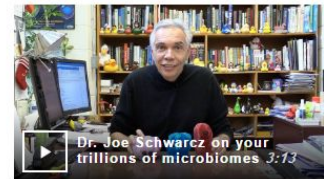


Opinion: In Montreal, leadership diversity remains a work in progress

VIDEO



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DiversityLeads examined 3,087 senior leaders from the largest organizations in six sectors — elected, public, private, voluntary, education and appointments to agencies, boards and commissions — with headquarters in Greater Montreal. Women, who account for 51.3 per cent of the residents of Greater Montreal, now fill 37.6 per cent of senior leadership positions, it found.



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Efforts to advance evidence-based approaches to diversity and inclusion are more important than ever, particularly in the wake of the U.S. election. The campaign and its outcome exposed misogyny and racism and seemingly legitimized barbaric views on women and immigrants.

But in Quebec, there are signs of progress, at least where gender is concerned. [Our recent research](#) on women in leadership roles in the Greater Montreal area shows significant gains over the last three years. DiversityLeads examined 3,087 senior leaders from the largest organizations in six sectors — elected, public, private, voluntary, education and appointments to agencies, boards and commissions — with headquarters in Greater Montreal.

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Women, who account for 51.3 per cent of the residents of Greater Montreal, now fill 37.6 per cent of senior leadership positions, a 20.5-per-cent increase since our last analysis in 2012. The voluntary sector has achieved parity (50.8 per cent women in senior leadership roles). Municipal and provincial agencies, boards and commissions are close, at 49.7 per cent. While the corporate sector had the lowest representation, with only 21.3 per cent women in executive positions and on boards in the largest companies headquartered in Montreal, this is a dramatic increase since 2012, when only 15 per cent were women.

Quebec leads the way on gender diversity with female-friendly policies, introducing affordable childcare, advances in paternity leave and gender parity in cabinet more than a decade ago.

But there is still much to be done. In 2015, 25 per cent of private-sector corporations in Montreal still had no women in senior positions. Given women's high representation in some companies, it's clear the issue is not the availability of well-qualified women, but rather the priority placed on gender equity and the processes in place to promote it.

However, it is not all sunny days and happy talk. Our study also shows that visible minorities (as defined under Canada's Employment Equity Legislation) are dramatically under-represented, comprising 20.3 per cent of the population in the communities studied, but holding only 4.8 per cent of leadership positions. Even more concerning is that this is a substantial decline from 2012 (5.7 per cent). Senior public sector roles had 7.6 per cent visible minorities. The private sector was the lowest, at 1.7 per cent. But this masked huge differences among firms. Again, while the numbers are small, this does suggest the issue is not the pool of qualified candidates, but a matter of priorities and processes.

In this context, when we consider Quebec's significant progress with gender diversity, it is critical to think about how to adapt some of those strategies to a broader definition of diversity.

The federal government's proposed Bill C-25, An Act to Amend the Canada Business Corporations Act, the Canada Cooperatives Act, the Canada Not-for-Profit Corporations Act and the Competition Act, is an important piece of legislation for the first time requiring all large corporations to report on diversity. While some argue the law does not go far enough, and prefer quotas to the proposed "comply or explain" approach, we think it is worth a try. What is critical is to ensure that the legislation addresses more than gender. Encouraging corporations to replace white men with white women will not lead to the diverse leadership we need to excel and compete globally.

Regardless of the approach, laws are only words on paper. We all have a role to play. The evidence is strong that diversity and inclusion are tied to organizational performance, whether in banking, or education, or policing. There need to be consequences for not achieving diversity performance targets. Robust tracking, rigorous evaluation and transparency are critical.

If consumers and corporations put their money where their mouth is and make purchasing and procurement decisions based on corporate diversity performance, we can drive change.

Wendy Cukier is the founder of Ryerson University's Diversity Institute and the principal investigator for DiversityLeads. Suzanne Gagnon is a professor in organizational behaviour in the Desautels Faculty of Management, McGill University, and the co-investigator in Montreal for DiversityLeads/DiversitéEnTête.



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