Briefing September 2004

The Voices of Visible Minorities Speaking Out on Breaking Down Barriers

*F*auzia is a 35-year-old woman from Pakistan who came to Canada two years ago. Although she entered under the "skilled immigrant" program, her search for employment in her field has not been easy: her educational background and previous work experience as a geologist did little to spark interest among potential Canadian employers. As a consequence, Fauzia has worked at relatively menial jobs in order to survive. Two months ago, she left her restaurant job for a team leader position in a geological consulting firm, a position she learned about through her landlord. Fauzia is excited. This, she believes, is the "foot in the door" she's been looking for. She sees it as her opportunity to use her talents.*

John, a black, Canadian-born man living in Toronto, had been working as a database administrator at a medium-sized company for three years when a managerial position became vacant. Possessing previous management experience and a solid knowledge of the company's information technology (IT) structures, he felt that he *was in a great position to be promoted. He was competing with only one other candidate, a white man. When the director told John that the position had been given to the other candidate, John asked why. He was told that even though his qualifications met the requirements of the job, he did not "fit" with the management culture of the organization.*

Both Fauzia and John may be experiencing systemic discrimination. Fauzia's experience matches those of many newcomers to Canada. For example, a recent Statistics Canada survey revealed that, in 2001, six in 10 newcomers worked in a different occupational field than they had before coming to Canada.[1] The same survey showed that many immigrants find themselves in sales and service or processing and manufacturing occupations after they arrive. Not only do many immigrants with degrees find themselves in low-skilled occupations, but they also earn less than Canadian-born workers, whether they work in a high-skilled or low-skilled occupation.[2]

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

How widespread is the perception of discrimination? Statistics Canada found that most visible minorities in Canada have not encountered discrimination or unfair treatment. However, they are four times more likely than non-visible minorities to report discrimination or unfair treatment because of their "ethnicity, culture, race, language, accent or religion."[3] Among the visible minority groups, blacks were more likely to report discrimination (32 per cent) than those of South Asian (21 per cent) or Chinese (18 per cent) origin.[4]

This briefing summarizes the key learnings from seven focus groups with visible minorities in management, supervisory or professional roles in Canadian public and private sector organizations.[5] (See box, "Methodology.") It speaks to a number of barriers encountered by focus group participants in getting work and in advancing within their organizations. Most importantly, it describes various approaches that participants have taken to overcome barriers to success. The final part of the briefing outlines visible minorities' advice to Canadian organizations on how they might fully maximize the talents of this growing pool of labour.[6]

Methodology

In the fall and winter of 2003–04, The Conference Board of Canada undertook seven focus groups with visible minorities who had achieved some success in their chosen fields. The purpose of the focus groups was to learn about their perspectives on barriers to success, as well as about the factors (personal and organizational) that contributed to their success. The five locations, Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, Montréal and Halifax, were selected because of their sizable populations of visible minorities. Two focus groups each were held in Montréal and Vancouver.

Three of the focus groups took place with federal government employees, three with private and parapublic sector employees, and one with both private and public sector employees.

Participants were recruited in two ways: focus group participants from the federal public sector were recruited by the Public Service Commission, and private and parapublic sector participants were recruited by an independent market research firm.

To be selected, focus group participants had to be managers, supervisors or work in professional positions. A total of 68 visible minorities attended the focus groups.

Focus Group Participant Profile	Number of Participants
Sector	
Private	37
Public	31
Gender	
Male	40
Female	28
Canadian-born/immigrant*	
Canadian-born	29
Recent immigrant	16
Non-recent immigrant (1996 and prior)	20
Age**	
21 to 30	13
31 to 40	25
41 to 50	10
51+	14
Years in current position***	
Less than 12 months	22
1–5 years	33
6–10 years	2
10+ years	5

*Three participants did not specify year of immigration.
**Six participants did not specify their age.
***Six participants did not specify how long they had been in their current positions.

Most of the visible minorities in Canada are immigrants. According to the 2001 Census, 84 per cent of visible minorities are immigrants, while 14 per cent are second-generation and 2 per cent are third-generation or more.

Source: Statistics Canada, *Ethnic Diversity Survey* [on-line] (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Sept. 29, 2003). Available from Internet: <www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/030929/d030929a.htm>. [Accessed July 8, 2004.]

WHY SHOULD ORGANIZATIONS CARE ABOUT FULLY INTEGRATING VISIBLE MINORITIES?

Organizations must step up their efforts to attract and integrate visible minorities for one simple reason: to maximize access to human capital for the benefit of organizations, the economy and our country. Canada is aging. Labour shortages are already being felt in certain regions and occupational categories. For example, skilled construction tradespeople, medical technologists and technicians, aircraft mechanics, police officers and other skilled workers are in demand in many organizations.[7] The Conference Board of Canada expects labour shortages to become generalized in 2011 when the first baby boomers reach age 65 and retire.

These looming skills shortages signal a need for Canada to attract large numbers of immigrants. At one time, Canada received most of its immigrants from European nations. In contrast, today's newcomers are from countries such as China, India, Korea, Pakistan, the Philippines and Taiwan.[8] As a result, most immigrants (73 per cent in 2003) are visible minorities. These changing immigration patterns are responsible for the growth

in Canada's visible minority population, which today numbers roughly 3.9 million, or 13.4 per cent of the population—up from only 6.3 per cent in 1986.

Canada is not the only country with an aging population. Nor are we alone in turning to immigration to fill skilled worker positions. This means that we will increasingly be competing with other nations for the talent we need. For example, Australia, one of Canada's competitors, increased its target immigration levels in 2001, with most of the increase in the skilled worker stream. The United States, another major competitor for talent, has also increased the number of skilled temporary workers it will accept. (Once landed, these workers can apply for permanent status.) European nations, not traditionally known as "immigration countries," have also begun to develop programs to attract skilled immigrants.[9]

ARE ORGANIZATIONS OVERLOOKING TALENT?

Visible minorities' representation in the labour force is in line with their labour market availability.[10] Overall, in 2001, visible minorities had a participation rate of 66.0 per cent, close to the Canadian average of 66.4 per cent.[11] However, their numbers at senior levels in organizations and on boards of directors are dismally low. For example, visible minorities made up only 1.7 per cent of all the directors on boards of organizations surveyed for the 2003 Canada Spencer Stuart Board Index. Similarly, a Conference Board survey of almost 70 organizations, conducted in April 2004, revealed that only 3 per cent of executive positions were filled by visible minorities.[12]

Organizations that responded to The Conference Board of Canada's survey reported that their pools of candidates for senior management positions do not include many qualified visible minorities, largely because they promote from within. Yet the most recent *Employment Equity Act Annual Report* on federally legislated private sector organizations showed that only 46.8 per cent of visible minorities with the skills and competencies for senior manager positions were in such positions in 2002.[13] This finding suggests there may be a gap between organizations' perceptions about the talent pool and reality. Certainly, there is a strong feeling among visible minorities that a "sticky floor" limits their opportunities for initial advancement and a "glass (or cement) ceiling" stops them from attaining top positions in organizations.

EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS

What barriers prevent visible minorities from advancing or getting work in their fields? Focus group participants felt there were many.

"Racism is not something readily discernable by the senses: you cannot see it, hear it, smell it, touch it, but it does exist. It is subtle, invisible, and ethereal."

—Senator Donald Oliver

LACK OF FIT

One of the main barriers involves an applicant's "fit" with a position or an organization. Research has shown that personality and person–organization fit are powerful predictors of job performance.[14] However, many visible minorities believe this is an area where systemic discrimination hides. Indeed, the criterion of "personal suitability," which can exist for positions at all levels of an organization, appears to be a determining factor for management roles. For example, executive search firms looking to staff a senior position focus on whether a candidate's personality meshes with the overall organizational culture.[15] The issue, from the point of view of several visible minorities in our focus groups, is that fit or suitability often comes down to chemistry between the hiring manager and the candidate. Visible minority candidates who had been unable to create a rapport with hiring managers due to different backgrounds and ethnicity left the interviews feeling that prejudice may have been to blame.

For many focus group participants, the phrase "lack of fit" signalled a propensity for sameness, preservation of the status quo and underlying racism. Furthermore, they perceived that managers look for their mirror images in hiring or, as some said, they often "hire like me." They also felt that there are relatively few people with hiring authority who are a visible minority and that this was a bias in the selection process and a major barrier to their being hired or promoted.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

A working knowledge of either of Canada's official languages is a must in order to succeed. For many immigrants in our focus groups, becoming fully functional in English or French was the first obstacle they had to overcome. Those who had desired a career in the federal public service or wished to advance within it found that they had to become fluent in both official languages. This can be quite a challenge for those whose mother tongue is neither English nor French. Meeting the language requirement entails a substantial investment of time and money.

"I change my accent when I deal with certain clients. You get used to speaking in different ways in different situations."

—Toronto focus group participant

Beyond that, however, many immigrant focus group participants felt that merely speaking with an accent had lost them opportunities. Several participants who had an accent felt that employers had screened them out of job competitions. In fact, some believed that phone interviews were used as a way to weed them out, since recruiters rarely called back after the initial phone interview. Some also felt that their names, if they were unusual in Canada, signalled their immigrant status and gave "employers an excuse not to call back." For focus group participants, the perceived reluctance of employers to look beyond accents and unusual names revealed a tendency to sameness and implicit discrimination.

UNFAMILIARITY WITH THE "CANADIAN WAY"

Immigrant visible minorities face another challenge: understanding and doing things the "Canadian way" (i.e., learning how to adjust and adapt to Canadian customs and organizations). They reported that a lack of knowledge of Canadian norms and values had been a barrier to realizing their full potential. Focus group participants expressed a strong desire to learn about Canada. But they also acknowledged that it takes time to adapt to a culture, to learn to interact effectively with potential employers and to perform well in their jobs.

Participants talked about how cultural norms guide Canadians' perceptions of what constitutes a solid resumé or a good job interview. Similarly, cultural norms determine what constitutes appropriate interactions. One focus group participant said that his employer had told him that some co-workers felt uncomfortable about "his way of doing things" and that he should try to be more "polite" and "communicate better." In addition, some of the immigrant visible minorities in the focus groups had found that mere fluency in English or French was not always enough to be fully valued. They also had to use the right tone and inflection and choose the right words. Language is, in other words, more than the words within it. It is also shaped by the culture in which we live.

LACK OF RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN CREDENTIALS AND WORK EXPERIENCE

We heard that many of the participants in our focus groups, especially immigrants in the skilled worker stream, had come to Canada on the understanding that it would be easy to find work and to achieve a high quality of life. However, this expectation had frequently been unmet and become a source of frustration. The sentiment was summed up as follows: "I have the feeling that I was good enough for immigration but not good enough for Canadian employers….If Canada needs cab drivers, then Canada should get cab drivers, not professionals."

Indeed, we heard that Canadian organizations appear wary not only of educational credentials from other countries but also of work experience gained in other parts of the world. Ironically, Canadian organizations outsource and offshore a variety of tasks to countries such as China and India, where Chinese engineers create manufactured goods for the Canadian market and accredited Indian IT specialists give Canadians advice on their computer problems over the phone. However, when these individuals come as immigrants to Canada to do similar work, their credentials are not accepted and their work experience is not valued. In other words, their talents are not used to the maximum once they come to Canada.

DIFFERENT STANDARDS FOR PERFORMANCE

Many workers in Canadian organizations feel they have to work hard to succeed. However, visible minorities in our focus groups felt that they experienced more pressure than their non-visible minority colleagues. Many reasons were given. In some cases, visible minorities felt that managers needed to justify the hiring of a visible minority to the rest of the organization. Pointing to the visible minority employee's results and long hours would convince other managers and employees of the value of this talent. In other cases, the source of pressure was co-workers' suspicions that jobs or promotions went to people *because* they were visible minorities, not because

they had the appropriate competencies and skills. This need to "be exceptional to be qualified" has been documented by other research.[16] "You need to be one step ahead of everyone else to succeed," according to one focus group participant.

In work environments where there were few visible minorities, many placed significant pressure on themselves to succeed "because, if you don't, you may be responsible for curbing the career opportunities of the visible minorities who enter the organization after you." Managers will think twice about hiring another person of colour, because "the last time I hired a visible minority, it really didn't work out." This is a heavy burden for anyone, but it is especially heavy for visible minorities, who may not have a mentor, a network or other forms of support to access for advice.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO GET AHEAD? WORDS OF ADVICE

Focus group participants described a number of personal and professional factors that have contributed to their success.

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR CAREER

We heard that successful visible minorities, especially those born in Canada, take charge of their careers. According to focus group participants, this means:

- researching potential employers to determine their commitment to diversity. An organization's commitment to diversity is gauged by whether its Internet site includes pages dedicated to diversity, whether its leaders have spoken publicly about the importance of diversity to their business, and whether it has a diverse employee base and visible minorities in senior positions. "I like working with people that are like me. It would be nice to go to work and feel normal," said one Halifax focus group participant;
- participating in as many interviews and selection processes as possible to continuously improve interview skills and thus increase their chances of moving ahead. This also includes following up with interviewers afterwards for feedback on the interview;
- taking risks to make their skills and capabilities visible, such as accepting stretch assignments or acting positions and volunteering for special projects and tasks. The goal is to "brand" themselves as employees who are eager and willing to contribute and advance;

- becoming intimately acquainted with the resources available to assist them. This can include seeking out and taking every opportunity to grow and develop professionally by applying to career development programs, taking internal and external courses, participating in networks or finding a mentor or coach;
- evaluating the work environment and specific situations in order to know when to "go with the flow" and when to stand on principle (i.e., to "pick your battles"). This helps ensure that they are perceived as corporate players; and
- working hard because "when you work hard, you stand out….And with delivery of results, others also see your competencies."

FOSTER A "CAN DO" ATTITUDE

For the visible minorities in our focus groups who had recently immigrated to Canada, the most important key to success was demonstrating a positive attitude, including never saying no to a task or challenge and showing initiative. Many believed that they had been promoted and given developmental opportunities as a result of this attitude.

GET CANADIAN WORK EXPERIENCE— ANY IS BETTER THAN NONE

Immigrant focus group participants told us that it was important to show prospective employers that they had some experience in a Canadian workplace. Thus, shortly after their arrival in Canada, some had made a conscious effort to take any job while they continued to apply for work more in line with their credentials. In addition, many newcomers took lower-level assignments, pursuing such positions in larger organizations in order to get a "foot in the door." They felt that being part of a larger organization—any part—held greater promise for advancement in the future. Still others volunteered with non-governmental organizations both to get Canadian experience and to find worthwhile opportunities through networking with other volunteers.

GET CANADIAN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE— ANY IS BETTER THAN NONE

Immigrant visible minorities have also come to learn that having any type of diploma, certificate or degree from a Canadian educational institution will facilitate their job hunt. They felt that Canadian employers disregard applicants with years of education and work experience in other countries but are more receptive to those

who have attended Canadian schools. According to one focus group participant, "Once I had a diploma from a local training institute, I received more interest." Another stated, "My degree from a Canadian university made all the difference in the world."

To ramp up their understanding of Canadian culture, focus group participants told us they took courses on writing resumés and on honing their interview skills to help them interact more successfully with organizations. Others took language courses to soften an accent or improve writing skills. Many also upgraded their skills by taking courses and enrolling in programs at colleges and universities.

MARKET KNOWLEDGE OF OTHER LANGUAGES

Immigrant visible minorities also said that they marketed their knowledge of other languages and cultures to prospective employers. Several focus group participants believed that this knowledge had been instrumental in landing them jobs in organizations with a global reach or those interested in expanding their businesses in these immigrants' countries of origin.

NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK

Networks, whether internal or external to the workplace, professional or personal, have played a major role in visible minorities' success at work: "You need to create networks everywhere you go to succeed," according to one focus group participant.

Many of the visible minorities we talked to attributed their success in securing a job to their networks of family, friends and community. From their perspective, employers are more receptive to an application when it comes through someone the employer already knows. This view was voiced in all the focus groups. The "who you know" factor was seen as especially important in smaller centres in Canada.

Once inside an organization, recent immigrants reported participating in social outings and nurturing friendships with other recently immigrated employees. They were conscious of the importance of developing a support structure around them for their personal well-being and for success at work.

Learning the "Canadian way" was difficult for many. But those who had the benefit of colleagues and others who took the time to explain "how things are done around here" found their integration into workplaces and communities to be easier.

"The small things, the simple things go a long way to make me feel welcome in an organization: a smile or a gesture from managers and co-workers . . . people coming by my desk to say hi."

—Toronto focus group participant

Many organizations in Canada have formal networks and committees for visible minority staff. These networks provide opportunities for visible minorities to connect with other visible minorities in the organization and to provide input into programs, activities and policies that relate to them. Focus group participants who were part of such networks and committees indicated that their participation made them feel more engaged in the workplace. For some, network membership was seen as a way "to give back" to the organization and thereby contribute to the development of an inclusive workplace.

FIND A MENTOR—IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Focus group participants said that having mentors has been essential to their professional growth. Research supports this conclusion. For example, David Thomas, a U.S.-based researcher on minority advancement and career progression in U.S. corporations, found that "the people of color who advance the furthest all share one characteristic—a strong network of mentors and corporate sponsors who nurture their professional development."[17]

Many organizations have developed formal mentoring programs for their employees. Some assign a mentor, whereas others manage an on-line matchmaking tool. Just over half the focus group participants belonged to organizations offering such programs. Most felt that the ethnicity or race of their mentor was much less important than the mentor's interest in their career and well-being at work. Yet we also heard from a few women that having a mentor of the same gender and cultural background was

especially valuable in helping them to balance work and family obligations. According to one, "It feels really good to talk with someone who fully understands what it is like to be a Chinese woman and who can provide advice and guidance on how best to balance competing priorities."

THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONS IN ENSURING VISIBLE MINORITY ADVANCEMENT

High-performance organizations are characterized by inclusive workplaces and engaged employees. Focus group participants feel that both they and their organizations have a role to play in making workplaces more welcoming for visible minorities.

What signals a welcoming environment for visible minorities? The unanimous answer from the focus groups was a strong representation of diverse people throughout the organization. In the words of one participant, "The ideal workplace for me is that there is not one group more represented than another." Another said, "To me, it is really important that I see someone like me." And for many of the recently immigrated focus group participants, an inclusive environment is also a place where colleagues and managers have an interest in learning about one another's cultures and countries of origin.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPERVISORS AND MANAGERS

"What motivated me to move up the ladder? It was when my manager approached me and told me that I would make a good manager. Suddenly I saw myself in a different light—as someone who had strong potential. I started to apply for different positions, I studied harder and I worked harder."

—Vancouver focus group participant

According to focus group participants, supportive managers were essential to their success. They described a supportive manager as someone who sees the potential in visible minority talent and helps to ready them for greater responsibilities. Such a manager has these employees' interests at heart and will assist them in their career moves.

Visible minorities who believed their employers and managers to be "fair" were less likely to perceive other barriers to their advancement. When asked what managers need to do to demonstrate fairness, participants mentioned things such as being supportive, being sensitive to cultural differences and understanding that it takes time to adjust to a new culture. They also noted that fair managers give people a "chance" to prove their worth. Fair managers are open-minded: they welcome different opinions and they encourage others to be open-minded as well.

Equitable Leadership

According to research conducted by TWI Inc., a Canadian firm with expertise in diversity management, equitable leaders display seven key competencies. They are open to differences, treat employees equitably, are sensitive to and accommodate employees' different needs, treat employees with dignity and respect, contribute to change efforts that support diversity, demonstrate knowledge of best practices, and enthusiastically endorse and participate in diversity-related programs. Consistent with our focus group results, TWI Inc. found that leaders who rate higher on these competencies have more engaged employees and are perceived by employees to value and support the unique contributions of diverse employees.

Source: TWI Inc.

A diverse workforce, with its varying ideas and approaches, can be a source of innovation for an organization. Managers play a critical role in creating the environment needed to tap into these different perspectives. In the words of one focus group participant, a dynamic workplace is "where you aren't made to feel like you're different, but where your differences are acknowledged."

Several focus group participants stated that being different had meant getting more attention and thus more opportunities from their managers. Yet participants also cautioned that there was a flip side to this. Being different may mean that any mistake or performance issue is much more visible to others in the organization.

"Diversity must not be viewed as the 'flavour of the month.' Everything the organization does must be tied into an ongoing diversity strategy. Ensure that every employee in the organization knows, is aware of and fully understands the necessity of diversity as an important key to organization survival and growth/ development and possibly evolution."

—Montréal focus group participant

Focus group participants also stressed that senior management plays a major role in creating an inclusive corporate culture. In their view, if all employees are to buy into the idea of an inclusive and diverse workplace, senior managers must set an example for behaviours that promote inclusiveness. "People see, people do," according to one focus group participant.

Indeed, visible minorities look up to executives in their organizations who take an active interest in their careers and well-being within the organization. For example, senior leaders who participate in visible minority networks and employment equity activities were particularly admired. The increased access to leaders gave visible minorities a feeling of being a part of the "in group" and a confidence that the glass ceiling could be shattered.

ACCOUNTABILITIES AS ENABLERS OF CHANGE

Holding managers and leaders accountable for diversity goals and results was mentioned by some focus group participants as a way to keep the hiring, retention and promotion of visible minorities on an organization's radar screen.

Senior managers need to make sure that diversity policies are respected and acted on and that diversity goals and objectives are met. Focus group participants thought that performance-pay programs for managers and supervisors provide good incentives. Conversely, they felt that withholding bonuses or imposing other penalties for failing to meet diversity performance objectives are effective ways to change, if not attitudes, at least behaviours.

To Self-Identify or Not to Self-Identify?

Organizations that are required to comply with the *Employment Equity Act* collect employee data for reporting purposes once a year. However, many organizations find that visible minorities are reluctant to identify themselves as such on workforce surveys.

The visible minorities in our focus groups who understood the reasons for collecting this information—and could see the benefits to themselves and to their organizations—had no real objections to self-identification. Nevertheless, many participants noted that, due to their distrust of management, they often hesitate before checking off the "visible minority" box on the employee survey forms. "Will self-identification help me or the manager who hires me?" some ask themselves. A few said they would not identify themselves as visible minorities because they believed it would benefit only the manager.

Several of the visible minorities in our focus groups—regardless of place of birth or sector—saw self-identification as a way of creating different groups among employees. This was problematic for them. In their view "equality cannot come about through the creation of differences." For these focus group participants, equality and inclusiveness will exist only when visible minorities do not feel that they are different and our society is colour-blind.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES ARE ESSENTIAL FOR ADVANCEMENT

Many focus group participants (particularly federal public servants in the 41 to 50 age bracket) spoke about the value of career development programs for visible minorities. These types of programs provide individuals with opportunities to gain management skills and experience and to demonstrate their strengths. Such programs also help create a critical mass of visible minorities in organizations, especially in middle management layers. According to focus group participants, this critical mass is important: the presence of visible minority role models signals the potential for advancement, suggesting that the organization is fair when it comes to promotions.

"I think that it is so important for visible minorities to have career development opportunities…. But I want to make sure that I am selected on the basis of my skills and not because of my colour."

—Toronto focus group participant

At the same time, the younger Canadian-born focus group participants were unsure of the value of career development programs targeted specifically at visible

minorities. This view stemmed partly from a distrust of management intentions. That is, many visible minorities felt managers were more interested in filling some sort of quota than in their professional development. These individuals did not want to participate if it meant that "a senior manager could check off a box and get a bonus." They also said that singling out visible minorities for opportunities felt like tokenism, which could feed into a general perception by co-workers that visible minorities end up in positions because of the colour of their skin, not their competencies.

Recently immigrated visible minorities saw their developmental needs differently. According to these focus group participants, organizations wanting to tap their talents should create career development programs that aim to develop soft skills, such as communications and listening skills, as well as an understanding of how to "do things the Canadian way." Programs could, for example, provide information on how to navigate organizational processes, how to interact with colleagues and managers, and what it takes to be successful in Canadian organizations and society. Focus group participants also indicated that diversity training for all employees, including visible minorities and immigrants, is an important contributor to organizational success.

CONCLUSION

Visible minorities attribute their success to a series of personal and organizational factors. While many encounter employment barriers, immigrant visible minorities are in a particularly difficult situation with multiple challenges and obstacles hindering their success. Canada's impending labour shortages and an increasing reliance on immigrants to offset the shortages mean that organizations need to make their workplaces more welcoming to the large and growing population of visible minorities. Recognizing and fully utilizing the skills and talents of this pool of labour is no longer just "a nice thing" to do; it has become business-critical.

1   Statistics Canada, *Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada* [on-line]. (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2003), [Accessed July 8, 2004]. Available from Internet: <www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/030904/d030904a.htm>.

2   Statistics Canada, *2001 Census: Analysis Series. Earnings of Canadians: Making a Living in the New Economy* [on-line]. (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, March 11, 2003), [Accessed July 8, 2004]. Available from Internet: <www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/earn/pdf/96F0030XIE2001013.pdf>.

3   Statistics Canada, *Ethnic Diversity Survey* [on-line]. (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Sept. 29, 2003), [Accessed July 8, 2004]. Available from Internet: <www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/030929/d030929a.htm>.

4   Ibid.

5   The focus groups are part of a larger project—A Program of Research and Education on "Best Practices" in Maximizing the Talent of Visible Minorities—being undertaken by the Conference Board in partnership with Senator Donald Oliver and a group of leading organizations, including Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, BCE Inc., BMO Financial Group, Business Development Bank of Canada, Canada School of Public Service, Canadian Heritage, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, Canadian International Development Agency, CAW – Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Emera Inc., Foreign Affairs Canada, George Weston Limited, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada/Labour Program, IBM Canada Ltd., Industry Canada, Power Corporation of Canada, Public Service Commission of Canada, Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada, Public Works and Government Services Canada, RBC Financial Group, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Scotiabank, Statistics Canada, Sun Life Financial, TD Bank Financial Group, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat and Unilever Inc. In addition, the work is supported by four citizens who participate on an advisory committee for the project: Frank Claydon, Megan Harris, Susan Pollonetsky and Sharon Ross. In keeping with Conference Board guidelines for financed research, the design and method of research as well as the content of this study were determined solely by The Conference Board of Canada.

6   The Conference Board is preparing an employer's guide based on the information obtained from the focus groups and other aspects of its research on best practices in maximizing the talents of visible minorities. Organizations interested in fully tapping into the skills and capabilities of visible minorities will be able to obtain copies of the guide in the fall of 2004.

7   Report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, *Competing for Immigrants* (Ottawa, June 11, 2002).

8   The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-white in colour and non-Caucasian in race, including both native-born Canadians and immigrants. The following population groups make up the total visible minority group assessed in this study: Blacks, South Asians, Chinese, Other Asians, Pacific Islanders, West Asians, Arabs, Latin Americans and Multiple Visible Minority Origins.

9   Report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, *Competing for Immigrants*.

10 Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, *2003 Employment Equity Act Annual Report* [on-line]. (Ottawa: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2004), [Accessed July 8, 2004]. Available from Internet: <www.hrsdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=en/lp/lo/lswe/we/ee_tools/reports/annual/index-we.shtml&hs=wzp>.

11 Pedro Antunes, Judith L. MacBride-King, Julie Swettenham, *Making a Visible Difference: The Contribution of Visible Minorities to Canadian Economic Growth* (Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, April 2004).

12 Based on a survey of organizations conducted by The Conference Board of Canada.

13 Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, *2003 Employment Equity Act Annual Report*.

14 James Kierstead, *Personality and Job Performance: A Research Overview* [on-line]. (Ottawa: Public Service Commission, 1998), [Accessed July 8, 2004]. Available from Internet: <www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/research/personnel/personality_e.htm>.

15 From executive interviews conducted as part of the larger project on visible minorities.

16 John Samuel and Associates Inc., *Visible Minorities and the Public Service of Canada* [on-line]. (Ottawa: Canadian Human Rights Commission, February 1997), [Accessed July 8, 2004]. Available from Internet: <www.chrc-ccdp.ca/publications/chap3-en.asp>.

17 David A. Thomas, "The Truth About Mentoring Minorities: Race Matters," *Harvard Business Review* 79, 4 (April 2001), p. 98.

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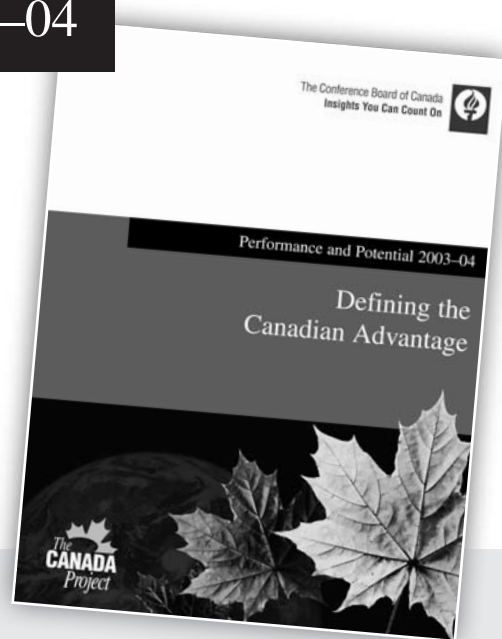
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The Voices of Visible Minorities—Speaking Out on Breaking Down Barriers
by *Bente Baklid*

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