

# VISIBLE MINORITY CHAMPIONS & CHAIRS COMMITTEE (VMCC)

## Preface

The Visible Minority Champions & Chairs Committee (VMCC) was convened in 2007, established a terms of reference and determined the core membership of the committee in 2008. The membership on the committee is comprised of Visible Minorities Champions and Chairs of departmental visible minorities committees - **also included is ex-officio representation from the National Council of Visible Minorities (NCVM)**, and senior representatives of central agencies, that is: the Public Service Commission, the Canada Public Service Agency and the Canada School of Public Service.<sup>1</sup>

The committee functions as a multi-stakeholder advisory mechanism for the federal public service to provide advice to VM Champions on how best to meet the employment equity needs of federal public servants.

## SUMMARY

The mandate of the committee is to:

*“...provide a forum for Visible Minorities Champions and network chairs to discuss and take action on issues related to the recruitment, career development, retention and equitable advancement of employees belonging to visible minorities groups.”*

The committee is scheduled to meet quarterly or as required to promote six activities associated with the Committee’s mandate:

1. Share effective best practices and lessons learned across the public service;
2. Actively promote employment equity programs;
3. Report on challenges and successes;
4. Consult with experts to help resolve visible minorities issues;
5. Establish concrete actions for Champions and chairs that will advance visible minorities’ issues;
6. Develop priorities and plans;

To date, the Committee has invited selected guest presenters to provide insight on visible minority issues to improve the socio-economic situation of federal public servants who happen to be visible minorities.

These presentations are intended to stimulate the thinking around best practices for sustainable frameworks and governance systems in departments, and to make

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<sup>1</sup> VMCC Terms of Reference

recommendations on short and long-term employment equity objectives specifically designed for visible minority employees in the federal public service (FPS).

The current situation of under-representation of VM's within the FPS was identified as a key priority for the Clerk of the Privy Council (PCO) in his plans for "Public Service Renewal" 2007. The impetus of PCO led to the establishment of the VMCC as a committee of experts mandated to provide the FPS with an expert perspective on the under-representation of VM's in the FPS of Canada.

Since inception, the committee has listened to several presentations as per their Terms of Reference (TOR)<sup>2</sup> to: 1. Share effective best practices and lessons learned across the public service; 2. Actively promote employment equity programs; 3. Report on challenges and successes; however, to date, the other activities stipulated in their TOR have not been addressed or employed; 4. Consult with experts to help resolve visible minorities' issues; 5. Establish concrete actions for Champions and chairs that will advance visible minorities issues; 6. Develop priorities and plans.

In fact, the minutes of the committee's meetings do not reflect the actual discussions held, consultation of experts (i.e. NCVM, EE experts, knowledge experts – Senator Oliver, etc.), determination of priorities or plans for the advancement of visible minorities - consequently there are no action items attached to the committee's minutes. Most disturbing is that there is not even an accurate list of attendees from previous meetings identifying members of the committee and/or stakeholders.

It is curious to also note that there have been neither recommendations nor reports summarizing the key conclusions that resulted from the VMCC's work. The committee has not even established an efficient communication framework among Visible Minorities' Champions and the Chairs of the Networks to identify and/or disseminate support of best practices or new initiatives. The Committee remains a collection of ad hoc stakeholders, some with the an ill-conceived agenda(s) looking to obtain "social credit" from their respective departments due to their participation in this committee's forum.

## **BACKGROUND**

There is an ample body of evidence (surveys, case studies, statistical information, etc.) that suggests that personal decisions around taking action on issues related to the recruitment, career development, retention and equitable advancement of employees belonging to visible minorities groups are not solely based on merit, staffing guidelines/values, human resource plans or financial considerations.

Most hiring Managers do not consider employment equity issues specific to visible minorities in arriving at their staffing decisions, or even consider recruitment, career development, retention and equitable advancement of visible minorities to be a financial

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<sup>2</sup> See Annex 1 VMCC TOR

investment of “value” in bringing diverse thinking and experience to the federal public service. The evidence from past programs and policies also suggests that factual information<sup>3</sup> is in itself of relatively little effect, and that hiring managers attitudes are only weakly correlated to behavior changes from learning associated with program implementation. These attitudes are often-times based on racial stereo-types or the individuals own limited experiences with VM’s and do not reflect FPS values.

What is needed is a mechanism to instill in the culture of the FPS acceptance that values and ethics related to employment equity principles support the notion of merit.

Experience has also demonstrated that concern alone does not produce results-oriented activities, as confirmed by the failure of “*Embracing Change, VM specific recruitment programs, leadership training programs and targeted departmental initiatives*,” thus the standard policies that governments use to motivate individuals — presentations on statistics (factual information), information/educational sessions/workshops, incentives (credit on performance reviews, performance pay, promotions for EE actions, etc.) and an appeal to “do the right thing” — may not work effectively for the majority of the FPS hiring Managers and senior executives.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

The analytical machinery of business and government is inherently rigid, statistically technical and financial in nature. Thus, it is not surprising to find that technical and financial models dominate employment equity policy and program thinking. However, NCVM’s experience on these issues indicate that technical and financial models are of limited value in understanding social conventions and the drivers that can motivate individual behavioral (culture) change.

The problem is that the FPS continues to search for risk-free and low-impact solutions that won't cause any disruptions to the status quo supported by ill-conceived government roll-out strategies.

These past programs "Embracing Change", targeted VM initiatives, departmental programs, etc. floundered in the problems of implementation and the current "Public Service Renewal" seems destined to the same fate, with respect to employment equity.

New frameworks and guidelines designed to motivate culturally conservative rational decision makers (senior executives, hiring managers, staffing advisors and many consultants) often fail, as the responsible persons chose to disregard even the best staffing guideline or technical HR employment equity considerations/information in favor of “right fit” criteria and the personal pick of the Manager to fill vacancies. Policies and programs based on careful social statistical and economic analysis have often been

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<sup>3</sup> Departmental Employment Equity Plans (gap analysis, federal public service senior management priorities, values of fairness, respect and equity, etc.); Embracing Change; 2006/07 Public Service Commission Annual Report to Parliament

psychologically naive or politically unrealistic. The reason lies in oversimplified analysis that has “serious blind spots in the area of human behavior.”<sup>4</sup>

The ruling paradigm for employment equity initiatives is that the additional dollar cost, management time and HR efforts required to employ the use of targeted VM recruitment and training programs is not cost-effective and only benefits a select few to the exclusion of others (non-VM's) who are also deserving of that type of short and long-term career investment.

The fact that employment equity provisions and programs have not enhanced the situation of under-representation for VM's and the reality for VM's in the FPS remains under-employment...has made little difference in the prevailing “attitude” that can be characterized as “backlash” to VM initiatives. **This backlash is a direct result of the uninformed perception of our non-VM colleagues and Managers.** The resultant “value” (payback) of hiring, promoting and retaining VM's appeal only to a minority of the FPS hiring Managers and senior executives and even those claiming to be well-informed and believing themselves to be acting in a morally correct fashion consider the extra work and financial costs an added burden (with little reward).

It is often difficult to get commitment to programs on the basis of values and ethics because the social model does not “compute”. This observation may help explain the well-documented drop-off rate, poor retention, lack of promotion and hiring of visible minorities despite the massive amount of financial resources that was allocated to resolving the under-representation issue (30\$M Embracing Change, targeted language training, etc.).

It has been argued that the high dollar costs associated with recent VM targeted programs including extra efforts and funds spent for language training, etc. prove that VM's are not ready to assume leadership roles (VM's do not merit it) in the FPS - And that the real costs of targeted programs (leadership development, language training, etc.) and initiatives do not reflect a cost-benefit ratio of success that is palatable to many departments.

The argument above has been used to dispute the validity of continuing to engage in initiatives to close the “VM gap” associated with the outdated 2001 census (analysis) on labor market availability and therefore any role of government to close it. The argument assumes that hiring managers and senior executives are applying decision rules *as if* they were making fair, transparent, equitable business like value vs. cost calculations to decide the staffing issues associated with hiring, promotion and retention. But as we know, the persistent under-representation of VM's, the fact that an inordinate amount of attention has been focused on “testing, training and development” refutes this argument. The fact that there are qualified pools of VM's who have competed and found to be qualified at every level but continue to be passed over (based on “right fit” criteria) for positions further highlights the hiring managers and senior executives who allow this “attitude” to undermine the goal and priority of closing the VM gap in the federal public service.

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<sup>4</sup> Director, Special Projects, National Council of Visible Minorities in the Federal Public Service (NCVM)

These same VM's are asked to re-compete time and time again as Managers manipulate the hiring system to exclude them.<sup>5</sup> . Hence the recent push on mentoring programs and renewal of leadership programs, which have taken the VM initiative back several years.

The high drop-off rate of VM recruitment, retention and promotion reveal perceptions about social concepts like diversity, racism and discrimination, but does not explain the basis of the perceptions. The current FPS policies or programs with their methods for analysis of successful employment equity initiatives have proven not suitable for investigating these underlying factors.

The above discussion does imply that hiring managers and senior executives are insensitive to their VM colleagues. However, there are those few leaders in the federal public service whose actions suggest that their response is not based on the application of policy and program models used by governments and business. These successful hiring managers and senior executives were frequently personally committed to the issues, enthusiastic and confident about their staffing decisions and have understood diversity and merit.

The disconnect between the policy/program model and personal decision models is also highlighted from a psychological perspective, the reasons for drop off of VM's in recruitment, retention and promotion would be because the programs and policies are not triggering real drivers for personal behavior change in the system. The lack of success of employment equity policies and programs raise serious doubts about the efficacy of EE programs and policies predicated on a simple attitude model.

Past policies and program evaluations have established that simply informing hiring managers of the current priority, moral impetus and organizational need to increase VM representation is not a strong motivator. Some of this may be because the information is of a type, e.g. statistical or values based, that does not "compute", or the source is not known or trusted. However, the current state of mind of the listener also affects whether they process or act on information. For example, those who are happy with the *status quo* tend not to absorb information, even in cases where they would agree, (upon absorbing the information) that acting would represent a net gain. The implication is, again, that for information to work, these individuals must be convinced to be unsatisfied with their current situation.<sup>6</sup>

Although attempts to change behaviors of hiring managers by just using information have not been successful, there is hope that factual information and senior management intervention can affect attitudes over time. However, five conditions must be in effect before a pro-employment equity information campaign will result in changing attitudes:

1. The information must be vivid: attract and hold the attention of the target audience;

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<sup>5</sup> PSC VM EX Recruitment initiative; ES Recruitment initiative NRCan, etc.

<sup>6</sup> End-use Data and Analysis Centre, Simon Fraser University March 31, 2004

2. Information must come from a source that is perceived to be credible and trustworthy;
3. The information must be well-understood, i.e. concrete and personalized,
4. Campaigns that focus on promoting a small number of specific actions are more effective than those that promote general concepts and information, and
5. Information that is compatible with pre-existing values is remembered more favorably.

### **CHANGE AGENTS**

While behavioral evidence makes it clear that individuals do not use a simple attitude model of future costs and benefits in making decisions about employment equity, it is not clear what the key drivers actually are.

“... [T]here remains a very substantial gap in our knowledge of the actual decision rules that hiring managers and senior executives employ in making or foregoing employment equity staffing decisions... [U]nderstanding these decision matrixes, and applying this understanding to the design of specific EE programs, is a critical step to achieving much higher adoption rates in recruitment, retention and promotion of VM’s.<sup>7</sup>”

Motivations appear to be complex, situation-dependent and culturally-influenced. As indicated from discussions with hiring managers, *intrinsic satisfaction* is an obvious driver. There are many for whom fair, transparent, equitable behavior is in itself satisfying enough to lead to substantial actions to close employment equity gaps and support their VM colleagues. They do not feel they are giving anything up. Their personal drivers may include a commitment to ethical behavior, sense of fairness or social responsibility.

There is some element of intrinsic satisfaction from conscious fair, transparent, equitable behavior for almost everyone. However, “promoting employment equity” mostly connotes sacrifice in a culture that extols conservatism and self-promotion. Increased fair, transparent, equitable behavior would require a benefit other than intrinsic satisfaction. Policy and Program implementation in the FPS should include social marketing campaigns about employment equity, ethics or the merits of an inclusive FPS. These campaigns would have to connect to all employees in other ways, perhaps as adjuncts to more concrete program concepts such as “diversity/inclusiveness” which may be more consistent with prevailing, norms and therefore perhaps an easier sell.

Another set of drivers may arise if people associate recruitment, retention and promotion of VM’s with other desirable attributes. Most individuals do not perceive VM EE initiatives as an intentional activity, but as a side-effect of other meritorious staffing activities, and so the majority of outcomes are by-products, not objectives of their choices. Being compliant on the EE plan for the department can and should be a source of pride, for example it singles out the achievement of your department as inclusive, diverse and high performing in supporting HR policies and programs.

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<sup>7</sup> Director, Special Projects, NCVM

## CONCLUSION

While it is difficult to generalize about motivations that work, there is general agreement on how behavior change is diffused through society, namely that people communicate with each other in social networks, and are more likely to change behavior based on those interactions, rather than listen to experts or authorities.

Conventional social marketing often relies heavily on information dissemination through media related forums and activities in creating awareness and understanding of issues related to culture and diversity, but are limited in its ability to promote behavior change.

“... [W]hen individuals find themselves in an ambiguous situation, (i.e. they do not exactly understand concepts or are in doubt) [they tend to] compare their behavior with that of people similar to them...In these types of uncertain situations individuals tend to rely on information from others as the major input into their decision making process...This premise is strongly based on the fact that imitation is part of human behavior and that the "models" here are respected “friends” and “colleagues” rather than actual processes, guidelines, experts, educational programs or pamphlets.”<sup>8</sup>

Marketing of a strategy to increase the value of VM recruitment, retention and promotion also depends on whether people believe their behavior has a genuine effect on society or their environment (perceived effectiveness). Thus there is an additional ‘critical mass’ effect — in addition to imitating others in their social networks, individuals are more likely to perceive their actions to be effective if they see others acting similarly. Conversely the “commons” problem may apply: people tend to avoid supporting targeted employment equity staffing actions behavior because they believe that others will not follow suit, or that they will be viewed as providing an unfair advantage or even increased costs in response to staffing activities. **On occasion, the resistance of others is at the direct expense of those acting ethically**, e.g. the lone manager who provides leadership on VM staffing significantly impacting his time and budget.

A third element, in addition to social diffusion and perceived effectiveness, lies in the continuous process of positive reinforcement and differentiation that is at the core of behavioral change.

Effective positive reinforcement will: appeal to most individual’s emotions and self-esteem, address the specific needs and interests of the target audience, and use humor and distinctive images to grab attention. The image associated with employment equity has to speak to the concepts that people have of themselves and want to show others. Thus the appeal must be different for different “clusters” or “social groups” of employees, defined in terms of demographics, income, and various lifestyle indicators. These clusters can be defined statistically, based on FPS studies, survey results and focus group information on hiring managers that have already been collected.

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<sup>8</sup> Constructs of Behavior St. George University of Toronto Campus, *University of Toronto*

*Employment Equity for Visible Minorities*, messages should enhance perceptions of the effectiveness of individuals' proactive behaviors to support EE initiatives – which could address the way people see themselves and want others to see them. The FPS could utilize the effective deployment of the social diffusion approach that includes analysis and research to define clusters of interest among hiring Managers and senior executives that respond to different messages.

Through the use of influential leaders that appeal specifically to those clusters, as well as knowledgeable change agents in key departmental network communities, professional groups, unions and related groups to influence the vision of an inclusive FPS at events, and using marketing techniques like 'networking to promote those in EE programs' or other workplace initiatives.

**In summary, to effect a culture change in the FPS, a more comprehensive approach, which uses a variety of communication techniques, performance monitoring, performance assessments and accountability mechanisms are needed to reach out to hiring Managers and Senior Executives.**

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