the non-profit, for-profit, tech, and social enterprise sectors. At Accelerate Her Future, she provides design and tech expertise, and is co-creating programs that centre the voices of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in business and STEM across Canada. This project aligns with Natasha's background and values of her advocacy work for Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in the workplace. A key insight Natasha had from participating in this project was the lack of awareness and foresight within workplaces, notably among leaders, who disregard the critical importance of ensuring the psychological safety of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women. This oversight can perpetuate significant harm to their health in the long term, and their careers, a reality that demands immediate recognition.



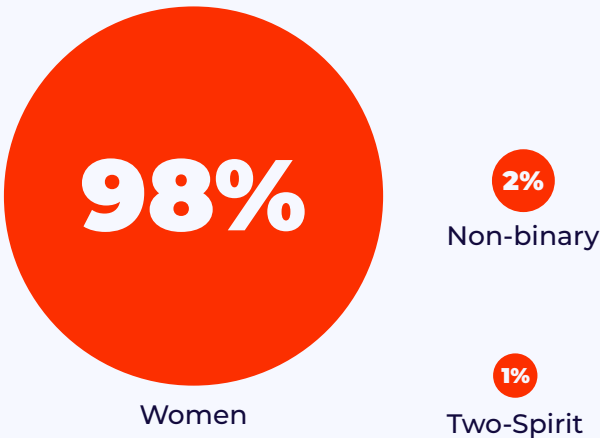
Appendix B: Methodology

Research Participation

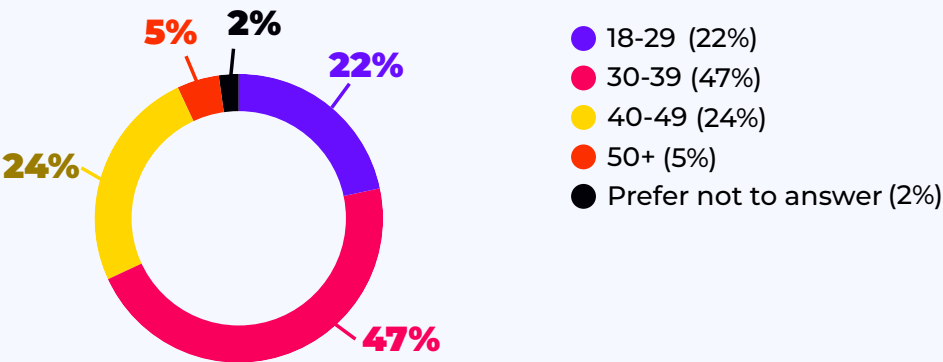
122 Total Participants



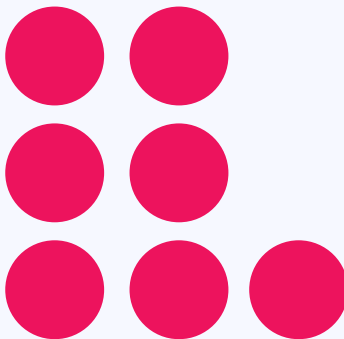
Gender Identity



Age Range



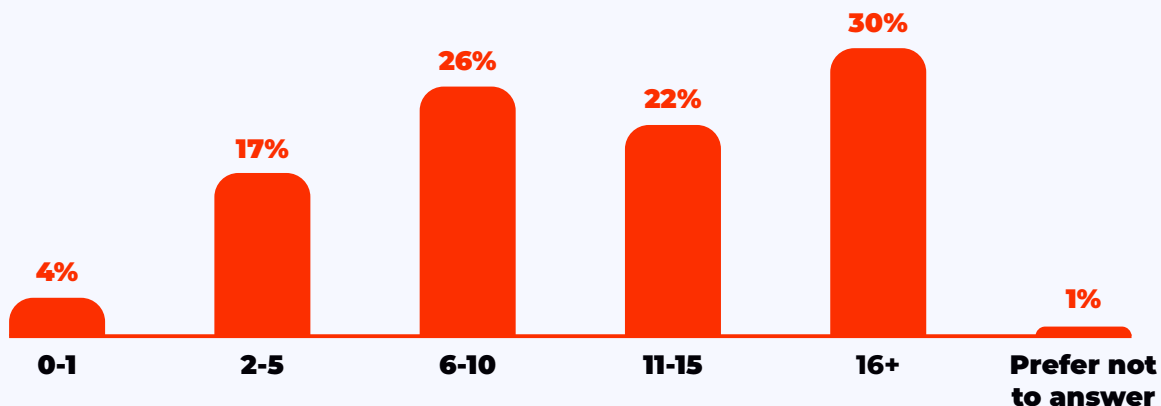
Total Provinces 7



Race/Ethnicity



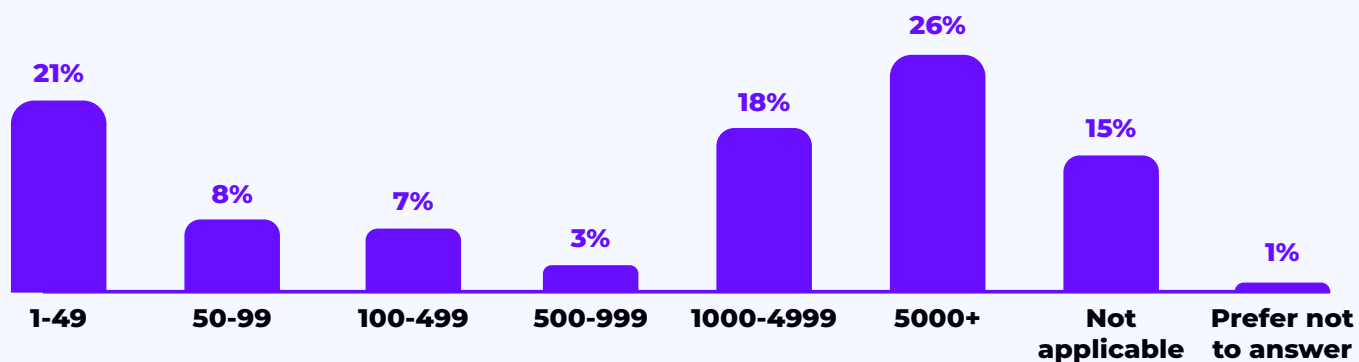
Years of Work Experience



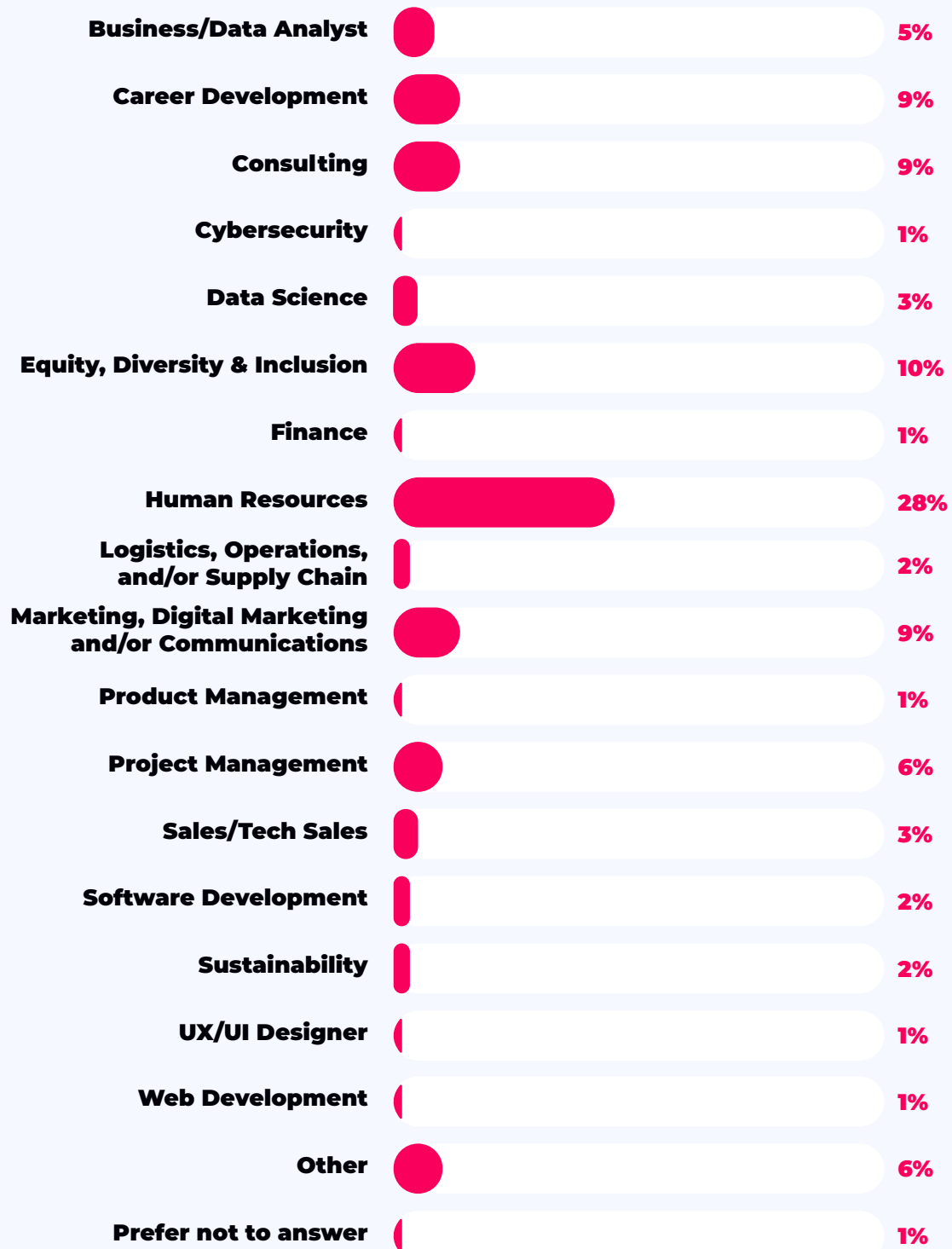
Level in the Organization



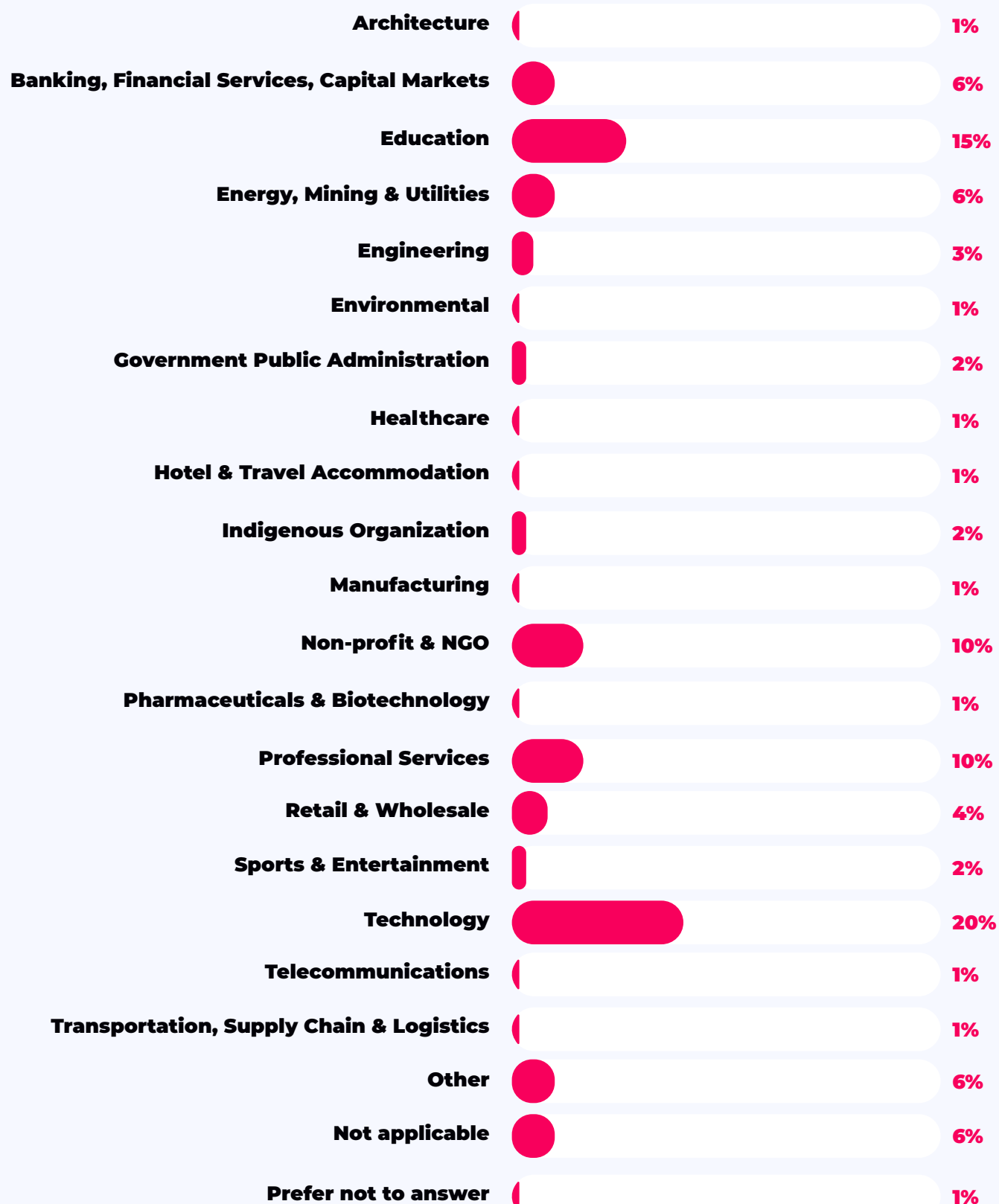
Organization Size



Field of Work



Industry/Sector



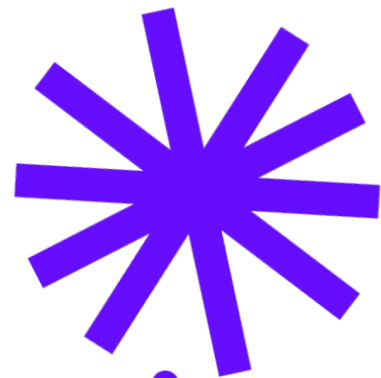
Methodology

The main goal of this research project was to determine the career development experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women at different stages of their careers within Canadian workplaces with a focus on those in business and tech functional roles. The methodology consisted of Sharing Circles and Individual Interviews.

The research team hosted Sharing Circles with Indigenous, Black, and racialized women to better understand their career development experiences and needs. Additionally, HR and EDI professionals, people leaders, ERG Chairs and career coaches were consulted to assess their understanding of career development inequities, needs, and gaps faced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized women as well as the workplace supports, initiatives, and programs that are or are not in place to address them. By approaching this research more holistically, the goal was to determine workplace understanding of the needs of women under study, and how services, initiatives, and supports align with needs and experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women in order to better identify gaps, opportunities, and preliminary recommendations.

Our Overarching Research Questions

1. What are career development barriers experienced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized women at all stages of their careers within Canadian workplaces?
2. How do workplaces understand and address the career development needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women?
3. What are the gaps in career development initiatives and supports (i.e., what is working or not working with existing initiatives, supports, and solutions)?
4. What preliminary career development recommendations do Indigenous, Black, and racialized women offer in terms of needs/wants in order to advance their career goals?



Research Participant Recruitment

Research participants were recruited through Accelerate Her Future's newsletter, website, LinkedIn and Instagram pages, as well as community organization, HR communities, and partner organizations, using Research Ethics Board (REB) approved newsletter and email copy, flyers, and social media assets. Participants were compensated for their time with CAD \$50.00 honorarium with the aim to give and counter an "extractive" traditional research approach.

Sharing Circles

The sharing circle occurred between May-August 2023, with participants including Indigenous, Black, and racialized women with workplace experience and were approximately 120 minutes each. Eligibility criteria for sharing circles included participants to self-identify as an Indigenous, Black, or racialized woman, be 18+ years of age, residing in Canada, with work experience in the areas of business and tech functional areas (i.e., finance, accounting, consultant, human resources, marketing, supply chain, operations, business analyst, project management, software engineer, design, data analytics/science, product manager, or web development, etc.).

A trauma-informed lens was essential to this work. As such the research team adopted transparency about our methodology, data collection, and usage through a consent form. We also had a trained psychotherapist available to sharing circle participants if needed while also making mental health resources available in advance. We invited an Elder to the sharing circles involving Indigenous

research participants to support our moderator in opening the sharing circle in a good way by conducting a smudge, and prayer, and to reassure the Indigenous women research participants that appropriate Indigenous protocols have been followed. In our consent form, we provided the option for tobacco offering to Indigenous participants.

Dana Carriere hosted and moderated the discussions in the sharing circles with Indigenous participants, and Dr. Golnaz Golnaraghi and Seema Taneja hosted and moderated the other sharing circles with Black and other racialized participants. At the beginning of each sharing circle, the moderator briefly explained the research project, reviewed the consent form, and then used a semi-structured approach using a discussion guide to pose a series of questions, with follow up probes.



The questions asked in sharing circles:

1. Thinking about your career, how would you describe your career development experiences?
2. Thinking about what has helped you with your career development. Specifically, towards meeting your career goals. Tell us about your experiences.
3. Now think about what has stood in the way of your career development? Specifically, what are the challenges you've encountered in meeting your career goals? Why are they challenges?
4. What initiatives, programs, or supports have you accessed inside your workplace offered by your employer to help you with your career development?
5. What initiatives, programs or supports have you accessed outside of the workplace to help you with your career development?
6. In a perfect world, if anything were possible and there were no constraints, what initiatives, programs or supports do you wish your employer would offer to help you with your career development?
7. If you could give career advice to a [Indigenous, Black, or racialized women] starting out on their career in business or tech, what would you share about their career development? What else do they need to know?

Interviews

The Individual interviews occurred between May - August 2023 and were approximately 60-75 minutes in length each. Eligibility for interviews included participants of all genders and race/ethnicity in HR, EDI, people leader, ERG chair, and career coaching roles, 18+ years of age, residing in Canada, with Canadian workplace experience.

Dana Carriere, Dr. Golnaz Golnaraghi, and Seema Taneja hosted and moderated individual interviews. At the beginning of each interview, the moderator briefly explained the research project, reviewed the consent form, and then posed a series of questions.



The questions asked in interviews:

1. Thinking about your work, how would you describe the career development needs of Black, Indigenous and/or racialized women? How are these needs different from other talent pools (like white identifying women or men)?
2. What career development supports, initiatives and programs do you believe can address Black, Indigenous and/or racialized women's career development needs?
3. Does your organization provide any of these supports, initiatives and programs either internally or through a third party and to what level of employee? If yes, explain. If not, explain what are the barriers to your organization offering supports, initiatives and programs.
4. Does your organization's approach to career development differ for Black, Indigenous and/or racialized women in comparison to what's offered to white identifying women? If yes, how?
5. What is working well with these career development supports, initiatives and programs? How do you measure the impact?
6. What are the gaps with these career development supports, initiatives and programs? What is not working? What continues to be the challenge with them?
7. In a perfect world, if anything were possible and there were no constraints, what career development initiatives, programs or supports do you wish were available to Black, Indigenous and racialized women to help them meet their career goals?
8. What is stopping your organization/organizations from offering these initiatives, programs or supports internally or through a third party?



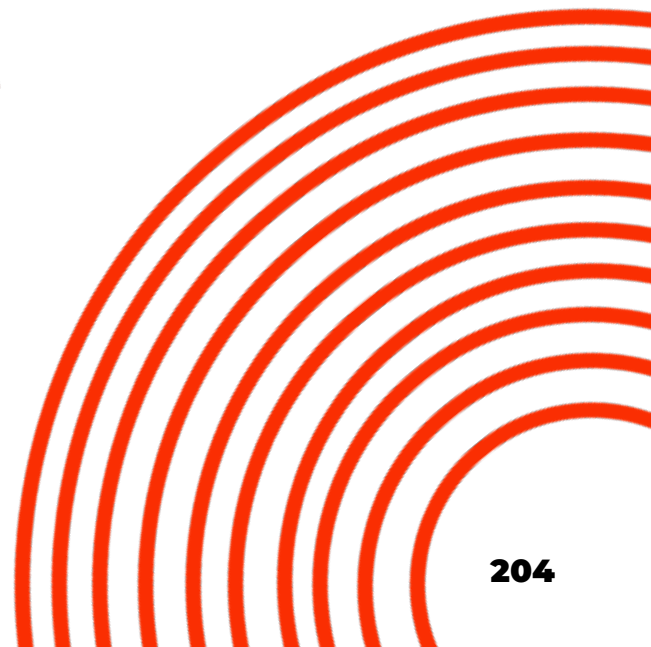
Data Analysis

Note takers transcribed all sharing circles and Interview participant responses. We anonymized the data with participant codes and reviewed all transcripts to ensure company names or other identifying information was also anonymized. The transcripts for the Sharing Circles and Interviews constituted the primary form of data collected and analyzed for the study. At least two members of the research team coded each transcript. Then, the research team performed a thematic analysis. Data analysis consists of the research team

coming together to discuss, debate, and converge around key themes and sub-themes that emerge in the data.

Consulting and engaging our community at different stages of this research was an important part of our process. Since Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities are diverse and may have different views and differing protocols or processes they may be familiar with or wish to have in place, we have engaged the Accelerate Her Future volunteer Advisory Group in this process.

This group encompasses Indigenous, Black, and racialized women at different stages of their careers in the fields of business and tech, human resources, equity and inclusion, and career development, representing the voices and lived and professional experiences of our community. We initially engaged this group to share the project protocol and process prior to commencing data collection activities. After completing preliminary coding and thematic analysis of Sharing Circles and Interviews with Indigenous research participants, we consulted with the Advisory Group with respect to our themes and findings to reflect and respect diverse worldviews, cultures, knowledge, histories, etc.



Appendix C: Glossary

Terms used in the EDI space are ever evolving. The glossary below includes terms and corresponding definitions that reflect the current discourse of 2025, but these meanings may evolve or change in the future. Terms in this glossary employ a general definition since many of these concepts are not exclusive to Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's experience, but where possible, we have also included specific details that contextualized the term as it relates to Indigenous, Black, and racialized women's career development. Additionally, research participants utilized a range of terms to describe their experience with career development, but for the purposes of this report, we have tried to use consistent and official terms (e.g., using imposter phenomenon instead of imposter syndrome).

2SLGBTQIA+: An acronym used to represent various gender and sexual identities, including Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, queer or questioning, and others who identify as a member of a sexual and/ or gender diverse community but use different terminologies.

Affinity bias: The tendency to favour people who look like you or have similar backgrounds (e.g., attended the same university, practice the same religion).

Allyship: The practice of proactively recognizing your privilege and leveraging your power to disrupt and rebuild systems of oppression that discriminate against systemically marginalized people. Allyship that is responsive to the needs of Indigenous, Black, and racialized women is continuous, action-driven, beneficiary-centred, and founded in solidarity with Indigenous, Black, and racialized women to dismantle systemic barriers.

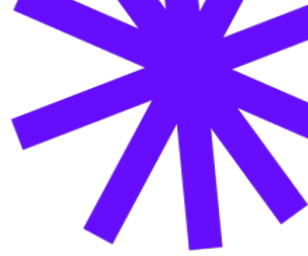
Anti-discrimination: Policies, practices, or laws intended to prevent the unfair or inequitable treatment of someone.

Assimilation: The act, oftentimes implicit, expected, or forced, of adopting the dominant culture's norms, practices, behaviours, and beliefs (e.g., language/speech, appearance, clothing, mannerisms, activities/hobbies, social behaviour, religion, etc.) to fit in. Typically requires those who are different, especially immigrants and newcomers, to abandon, disavow, or mask their divergent norms.

Bias: The overt or subconscious process of discriminating against someone, or in positive cases, favouring someone. Biases can impact judgement and decision-making, leading to entrenched systems of discrimination that favour certain qualities, characteristics, and people over others.

Broken-rung: The barriers women face advancing to managerial or leadership levels in the workplace.

Burnout: Emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress which can be caused or exacerbated by the psychological repercussions of inequity in the workplace. Career burnout is ultimately an equity issue related to health and wellbeing in the workplace, and a symptom of systems of oppression like white supremacy which can have a disproportionate impact on Indigenous, Black, and racialized women.



Career development: An active, continuous process leading to improved career outcomes. Responsive, equitable, and inclusive career development is co-created so that Indigenous, Black, and racialized women have ownership over their career trajectories and workplaces actively dismantle systemic barriers, foster inclusion, and create meaningful, tailored pathways for advancement.

Code switching: Adapting and shifting language, behaviour, and cognition based on living in multiple cultures. Often used by Black and racialized women to overcome stereotypes and assimilate to professional environments perpetuating white-dominant norms.

Colonialism: The exploitation of people, resources, and land by a foreign power. In Canada, European colonial powers established control (by violence, deception, assimilation, and genocide) and displaced Indigenous Peoples, leading to significant cultural, social, and economic impacts, as well as intergenerational trauma.

Cultural taxation: Being expected to take on the invisible labour of educating peers and managing their emotions, specifically for Indigenous, Black, and racialized people around topics related to social justice and equity.

Decolonization: The act of rectifying exploitative political and cultural power structures, systems, and ideologies that were established during colonial rule on Indigenous populations. Macro decolonization addresses systemic or institutional change while micro decolonization focuses on the mind, body, and values.

Diversity: The variety of human differences and backgrounds, commonly linked to the representation of people with different races, genders, sexualities, cultures, ethnicities, language, abilities, ages, etc.

Emotional tax: Feeling one must remain on guard to protect against bias due to race or gender.

Employee resource groups (ERGs): Employee-led groups typically organized around a particular identity or demographic (e.g., women, Asian people, members of 2SLGBTQIA+ community) and their allies that provides a safe space for those with similar lived experiences to connect on issues of importance, build connections with one another, and support their personal, professional, and career development.

Equity: An outcome-driven approach that centres on providing fair, but not necessarily uniform treatment to achieve equal outcomes, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach.

Equity-deserving groups: A designation made by the Government of Canada to recognize five groups of peoples who have experienced systemic marginalization: Indigenous Peoples, women, racialized individuals, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and those with disabilities.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI): A framework for recognizing bias, prejudice, and discrimination and rectifying this systemic oppression by creating the conditions to uplift and treat people fairly. Please see individual entries for “equity”, “diversity”, and “inclusion” for more information.

Eurocentrism: The belief that European culture, values, traditions, and customs are superior to others, especially non-Western nations, and that they should be adopted as the norm.

Feminist: A person who believes in social, political, and economic equality for women.

Gender diverse: A blanket term for people who do not identify exclusively as a man or woman. It encompasses multiple gender identities and includes members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Gender equity: Fair and just treatment on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

Hegemonic masculinity: A set of behaviours, often characterized by hyper-masculinity and reinforced in gender roles across society, that normalizes or legitimizes men's dominance over women. Please see "patriarchy" for more information.

Imposter phenomenon: The self-doubt of one's skills, knowledge, identity, and ability compared to others, despite evidence to the contrary.

Inclusion: Ensuring that everyone has equal access to positive outcomes and feels like they are represented, respected, their needs are met, and that they belong. Inclusion works to improve outcomes and opportunities for equity-deserving groups, eliminate systemic structures of inequity rooted in historical or cultural injustices such as white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism, and ableism, and responds to current socio-political imperatives, such as the urgent calls for decolonization and truth and reconciliation.

Internalized racism: A repercussion of white supremacy culture in which someone accepts negative, stereotypical, or devaluing beliefs about their own race.

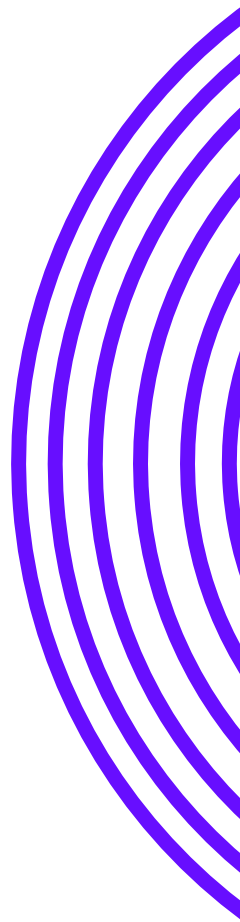
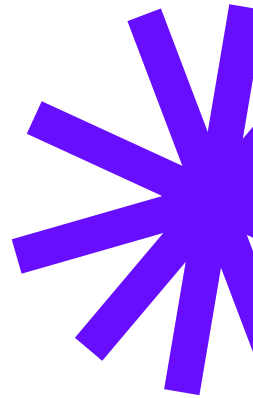
Intersectionality: A term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the diverse and overlapping identities, such as race, gender, age, religion, and ability, that shape individual experiences.

Lateral violence: Verbal, physical, emotional, or psychological violence that occurs between colleagues or peers. For Indigenous, Black, or racialized people, this may take the shape of lateral violence being perpetrated by members of their own community who have internalized racism, colonialism, patriarchy, and xenophobia.

Mentorship: Guidance and support given by a mentor, who typically has more experience, knowledge, and influence, to a mentee.

Meritocracy: The theory that advancement decisions should be based solely on the merit of candidates. In reality, numerous flaws, biases, and inequitable practices in recruitment, hiring, and promotion processes make the concept of a meritocracy impossible until true equity is achieved for all.

Microaggression: An action or behaviour that demonstrates prejudice or discrimination towards a member of a systemically marginalized group. Sometimes subtle or unconscious, these slights perpetuate stereotypes while negatively impacting the safety and wellbeing of the person who is the subject of the microaggression.



Misogynoir: A term, coined by Moya Bailey, used to describe the unique burden of racism and sexism experienced by Black women.

Nepotism: Predetermined decisions taken by those in positions of power, especially related to hiring and promotions, that favour those with pre-existing connections (e.g., family, friends, peers, associates, etc.).

Othering: Treating someone who is different (i.e., not a member of the dominant social group) as if they are not welcome or part of your group or community, often through exclusion, isolation, and marginalization.

Patriarchy: A system of social hierarchy where those who identify as men hold the power and use their privilege to enforce inequity on those who identify as women or gender diverse individuals.

Performative: Superficial or unauthentic support for equity, diversity, and inclusion. Oftentimes, performative support takes the shape of a visible gesture, but it does not actually contribute to advancing inclusion and meaningfully addressing the needs of equity-deserving groups.

Saviour complex: Patronizing or condescending behaviour by those with privilege in the name of wanting to help or “save” those experiencing systemic oppression without truly empathizing with them or listening to their needs.

Sponsorship: A person in a position of power actively using their influence and decision-making authority to advocate for and support the professional development of a sponsee by enhancing their visibility with senior leaders, putting them forward for promotions or high visibility initiatives, promoting their work, and giving them access to networks, opportunities, and resources.

Stereotype: A generalized, unsubstantiated belief about a particular group that is harmful, simplistic, or untrue.

Systemic marginalization: When groups of people are disadvantaged and discriminated against, especially when it comes to access, visibility, and opportunities, through systems, structures, and institutions.

Systemic racism: The structural enforcement of the notion that different races possess distinct, inherent qualities as a means of valuing certain races above others. Often results in the treatment of members of one race with prejudice, discrimination, bias, and violence. See “white supremacy” for more.

Tokenism: Performative support for equity, diversity, and inclusion that does not actually improve outcomes or foster change for systemically marginalized groups.

Truth and Reconciliation: A concept designed to facilitate the rebuilding of Canada’s relationship with Indigenous Peoples and as a way to honour the victims, survivors, families, and communities of residential schools. The movement for truth and reconciliation openly confronts past atrocities while also envisioning a future where bridges are built between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to foster unity.



White supremacy: The deep-rooted belief that white people (and their customs, norms, and culture) are superior to other races. Used as justification for white people to dominate and discriminate against non-white people.

White supremacy culture: A set of cultural norms, practices, and values that perpetuate the dominance of white people, and centre whiteness as the standard or “normal” conduct for institutions, organizations, and society.

Xenophobia: Prejudice or bias against people from other countries or foreign customs, values, and cultures.

