

# *Cultures at Work*

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Diversity in the  
Nova Scotian Workplace

*December 2011*

The logo for 'isis' features two green circles above the letters 'i' and 's'. The letters 'i', 's', 'i', and 's' are rendered in a bold, teal, sans-serif font.

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## Current Challenges

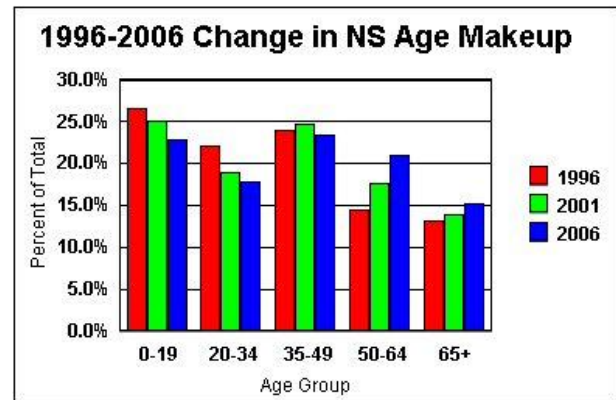
Nova Scotia's changing demographic profile means that the province's workforce is also in a period of transition. An aging population with low fertility rates results in a minimal overall growth rate. The result is a significant labour shortage. Immigration has long been considered an important way to meet this new demographic reality. This changing cultural makeup in wider society is inevitably mirrored in the workplace, where there is inherent value and potential in a staff which promotes cultural diversity.

When faced with an increasingly diverse workforce, employers must adopt inclusiveness as a core principle. This will allow employers to fully benefit from the gains in innovation and productivity associated with a diverse workforce. This short document provides readers with proven strategies to further integrate and retain the talent and opportunity that immigrants bring to the workplace.

## Provincial Demographic Changes

Nova Scotia has seen its population rapidly change in recent decades:

- Our population is aging. Nova Scotia currently has the highest median age in Canada. In 2010, 16% of the population in the province was 65 and older. (Statistics Canada, 2011)
- The fertility rate is below the replacement level. In 2008, Nova Scotia's fertility rate was 1.54, under the national average of 1.68. This number is below the accepted replacement rate of 2.1. (Statistics Canada, 2011)
- Our total growth rate in NS is a mere 3.59 (per 1,000) as compared to the national growth rate of 11.4.
- With 2,409 new immigrant arrivals in 2010, Immigration proved to be the largest single contributor to population growth in the province. (Statistics Canada, 2010)



(Government of Nova Scotia, 2009)

## Immigration: An Important Part of the Demographic Puzzle

- Between 1991 and 2006, Canada experienced one of the longest uninterrupted periods of strong immigration since 1871 (Statistics Canada, 2010).
- This trend will only continue. In 2031, approximately three Canadians in ten could be a member of a visible minority group. At that point, Canada would have between 11.4 million and 14.4 million visible minority persons (Statistics Canada, 2010).
- In 2010, Nova Scotia received 2,408 immigrants. As a country, Canada received 280,681, meaning that N.S. received 0.9% of immigrants to the country. Provincially, our Nova Scotia's population represents 4% of the overall Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2011).
- In the near future, this number will likely increase. In their Immigration Strategy of 2011, the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration set a goal to attract 7, 200 new immigrants to the province per year by 2020 (Government of Nova Scotia, 2011).

*What is Diversity?*

“Diversity works out with visible characteristics (gender, race, cultural background, accent, language) and invisible (different means of communication, different ways to compose with conflict, ways to learn, motivation and stress, contributions to task requirement)” (Cardu, 2007).

*Challenges in a Culturally Diverse Workplace*

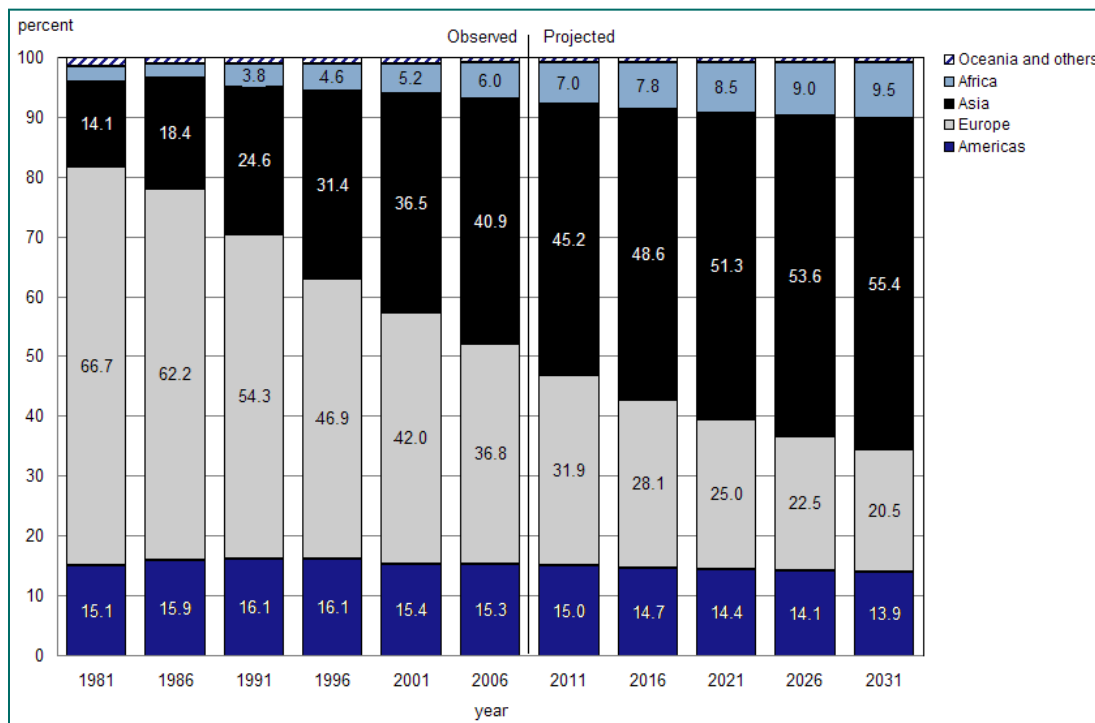
- 1) Power relationships
- 2) Individualism/ collectivism
- 3) Gender differences
- 4) Language competencies
- 5) Time perception and value

“Canada’s diversity, properly nurtured, is our great strength...” *Stephen Harper*

**The Future Labour Market**

As immigration rates increase, the racial composition of Canada is shifting away from its traditional European origins to Asian, African and other (see chart below). The workplace is no exception to this change, and employers of small, medium and larger firms will need to adapt to these new demographic realities in order to remain competitive.

**Distribution of the Population Born Outside Canada by Continent of Origin**



(Statistics Canada, 2010)

## What Are The Benefits Of Diversity In The Workplace?

A recent Conference Board of Canada report made a strong case for immigrants as valuable assets for businesses. The study noted that immigrants:

- Are more likely to be university educated than their Canadian-born counterparts;
- Can be a source of new and expanded business opportunities, because their knowledge of diverse networks has the potential to expand a company's customer base and increase business opportunities at home and abroad;
- Bring new perspectives to challenges and issues, in that they can draw upon different knowledge, experiences, and approaches utilized elsewhere (Conference Board of Canada, 2010)

Employers now have the opportunity to recruit immigrants, skilled workers and entrepreneurs from among the thousands of foreign and out-of-region students who graduate from Atlantic Canada's 17 universities each and every year. Together, these students represent a renewable, powerful human resource that can make an immense contribution toward building a more diverse, more affluent society – one better prepared to compete inside the nation and across the globe (AAU, 2010).

## How Does Cultural Diversity Impact The Workplace?

- Adds complexity to management
- Provides opportunities for increased innovation
- Involves more knowledge and skills
- Links organizations to wider community (Fantino, 2004)

## How Can Nova Scotia Businesses Best Manage Diversity In The Workplace?

Managers of diverse staff need to create a professional and innovative workplace culture which values the relationships among various groups and individuals. Here are a series of "best practices" presented by the Conference Board of Canada (2010). They are recognized initiatives which benefit all employees and are especially helpful when hiring, integrating and retaining immigrant employees.

- *Effectively manage talent*  
Managers should strive to be empowering rather than controlling. They can do this by understanding and acknowledging differing perspectives, providing clear explanations when giving instructions and offering choice and flexibility when possible. This research shows that managers who empower their staff gain highly engaged employees with good psychological well-being and the capacity to be more productive at work.

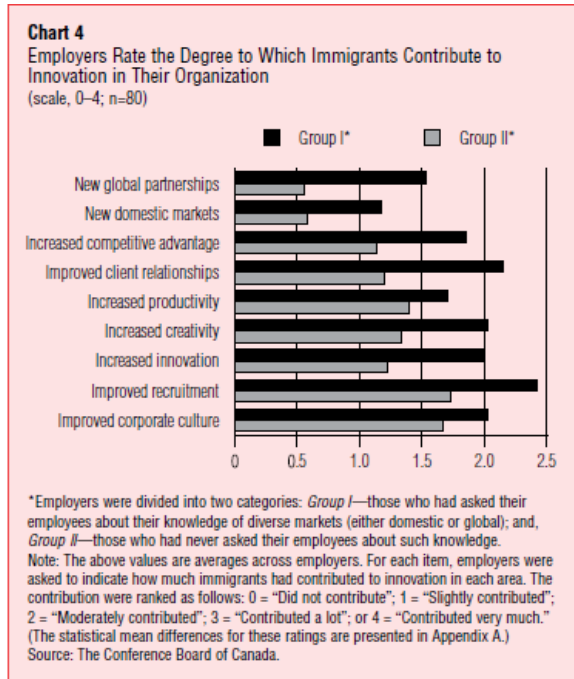
- **Value Diversity**

If an organization clearly states its commitment to diversity, employees are better able to integrate into their workplace. Ideally, employees are team members who are treated fairly and recognized and rewarded for their unique abilities.

- **Hire immigrants at every level of the organization**

Employees behave differently when they believe that they have a realistic chance at promotion. This leads to a greater commitment to and satisfaction with the organization. Alternatively, if employees perceive a “glass ceiling” in the workplace, they will respond negatively to leaders in the organization and demonstrate lower levels of commitment to the organization.

- **Contact Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services (ISIS) to tap into the international talent of immigrants in Nova Scotia.** ISIS recognizes the importance of building awareness among local employers about the benefits of hiring immigrants and increasing diversity in the work place. Partnering in an intentional and strategic manner with small, medium, and large employers in the private, public and voluntary sectors contributes tremendously to the success of immigrants at the workplace in Nova Scotia. ISIS offers a variety of services to support employers’ access to this talent pool. These programs include work placement, wage subsidy, and a job board amongst others. <http://www.isisns.ca/employment/for-employers/>



### Future Implications

Immigration is one of the key solutions to meeting current labour market needs. There is increasing recognition that immigrants are an invaluable resource for the innovation, work ethic, contacts and the global perspectives they bring to workplaces in the province. Employers can embrace new opportunities in innovation and productivity as presented through a diverse workplace.

## Data Sources

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