

Transcript for the how to lead with equity and inclusion with focus on BIPOC webinar

Speaker: Varsha Naik

Good afternoon, everybody. Let us get started on time.

And I am going to invite my wonderful colleagues Taranum Khan and Frishta Bastan to take it away.

Speaker: Taranum Khan

Hi, my name is Taranum Khan and I'm the coordinator at Regional Diversity Roundtable and it's my proud privilege and honour to be hosting you all today. With me, joining us is our executive director at Regional Diversity Roundtable, Varsha Naik, who has been very kindly keeping us all energized and for the start of this session.

Today, we have the Community Leadership Project team with us, Sonika Sharma, who's the project lead, Frishta Bastan, the DI Charter lead. We have Rushaan Rashid, our intern at Regional Diversity Roundtable, and we are very happy to be here in conversation with you all. I hear that we are still being joined by guests but to be sure and respectful of people who have joined us, we are going to start shortly so, I welcome you all to this conversation in leading with equity and inclusion.

In focus is BIPOC and BIPOC, for people who do not know the term, is for Black Indigenous people of colour we want to be very respectful of everybody and remind everyone that, yes, there are race-related issues in multiple ways and multiple intersections. However, we want to focus on the Black Indigenous populations and the population who are minorities and racialized so let's be very mindful in our responses and, in conversation, try to stick to the issue. I would request my colleague to move on to the next slide.

And let's go over a little bit of housekeeping just to be sure that we are mindful of everybody who is joining us we understand and appreciate that people are unique and so are opinions. But that said, being respectful of each other and being inclusive of the diversities that we bring in the group is important when you join you will be put on mute.

So, therefore, please continue to engage through the chat. You are more than welcome to put comments, questions, thoughts, whatever have you and we'll try to get back to as many as possible.

From time to time, we will be inviting Sonika to moderate and ask the questions so you're welcome to do that while we present. If you wish to be identified, please remember to put your name so that you can be addressed that way.

However, given that it's a limited time, you only have an hour, for whatever reasons if you're not able to get to all the questions we will be happy to respond to you. You're welcome to

email us and continue the conversation through there. We will have two interact quizzes during the during the session.

The links to the quizzes will be put in the chat if, for whatever reasons, the links do not work for you, please copy paste the urls into your browsers and they will start working. With that, I would hand over the next slide to my colleague Frishta who will be taking us through the agenda. But one just gentle acknowledgement of the fact that this is a digital space and we are limited in accommodating people who might have other needs. So if, for whatever reasons, we are not able to accommodate that, we acknowledge and appreciate it but we are also limited in how we present due to it being a digital space. So Frishta please I'd let you take over.

Speaker: Frishta Bastan

Good morning everyone, thank you for joining us today. Before I start that just wanted to quickly introduce RDR. What we do the Regional Diversity Roundtable is a membership driven federally incorporated not-for-profit charity. We are based in the Region of Peel and serve diverse communities and organizations across the GTA and beyond. With the current digital transitions, we have moved a lot of our engagement online where we have been connecting with folks beyond borders.

One of our priority initiatives is building capacity through training and through these webinars, that you folks have joined today. We have currently 50 plus members from the non-profit sector and work very closely with the for-profit sector based on need. If you have any questions about RDR and services that we provide, please let us know or message us in the chat. So, the agenda for today: we will begin with the land acknowledgement, we will dive into the roots, and foundations of what it means to be a Black Indigenous person of colour, and given those definitions, we will then go into the key issues feeding into discrimination. We'll walk into the systems and what that means.

We will then give you tangible solutions and advice as to what you can do to break the cycle and what your part is in this and then we will give you supports and resources that can better help you take this work and the knowledge that you've learned today outside, and then we will end with a reflection.

So, of course it is incredibly important that [the] work of diversity equity inclusion goes without saying must recognize the Indigenous land that this webinar is taking place on. We wish to acknowledge and honour the land that we're on.

For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples have walked this land it has been a traditional home for many Indigenous nations including the Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Today, this meeting place is still a home to many Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to live, work, and play on this land.

Speaker: Taranum

So I'll take over this slide and let's reflect on what is racism and the roots of it and why are we having this conversation in the first place in 2020. Let me begin by reminding everyone of a few life incidents grounded in overt racism.

Nobody is shy of the information that unfolded south of the border with George Floyd but we in Canada also experience the same with deaths of D'Andre Campbell, Michael Legend, Duane Christian, three of many Black Canadians involved in use of force by police, related to a history rooted in hate filled with race relations.

There are deaths of 19-year-old Christian a promising Indigenous young man in Strathmore Alberta. A 15-year-old Anishinaabe girl who was killed and dumped in the river with no one held responsible and the death of a Cree man who was shot and murdered but the shooter was acquitted.

And in our own backyard Ejaz Chaudhry's life was snuffed with a gunshot in response to a non-emergency mental health check. What is happening? Why are we still rooted in hate on that overt level? If you look on the screen, you will see Black people in Toronto are 20 times more likely to be shot dead by the police and nobody is shy of how Indigenous, Asian, and

South Asian populations are looked upon when they enter shopping areas or how the system responds to them when it comes to employment promotions which are more subtle and micro aggressions that we see unfold in our day-to-day lives. That said, "where are we headed?" is the question. These are obvious, and to explore the obvious, I will hand it over to Frishta.

Speaker: Frishta

Thank you so much, Taranum. So we will start talking about the foundations of where our biases and racism might come from first and foremost is our mindset. How do we perceive by populations?

So this can be from developed misunderstandings about these populations based on our very white very Eurocentric understandings and learnings that surround us, whether that's in school whether it's in the media. These are the learnings that we grow up with and the way that BIPOC populations are portrayed in the media or portrayed in stories. These build the foundation and the perspectives of how we see these peoples. The norm and the center of acceptance has always been white community members.

This is what we see of who has value- bodies who have value over bodies who don't have value. Because of this, this has also informed our practices and policies and perhaps consciously or unconsciously determines the way we function and work in school and parks where funding is given, where pipelines are built, based on the mindset that we have. Through this mindset, we also develop stereotypes. Stereotypes are incorrect assumptions based on the things like race, colour, ethnic origin place of origin, or religion.

Stereotypes can be anything from Covid, for example. The East Asian community specifically has been a target of racist discrimination because of, you know, international leaders calling it the Chinese virus. That automatically has put a target on our East Asian community members and blaming them for an epidemic.

Or we can talk about President Donald Trump and the Muslim travel ban where, based on stereotypes, there has been international restrictions for folks from Muslim countries; certain Muslim countries that are banned from attending or from visiting America.

This can also range from more of our backyard categorizing all Indigenous peoples as alcoholics. Again, this is based on stereotypes. Through stereotypes, we also create our biases, so it's biases, or predisposition, or prejudice, or generalization about a group or persons based on a personal characteristic or stereotypes.

Biases can be Black Canadians who feel that if they're followed through a mall because of the employee fearing that they're going to be stealing something or biases can be a simple statement saying that women can't drive or East Asians can't drive or women can't lead countries because they're too emotional. And there's also biases against the seniors in our community especially with seniors of colour who have certain dietary restrictions.

So biases always come out to play whether we know it or we don't and it's something that's almost always hidden and we all have to be critical about how we perceive peoples, how we perceive, populations based on our own understandings and we always have to be learning and unlearning of these understandings. Ignorance is the lacking knowledge or comprehension of the things specified.

So, the reason why we've written privilege here is because ignorance plays differently for different peoples. For example, I'm a woman of colour, a racialized woman. However, I can also be white passing. My experience as a woman can be very different than a Black Muslim woman. Based on my own ignorance, I choose not to know or choose not to want to know but her experiences. That's a privilege.

I can use that ignorant privilege and assume that her experiences don't exist or that our experiences are the same. It's not; our intersections of oppression are very different. Because of this privilege, it sometimes leads us to rejection against any kind of change. For example, like my colleague talked about Ejaz Choudry, that just happened the night before Father's Day.

He was a 60-year-old man with schizophrenia who was murdered in his own home. Now, the protests that are being taken place in Malton- some folks are probably arguing, "well the police did their job, the police were protecting themselves" without critically looking into why police has to be called in a very severe mental health crisis.

Challenging this system the oppressive system is a part of change and when we reject any kind of criticism, this is a reflection of our ignorance, of our biases, of our already said sending stereotypes. For example, unfortunately, on the internet a lot of folks were calling Ejaz Choudhry a Muslim extremist and that kind of thing is incredibly harmful because it eventually leads up to something like murdering a man in his own home. So based on all of this, we have a responsibility to respond.

How are we going to change and make change within ourselves, within our community groups, within our friend circles and family circles based on these learnings and based on these understandings and critically continuously working on them? Nobody is

fully out of stereotypes or fully unbiased or fully un-ignorant. You need to continuously work on bettering yourself and un-learning and learning and acknowledging that some people's experiences are different than yours.

Can go to the next slide? Then over to my colleague, Taranum.

Speaker: Taranum

Thank you, Frishta. Well if we reflect on awareness and what would making a difference look like. So, let's look at some data. In 2019, according to race relations survey in Canada, racial groups that were most frequently targeted for discrimination - 44 were Black, 39 percent were Indigenous, and 22 percent were people of colour. There's also studies and research available by academia by social scientists.

You can look at the stats available by police, Ontario Human Rights Commission. All of these are data that support and conquer what Frishta just elaborated upon. Other than that, there is another side to data collection which is our systems are hesitant to collect desegregated data as that would bring into focus the inequities even more sharply.

To reflect upon how many leadership positions are taken by people from the BIPOC population, we all know that they are numbered and we can be counted and mostly can be underlined with tokenism. Also, when we talk about biases enough, evidence is available to support data around racism and discrimination that has continued to take place day in and day out and it's rested in our history. Still in 2020, we are caught in the same cycle when we talk about academia, social scientists, and the government, and the research, the experience concur. Both unconscious and conscious biases are feeding into the system of discrimination.

The intersectionalities are multiple and layered so the experiences are layered with life experiences. To give you an example a Black young man surrounded by family living in a well-to-do family would be different from an experience of a Black young man with a single parent struggling financially versus a Black young man, sorry a Black young LGBTQ youth, who does not have a support system.

Despite the fact the common denominator of these three be being Black and young but the experiences are different so intersectionality can have multiple layers and how these layers unfold and feed into systemic barriers needs to be thought and caught over. For that, I'm going to invite Sonika, my colleague, to put an interact poll in the chat where I would like you to have an opportunity to contribute your ideas and your thoughts. I'll give you two minutes and then we can look at the responses.

Alright, it seems people are still joining us, yeah. I think some of them are just able to join us now. And folks, as you are completing the little activity, again, RDR operates on an interactive model for learning and whether be it a webinar or whether it be into full-fledged training, we always engage our participants to be actively involved and we have, at this moment, responses ready. Sonika, are we able to share? Krishna, do you have the access to it or the one yeah, I just opened it so. Rushaan is doing it. Oh, sorry not Rushaan, Frishta I believe.

Speaker: Varsha

As we go through the little technical, internal adjustment, I also want to speak to a couple of things. I think the historical ills whether be it with the Indigenous community where their whole identities, their culture, their civilization was eroded with colonization.

Whether it was the Black community with slavery, with the bias around race with blatant racism, whether it is people of colour who are seen as less than what is the norm or the accepted preferential group within communities.

And within society, all of these have inflicted collective wounds and scars on the BIPOC community and we need to be mindful of the scars that the community carries. When we talk about racism, when we talk about discrimination, when we talk about needing change, we need to be mindful that these are real issues that we need to address collectively.

Speaker: Taranum

Okay, Varsha, we have the results.

Speaker: Frishta

So, I hope folks can see my screen. So for the first question we asked, looking to organizations' practices, are there policies in place to deal with discrimination issues? The most popular question [answer] was I'm not sure.

Second question, as an individual, do you undertake self growth and DI related learnings? The answer was yes, which is good. Next question, does your organization regularly offer diversity, equity, inclusion trainings? We have an equal answer between yes and no. And last question, does your workplace organization have process in place to deal with any kind of discrimination issues? We said yes and no so just that just kind of puts into perspective.

Speaker: Taranum

So, Rushaan, can screen share again please? And I'd hand that over to Frishta to take on the next slide.

Next slide please.

Rushaan, our next slide please, thank you.

Oh, previous one.

There we go.

Speaker: Frishta

Alright, so now we're going to talk about equitable versus equal so we might understand equality as giving everyone the same shoe. However, equity means making sure that the shoe

fits. Equity and having a more equitable stance means that you understand the intersections of oppression that affect different peoples in different populations.

You recognize and acknowledge the combination based on these needs and expectations. For example, most recently because of COVID and our federal government's response, there was an assistance check of two thousand dollars given to each person who's been affected in their work sector due to COVID-19. As great and as very helpful the assistance is, the equitable approach would have been to accommodate and to distribute that kind of money depending on the intersections of the person's individual problems.

So for example, some folks who are living in Toronto who might have incredibly high rent who are working three to four jobs and then lost every single employment day based on that and on top of that no longer has child care and no longer can make ends meet, \$2000 might not be helpful to them it or it might not help them make ends meet for that month. So an equitable approach would have been to assess each person's situation differently.

Although of course, everything had to be done very quickly given the situation of COVID and the response had to be quick, it's just an equitable approach would have been to understand each individual's needs and expectations.

So going off of this, when we understand equality and equity, we also need to understand so how does our systems work? How do the systems of oppression that we all currently live under- how does this work? How does it present inequality to our communities?

So for example, police budgets can be, you know, for example, regions police budgets about forty percent. However, we also have a housing crisis. So how do we, you know, allocate and redistribute and reprioritize budgets to ensure that we're taking care of our most vulnerable most marginalized community members? So this would be a systematic approach that we could take.

And once we understand the systems that we live under, now we can start reimagining. We can start calling out systemic discrimination. We can start approaching it and coming up with different solutions and be able to address these systemic gaps that exist and that could be anywhere from your workplace, the organization you volunteer for.

You know, if we take into consideration our essential workers most of them on the front line are marginalized populations and racialized populations. So how do we ensure that, you know, once we understand how systems work then now we're going to do what we can to protect our most vulnerable and marginalized that come from BIPOC communities.

So we're going to do an interact quiz again. So my colleague Sonika will send out the last quiz for you folks to try out. And this is just based on your own systems and organizations and what you see that needs changing based on what we've talked about so far.

Speaker: Taranum

I'd like to remind folks while you're taking the interact quiz you are welcome to put your chats, comments, opinions in the chat so that you have the opportunity to express yourself in more than yes and no answers. Do we have the results? Rushaan might want to stop share screen.

Speaker: Frishta

We do but I only have one result so far.

Speaker: Varsha

Give it.

Speaker: Taranum

Okay the quiz says preview mode. That's in the chat?

Speaker: Frishta

Okay let's try this. Okay let's try this one.

Speaker: Taranum

Okay let's give it another try please and, in the meantime, I do not see any questions. I would have invited Sonika to look at the questions.

Speaker: Varsha

There is a comment, Taranum, and I'm going to speak to that so the fact is, while these interactive questions are helpful, when you wear multiple hats it's difficult to answer from one perspective and we recognize that.

And I think there's an example that in the organization or in the firm the individual is, lawyers in general and the organizations that the individual is on the board for, there could be different answers and I think looking at experiences as well would influence. And I think what we are wanting to get from you is just that- where we speak to asking you a question about your organization, which one is your primary place of work that you would refer to? You may certainly have many interests within the community you may certainly engage in more than one organization and yes, experiences would differ but which is your primary place of work and what happens in that particular institution?

And we also appreciate your experiences of what you observe in the community. Yes, there is only one question on this quiz. We wanted to only see what's happening in the community and where are things at with the particular issue.

Speaker: Frishta

So we have the results. So based on the question, what within your systems of organization needs changing in order to address DEI? Our top answer is team relationships the second one is di training and education. The third one is more BIPOC representation in leadership and then we have policy safe spaces and more BIPOC representation on the front line. These are what you folks answered.

Speaker: Varsha

And I think it's, again, a point to reflect on that none of us here today on this webinar would question that nothing needs changing or that we all our organizations are exactly where they need to be. None of us would say that and that, again, indicates that there is work that needs to happen and based on our awareness, our understanding of the issue, of systemic discrimination, of our understanding of what Black Indigenous and people of colour go through.

We definitely would respond accordingly in terms of where things need to be. Also, our roles and responsibilities which guide some of the work that needs to happen.

So if we can move to the next slide, I am going to touch upon the question of where we see leaders and leadership addressing this issue. And for this particular conversation in this slide,

I'm going to refer to leaders as people who have the position, people who have the responsibility to account for an organization's mandate, for folks who really are tasked to move the organization forward, to grow the organization.

And, in the issue of diversity, equity, and inclusion and in specifically, as we talk about the Black community and some of the challenges that have unfolded right now, where the community has very vocally and very visibly said, "no more will we put up with the discrimination and the racism.

We are united in our voice and we are going to move the communities to say we will not stand for any such discrimination continuing for our community and for our brothers and sisters". Or whether it is the Indigenous community which says very clearly that, "We have been patient, we have been very open, we have offered you everything that we had, and we in the process have been excluded and we've been, you know, put to the margins". Or it's the people of colour who say, "we come to this land to make a contribution, we are contributing in every aspect of society and we are still treated as less than or second-class citizens.

How do we address this issue of racialization? How do we address this issue of colonization and its impact on the marginalized? As leaders what do we really need to create to be an effective and an inclusive leader? What is the simplest that most organizations and most workplaces do? Quickly whip up a policy or quickly whip up a statement verbally acknowledge that, "oh we are very inclusive. No, we definitely treat people fairly and justly,".

And so yes, that helps putting a policy certainly is the first step but it is not **the** step. More needs to be done to build on that. One needs, as a leader, to go beyond the espoused commitment to inclusion and to addressing the issue of racism and marginalization for our Black, Indigenous, and people of colour.

What does allyship really look like? Let's take a, you know, take a pause. Who are the largest proportion of senior leaders in the workplaces? Do they really look and belong and identify with the Black, Indigenous, and other persons of colour? Very few, very small percentage. So definitely we are looking at ally responsibility from leaders who are in places, but who are not of the BIPOC community. They have to then be an ally in this work and what does an ally have to do, first and foremost?

Definitely need to acknowledge that they have learning to do that they have, you know, awareness building to take on and that as leaders who are privileged and who have the power and have the position, they are going to implement and sustain initiatives that address this inequity, they are going to create safe spaces within their workplace that welcomes and includes people of colour, Black people, Indigenous people.

There will be segregated data collected to address and evidence-informed practices. Leadership is about walking the talk. Are they actually demonstrating and modeling that leadership that is inclusive? Are they truly building an organizational culture change and a shift that continues to sustain the work around equity and inclusion?

Looking at accountability, are they transparent in their processes? Are they transparent in their practices? Are they committed? Are they committed to outcomes versus the espouse values? Looking at walking the talk as a leader is a critical part of how you will get all within your workplace, all in the organization, to acknowledge that significant injustices, significant inequities have existed.

Racism is persisting and we need to stop it; we need to address it. So, this particular conversation is about the positional leader. A positional leader needs to do more than the rest of the team and not designate a person as a diversity person, not designate a person in or create us a position in the organization to say change everything that we need to change. Yes, a designated resource is needed but it's not a one individual responsibility.

Can we move to the next slide please? Here we are talking about every individual having the potential to be a leader. We are calling on each and every one of you who have joined us today, taking the time to join us today, to say, you are a leader but you need to work on these four aspects that we are recommending as an ally or as a person who belongs to the particular community.

Whether you identify as Black, you identify as Indigenous, or you identify as a person of colour, you definitely have a role to play and if you are not of the community and you are an ally, you definitely have a role to play. And what do these leadership qualities ask you to do in changing the status quo on racism, on changing the status quo on addressing systemic barriers and systemic discrimination?

One: begin to build your own knowledge base. Be aware of what the situations are. Be well informed about what resources exist in the community? What are some of the experiences that people are highlighting? Where are the gaps in the system? So be well informed, be very well informed. Do not just accept the fact that because I am well intentioned because I am caring. Therefore, I will not be a racist, I will not be biased.

I'm sorry, we need to be very conscious in not being racist so we need to dismantle some of our practices. We need to dismantle some of our structures, we need to dismantle some of our

beliefs before we can really become an ally in the right sense, whether we can become an advocate in the right sense.

So, with that, awareness building, it can't just stay at that you need to follow up with some concrete actions. We have given you a couple of indications here but we all are coming from diverse perspectives, we all are coming with diverse experiences, and we are in different environments. I think, in the chat, I saw people who have come from Florida, I've seen people come from New York, I know people who have come from Toronto, Peel, and London, Ontario.

So we've seen people's environments are different and therefore our actions need to be responsive. What, as an individual leader, can I do to move the needle around inclusion? And so, your actions need to match the context of where you are and what is the on the ground situation for you. Right now, in Peel we are definitely dealing with anti-Black racism, we are certainly dealing with people of colour and racism for them, as well as Indigenous equity.

So, these are our local context but you need to, again, identify what that action would be for you. As an ally and as a person of the community, you need to take an active role in advocating for change.

No more in June of 2020, can we say that we have moved a lot, we have progressed a lot. I'm sorry to say we have not moved a lot, we have just changed a little. Violence that happened during slavery, that violence has just taken another form in 2020.

A person, you know, having a knee on their neck and pleading and still not being heard or a 60-year-old man in his own home having an episode and not being supported- these are issues that can no longer be ignore.

So the pattern may have shifted and changed, the issue has not. It is still racist, it is still discriminatory, and it is still requiring our collective efforts on moving towards inclusion. So advocacy is a critical part of the work that we need to engage in. How should our response be? What should we take a position on?

I may be an advocate and an ally for a Black person, but I cannot speak to the experience that a Black person has and, therefore, I need to be sensitive.

I need to be empathetic and I need to create the space for a Black individual to speak for themselves.

I need to share that power,

I need to share my position.

I need to make that space to create room for my colleague who's Black and whose experiences might be different to address what needs to be addressed.

I need to be at the back, I need to be supportive, I need to be a strong voice, but I also need to be holding that hand to say I'm there to support but I'm not there to take over.

So we are not doing it for them, we are doing it **with** them. Remember that work needs to be collectively built upon. We need to address this as a community, and as individuals. Next slide, please. Take it away, Taranum & Frishta.

Speaker: Frishta

So on behalf of RDR and our team, I would like to thank you all for joining us today. I hope the conversation was fruitful and insightful and thank you for engaging with the interact chats. And again, if you have any more questions or want to get in contact with RDR about our training services, feel free to reach out to us. The slides will be made available online alongside resources that we also think would be very helpful to your learnings.