



DiverseCity

THE GREATER TORONTO
LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Perspectives on **TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP**



DiverseCity Perspectives is part of DiverseCity:
The Greater Toronto Leadership Project, an eight-
point plan to diversify our leadership landscape.

DiverseCity Perspectives aims to engage leaders and communities in a transformational “workout” to stretch and re-shape how we think about leaders and leadership, with the goal of allowing a new kind of leadership to emerge.

DiverseCity Perspectives is part of DiverseCity: The Greater Toronto Leadership Project, an eight-point plan to diversify our leadership landscape.

Thanks to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for its support of DiverseCity Perspectives



Perspectives on Transforming Leadership

A report of DiverseCity Perspectives

This report, Perspectives on Transforming Leadership, shares some of the learnings we gained on diversity and leadership and explores how they emerged in dialogue.

Often perceptions of who is a leader (or who has the potential to be a leader) can limit who receives opportunities to take on leadership roles.

To help re-shape how we think about leaders, discover new approaches to leadership, and find pathways to foster the diverse leadership we need, we sought out diverse stories and perspectives that could catalyze shifts in how we imagine and perceive ourselves and others as leaders.

In the DiverseCity Perspectives project, we trained leaders in Toronto, York, and Peel to facilitate dialogue on diversity and leadership. We also captured the personal stories and insights of leaders across the region on video for on-line dialogue.

We heard that diverse leadership brings new understanding to what it means to be a leader. Having diverse perspectives at the leadership table can also bring forward

new ideas and solutions, as well as create access to new audiences, markets, and networks.

In our interviews with leaders, we learned how doors were opened for them and how they now open doors for others. In our dialogues, we heard how promoting diversity in leadership requires acts of leadership.

Dialogue is about listening, but it is also about reflecting on our choices and taking action. After each of our dialogues, we asked what participants would do or do differently.

Throughout the project, we encountered examples of how leaders value diversity in leadership and the steps they take to encourage it. These are the choices that leaders make every day.

From the Perspectives stories and dialogues, we present concrete tips on creating opportunities and transforming leadership.

And we look forward to the benefits of diverse leadership that will follow.

On Dialogue: Advice from the field

Hold a session. Only good can come when you create opportunities for people to be heard. It starts a discussion that maybe wasn't there before because people are now listening to each other. It's not about going big. It's about taking a first step and then another.

– *Lynda Watson, Canadian Red Cross, York Region*

Acknowledge that it takes a certain amount of courage to participate and to take initiative. Allow for the critical thinking that needs to come. It can be a touchy subject so be open and honest and well-intentioned in your conversations.

– *Samantha Fernandes, Catholic Family Services of Peel Dufferin*

I started by understanding diversity to be about different skin colours but have come to realize that it has a lot more to do with what the individuals' backgrounds and experiences are – their different perspectives. Take the time to ponder what diversity means to you, beyond the typical definitions.

– *Hamoon Ekhtari, Deloitte*

It's worth getting some external help to do a meaningful audit. What is happening now? Most important, get as many people involved as possible in the conversation around what should change and how. People currently in leadership positions don't necessarily know what the community wants and needs. Deliberately including folks who would not normally be around the table is critical to making positive improvements.

– *Dave Deforest, Regional Diversity Roundtable (Peel)*

Be very open. Spend more time listening than talking. Challenge your assumptions. And be willing to give someone opportunities.

– *Kirsten Eastwood, Women's Centre of York Region*

Dialogue is not debate, discussion, or argument from different positions. Winning and losing are irrelevant. Instead we assume that everyone can hold multiple perspectives.

How to get started

- 1 Listen to diverse leadership stories from across the greater Toronto region in our video series. [CLICK HERE](#)
- 2 Read about the experiences with dialogue in this report.
- 3 Organize your own dialogue (with the help of the DiverseCity Perspectives Manual for Leading Dialogue on Diversity in Leadership). [CLICK HERE](#)
- 4 Take action as a leader to transform leadership.

On Dialogue:

How listening to different perspectives can shift attitudes

Changes happen when whole groups of people experience a shift in how they see themselves and the possibilities for transformation all around.

In conversation with Samantha Fernandes, Catholic Family Services of Peel Dufferin

Q. Why did you hold a dialogue?

A. We have been working on diversity for the past few years. Our diversity committee is on the agenda at every staff meeting where we discuss a different topic – racism, sexism, media representation, etc. We wanted to take these discussions in a new direction, to tackle the issues in a different way.

Q. What transpired?

A. I saw the difference between a discussion or debate and a dialogue. Rather than what we had been doing – having debates about what is or isn't okay – this was personal. The dialogue format allowed people to speak from their experience. At times it was very emotional. Conversations took on a

different spin.

Q. Did anything surprising happen?

A. The concept of leading by example came out. Taking a back seat and listening and observing is also a way to lead. Leadership is not just about taking the podium. Allowing people to speak their minds rather than directing the conversation is leadership.

Q. Did any new leaders emerge as a result?

A. It certainly allowed people to speak up who hadn't before. Where some had been uncomfortable participating in a debate that could sometimes get argumentative, they could now speak comfortably from their own personal experience.

Q. Did you encounter any barriers along the way?

A. The transition to a more personal approach was difficult for some. But the guidelines we were given (tips on how to encourage participants; the importance of recognizing everyone's wisdom) were really

helpful in moving forward.

Q. How has your organization changed as a result?

A. In our everyday work we can now feel more confident taking on leadership roles. We are more capable of bringing up issues of diversity. Everyone in the organization is now on the same page and can feel more comfortable participating and taking action on issues.

Q. What advice do you have for others?

A. Acknowledge that it takes a certain amount of courage to participate and to take initiative. Allow for the critical thinking that needs to come. It can be a touchy subject so be open and honest and well-intentioned in your conversations.



Samantha Fernandes,
Catholic Family Services of Peel
Dufferin

On Dialogue:

Everyone has wisdom.
We need everyone's
wisdom for the wisest
results.

**In conversation with
Lynda Watson, Canadian
Red Cross, York Region**

Q. Why did you hold a dialogue?

A. We operate in York Region, home of the largest immigrant population in Canada so we work with a lot of newcomers. I also work with youth. I wanted to create a process that would get youth more involved. They have something to say and the dialogue format could give them a voice. Also, since our programs work in silos this was an opportunity to get out into the community broadly. Partnerships are key to working in the community and this process allows us to partner well and network in the community.

Q. Who attended?

A. One of our sessions had an inter-generational focus. We brought youth under 18 together with seniors and police officers – a group that would otherwise not have sat around the same table.

Q. What will a more diverse leadership mean to your organization and your community?

A. If the leadership across York region is more diverse it will create a stronger community where everyone feels a part of it, where everyone contributes. Newcomers will feel more accepted into a new community and will move from vulnerable to engaged. It will create a forum to speak. You're listened to, therefore you are important.

Q. What happened?

A. We learned to listen. It was awesome. There was no agenda so no one knew what to expect. One of the youth made an observation that blew everyone away. He said that leadership is like conducting an orchestra. When it all comes together it makes a beautiful song.

Q. Did you learn anything new?

A. This isn't about teaching anything. It's about creating a circle. Like throwing a rock in a pond and allowing it to ripple out.

Q. Any interesting thoughts on leadership emerge?

A. We saw different cultural approaches to leadership. We might not agree with them all but there was no judgment. Some recognized the importance of leading by example. One participant emphasized the authority that comes with leadership: because I am a leader, you should do what I say. Others underlined that leadership in a diverse culture requires understanding of and respect for our differences and an ability to bring people together, to see that we are all the same in the end. One participant spoke of the urgency in a time of rapid change to have leadership that is open to diversity.

Q. Did you face any barriers?

A. The only barrier is getting people to see the value in dialogue. Once we got them there the process broke down barriers. The barriers will continue only if we stop talking and listening.

Q. What's next?

A. We've trained some youth who will take this process out to use in high school youth groups. I plan to hold another event in the fall and will look at using dialogue as a tool at conferences. One of our dialogue participants is planning to use the format for an inter-faith forum.

Q. Do you have any advice for others?

A. Hold a session. Only good can come when you create opportunities for people to be heard. It starts discussion that maybe wasn't there before because people have started to listen to each other. It's not about going big. It's about taking a first step and then another.



Lynda Watson,
Canadian Red
Cross, York
Region

On Dialogue:

Dialogue has the potential to bring to the surface views on diversity and leadership that can help us transform how leaders are imagined, shaped, and chosen.

Dave Deforest, Chair, Regional Diversity Roundtable (Peel)



In conversation with Dave Deforest, Chair, Regional Diversity Roundtable (Peel)

Q. What were you hoping to accomplish at the session?

A. Personally I wanted to develop some new skills but we also wanted to help the Brampton Board of Trade. They have been working on diversity issues and our hope was to see transformative thinking and action.

Q. What happened?

A. The Perspectives session was a catalyst to stimulate dialogue and move the Board of Trade to the next level. The CEO was a natural ally before but the fact of being asked to host the event enabled a process where he had to report back. The conversation went from the CEO to the governing council. It led to a more deliberate attempt to be inclusive. They have now created a new governing council position – Director of Diversity – and have improved their governance model.

Q. Why is this important?

A. Brampton is 60% visible minority and a young demographic. The Board of Trade needed to look at how to stay relevant. The Perspectives session stimulated dialogue, allowing them to have a real conversation internally at the staff level. From there the CEO took it up through the chain and the results now speak for themselves.

Q. What did you learn from the process?

A. Part of the challenge of having meaningful conversation is about moving from a place of itemizing examples of exclusion and inequity, which many have experienced – to a place where positive action is possible. The structure we worked with created a listening experience which is definitely an important first step.

Q. So what's next?

A. A number of us continue to work toward an overarching policy framework to make inclusion centre stage in Brampton. How we provide customer service, how we get people to engage, etc. This was an important step toward bigger

change. When, and how quickly are the important questions for us, not if. We want to help make change happen faster.

Q. Do you have any advice for others who are just starting to look at these issues?

A. It's worth getting some external help to do a meaningful audit. What is happening now? Most important, get as many people involved as possible in the conversation around what should change and how? People currently in leadership positions don't necessarily know what the community wants and needs. Deliberately including folks who would not normally be around the table is critical to making positive improvements.

On Dialogue:

Dialogue is not
hardwired to
prescribed outcomes.

In conversations with Hamoon Ekhtiari, Human Capital, Deloitte

Q. Why did you want to participate in a dialogue?

A. I spend a lot of my time at work and in my personal life on this so was interested in looking at it through a new lens. My sense is that often we are focused on the wrong outcomes. We look at diversity through proxies like gender or race. What you end up with is a nice picture but not necessarily a real picture of what diversity truly means.

Q. So what is diversity?

A. What we want is a diversity of perspectives. We tend to tokenize people rather than getting at diversity based on merit.

Q. What were you hoping to get out of the Perspectives dialogue experience?

A. I wanted to hear from others on the topic in order to broaden my understanding. I was also interested in the tools that would help facilitate conversation.

Q. What happened?

I work at King and Bay, so deep into the corporate sector. At the session I got to hear personal reflections from people from all walks of life, people working in nonprofits, in government, people working on diversity issues, others new to the topic. Understanding this range of perspectives allows me to be more effective personally and professionally in having casual conversations and in facilitating more formal sessions. I've since used the facilitator guide, with

some modifications, in hosting my own session. Topics came up that were different from what had been expected.

Q. What advice would you give to others?

A. I started by understanding diversity to be about different skin colours but have come to realize that it has a lot more to do with what the individuals' backgrounds and experiences are – their different perspectives. Take the time to ponder what diversity means to you, beyond the typical definitions.

On Dialogue:

Dialogue can occur when individuals listen to the meaning behind the words of other people and speak about 'what is alive in me'.

Kirsten Eastwood,
Executive Director,
Women's Centre of York Region



In conversation with Kirsten Eastwood, Executive Director, Women's Centre of York Region

Q. Why did you want to participate in a dialogue?

A. I used to work for a large bank where I did diversity and equity training but more recently issues around diversity were coming up with staff. I wanted to discover new tips and techniques for working with staff and the board.

Q. What happened?

A. It was structured, but not overly structured. I knew only one person so heard from people I wouldn't normally hear from – students, recent immigrants to York Region. This was really helpful for me to understand the issue from a range of perspectives. It's not just about what I do at work; it's about everything I do every day. How I interact with people and being mindful about being open to others.

Q. Did anything surprise you?

A. There were some really sweet moments, especially with the youth at our table who were treated as equals. I don't have a lot of conversations with people that age as my children are younger and most of our clients are older. We also heard from a police officer who shared his challenges around entering law enforcement as a new immigrant. What he showed us was how resilient people are. He recognized that while the policies that were getting in the way of his ability to practice his profession here were not changeable, with perseverance he could still get to where he wanted to be. Also, it struck me that everyone shared equally. No one person dominated.

Q. What did this tell you about leadership?

A. When one perceives oneself as a leader one is comfortable and confident enough to express oneself. Being a leader means having this comfort level, but also being a good listener. Leadership does not have to look the way it typically has. It can be reflected in someone

who is homeschooling his or her children or a police officer or a teenager. People perceive themselves as leaders in very different ways. Anyone has the ability to be a leader. When you take it out of the workplace there are multiple places where it can manifest. It's a willingness to be a role model and to be open to step up in some way. It may change too. You don't have to be a leader in every context. It can come down to opportunity. People are often not given the opportunity. In my role as an Executive Director it's about giving people who really want to the opportunity to step up.

Q. What advice would you give to others?

A. Be very open. Spend more time listening than talking. Challenge your assumptions. And be willing to give someone opportunities.

From Dialogue to Action:

What does it mean to you to be a leader in a diverse city?

“When you take off the lens of who does or doesn’t have a leadership title, you see that each person has some kind of leadership role. It’s great to have dialogue, but there needs to be change, and that starts with personal commitment.”

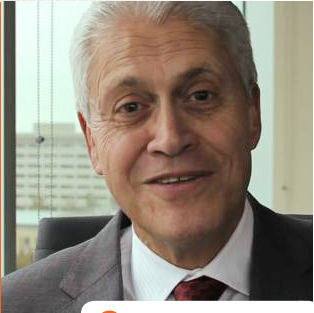
– Sheryl Thompson, Catholic Family Services of Peel Dufferin

Seven questions on your leadership

Creating opportunities for new leaders is one of the most important responsibilities of current leaders. Acting as a role model, either as someone who has broken the mold or as a champion for diversity and inclusion, is another.

In DiverseCity Perspectives, leaders shared stories of choices they make every day to ensure diverse leadership in these areas. What are your answers to these questions? What are some of your own stories of impact?

- 1 Do you create leadership teams with individuals from diverse backgrounds with different perspectives? How?
- 2 Do you personally look broadly for talent and to expand your informal networks? How?
- 3 Do you prioritize being open to meeting people and recognizing the potential they might have to contribute? How?
- 4 Do you give back and mentor as part of your leadership? How?
- 5 Do you give rising leaders opportunities to take on additional responsibility and provide them with support?
- 6 Do you put yourself out there to share your story and voice and act as a role model around diversity?
- 7 Do you see diversity and inclusion as a philosophy and style of leadership?



▶ WATCH VIDEO

"It is really a duty of every leader to identify those who are future leaders and give them the opportunity, but not only give them the opportunity, mentor them and give them the confidence in order to be able to move forward."

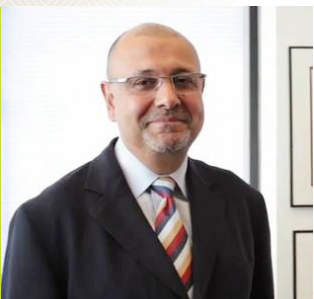
– Dr. Mamdouh Shoukri, York University



▶ WATCH VIDEO

"I believe that everybody is an individual. I believe that everybody comes with a gift and a talent. We see abilities in others, we don't see weaknesses."

– Ranjama Mitra, Community Environment Alliance



▶ WATCH VIDEO

"Being inclusive in leadership is critical. Leadership is not a solo sport. Leadership is a team game."

– Saäd Rafi, Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care

Ten Tips on Transforming Leadership

Our conversations with diverse leaders showed us that leadership goes well beyond position or title. Leaders can contribute to diversity in leadership through their everyday choices. If you seek to build a team, strengthen your leadership pipeline, or expand your networks, consider these tips on transforming leadership.

- 1 Be clear about what role and responsibility you have as a leader to create inclusive teams and to find and develop other leaders.
- 2 Be aware of who is currently represented in your leadership team and leadership networks.
- 3 Look for the potential and the strengths that people have to offer.
- 4 Have an open door policy to meeting and engaging new people. You never know where talent will turn up.
- 5 Expose yourself to new contacts and networks. Get out and talk to people. Look in all corners for the talent you need, not necessarily in the usual places.

Continued...



"It's important for people to see themselves as leaders because it gives a sense of power and ownership."

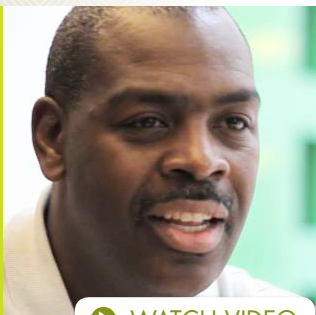
– Adaoma Patterson, Region of Peel



▶ WATCH VIDEO

"You see a lot of leaders on the ground and they may not even know, 'I am a leader.' [They're] just thinking, 'I'm doing well, I'm trying to do something good'. Those are the emerging leaders that would need further nurturing or further support for them to continue to grow and be able to make a bigger difference in the community."

– Janice Chu, United Way of York Region



▶ WATCH VIDEO

"The benefits of having diverse leaders at the table is that you get more diverse stories out there. And the more diverse the stories are, I find, the more we realize how similar we really are in this world."

– Nick Davis, CBC

Ten Tips on Transforming Leadership

...continued from previous page.

- 6 Recognize and invest in leadership happening on the ground even if people don't call themselves leaders.
- 7 Offer hands-on opportunities to practice leadership and develop abilities.
- 8 Give people responsibility above their level and support them along the way.
- 9 Encourage people to see themselves as leaders.
- 10 Step back and listen. Support others in finding ways to express their perspectives.

Visit diversecitytoronto.ca to view the DiverseCity Perspectives leadership video series.



DiverseCity
 THE GREATER TORONTO
 LEADERSHIP PROJECT

DIVERSECITY: THE GREATER TORONTO LEADERSHIP PROJECT AIMS TO ACCELERATE PROSPERITY BY TRANSFORMING THE LEADERSHIP LANDSCAPE.

The Greater Toronto Area is the most ethnically and racially diverse region in Canada yet there is a striking lack of diversity at the top of our corporate, public and nonprofit organizations.

This is a missed opportunity.

We are working to build a more prosperous region by changing the face of leadership through eight practical and measurable initiatives.



Thanks to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for its support of DiverseCity Perspectives.



Maytree promotes equity and prosperity through leadership building.



Catalyzing collective leadership on tough issues and big opportunities facing the Greater Toronto region.



DiverseCity: The Greater Toronto Leadership Project is funded in part by the Government of Ontario.