Summary: Crafting Inclusion within the Beverage-Alcohol Industry

Problem

The beverage-alcohol industry is home to many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that produce and distribute wine, beer, and spirits in Ontario. It has been found that there is a lack of support for these businesses to embed equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) practices within organizational structures and processes. Specifically, equitable human resource (HR) processes—such as encouraging transparency during the hiring and selection stage—are not as structured within businesses. These structural barriers can impede one's progress in trying to enter and advance within the industry, particularly women and other underrepresented groups.

Research shows that an equitable, diverse, and inclusive workforce improves financial performance by creating an inclusive environment for innovation and creativity, problem-solving, and resiliency.

EQUITY

…refers to fairness in the distribution of rewards and resources (Leventhal, 1980) within organizations. Equitable practices refer to fairly implemented employment practices that help to eliminate bias (Nishi, 2013).

DIVERSITY

…in an organization can be referred to as the degree to which it "advocates fair human resource policies and socially integrates underrepresented employees" (McKay, Avery, and Morris, 2008, p. 352) instead of simply how demographically diverse its employees are in an organization.

INCLUSION

…is how an employee perceives that they are an esteemed member of the organization through their sense of belonging and uniqueness (Shore et al., 2011).
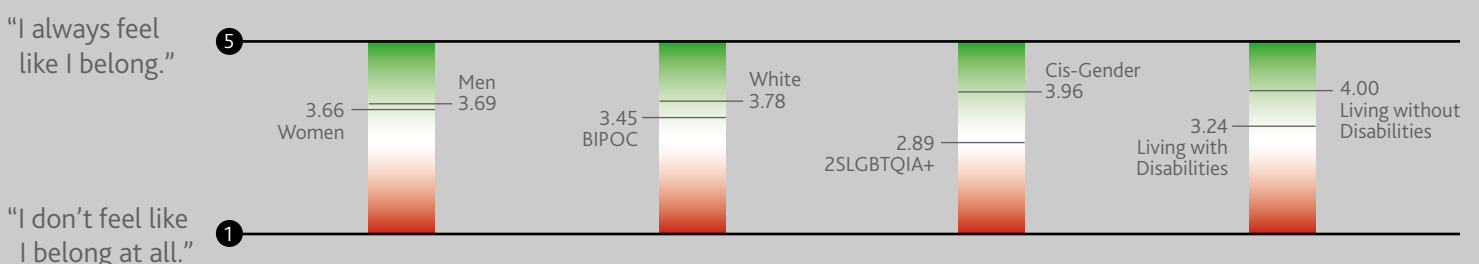
RESEARCH & METHODOLOGY

Our team conducted three studies to gather insights and perspectives from individuals within the beverage-alcohol industry to understand the different nuances and opinions that may exist. Each study allowed us to capture different pieces of the puzzle to determine the collective understanding of EDI within the industry.

Perceptions of EDI

1. We conducted a sentiment analysis that provided context as to how individuals within the alcohol industry feel about EDI. The question was posed: "What are the emotions shared by individuals working in the beverage-alcohol industry towards topics related to an equitable, diverse, and inclusive workplace?" This included gathering positive, negative, and neutral feelings, as well as insights and opinions from public forums.

2. We conducted an online survey, completed by 100 individuals, that collected data from diverse groups within the alcohol industry, including women, members of the BIPOC and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, and people with physical impairment or mental health issues. The aim of the survey was to better understand how individuals, particularly diverse women, working in the alcohol industry perceive the degree of equity, diversity, and inclusion in the industry. Additionally, we found statistically significant relationships among equity, diversity, and inclusion to recommend best practices.

3. We interviewed diverse women to capture lived experiences. The interviews focused on understanding career paths available for diverse women, achievements and accomplishments, challenges and barriers, perspectives of fit, and any recommendations that they had to offer.

Perceptions: "I feel like I belong at work."

"I always feel like I belong." — 5

"I don't feel like I belong at all." — 1

- 3.66 Women
- Men 3.69
- 3.45 BIPOC
- White 3.78
- 2.89 2SLGBTQIA+
- Cis-Gender 3.96
- 3.24 Living with Disabilities
- 4.00 Living without Disabilities

Framework

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EQUITABLE
PRACTICES  →  DIVERSITY
              CLIMATE  →  INCLUSION
                ↑
     PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY
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RECOMMENDATIONS: A WAY FORWARD

So, what can we do to foster EDI, and support SMEs and their employees within the industry? The following recommendations are based on our three studies:
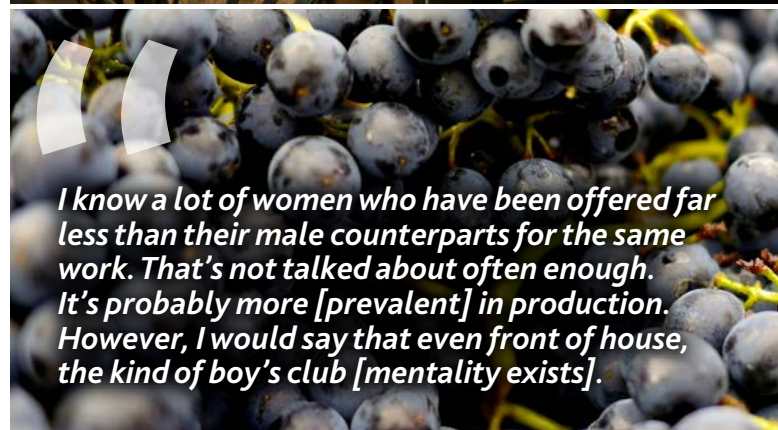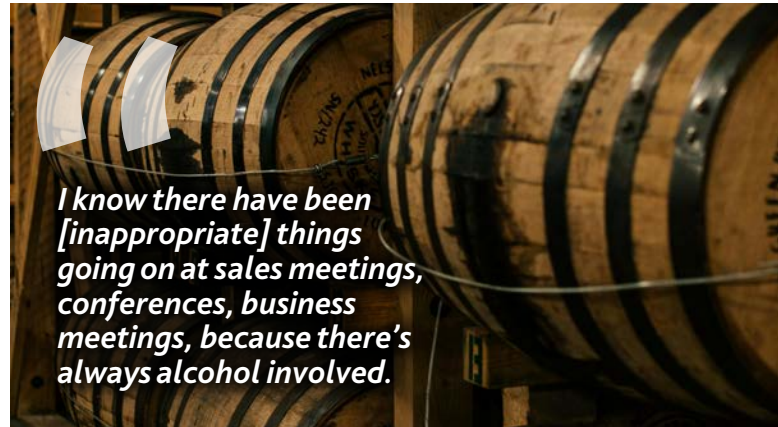
Learning from Best Practices

- Understand industry-wide efforts and initiatives on incorporating EDI within the sector to support staff, especially those from diverse backgrounds.
- Regularly update practices, protocols, and policies to ensure your organization is adaptable and up to date.
- Research what others are doing in this space, and find efforts and initiatives that can be applied within your own business.
- Learn from others within the space by researching negative efforts to understand how those actions were inappropriately executed.

HR support or training

- Receive free or low-cost HR support and training from education institutes (e.g., Brock, Niagara College).
- Apply for grants or funding from all levels of government to improve internal policies, practices, and protocols.
- Stay up to date with free learning on EDI topics from various learning platforms (e.g., LinkedIn Learnings, trainings and courses from the Government of Canada, etc.).
- Consult with companies specialized in providing EDI for SMEs.

Career advancement

- Introduce mentorship and professional development opportunities and support.
- Encourage managers to mentor employees to support career advancement and development.
- Develop career progression and development programs; and opportunities for all, including those from equity-deserving groups.
- Equity plays an important role in organizations and businesses within our sectors. Not only does it create fairness, but it also levels out the playing field, allowing everyone the opportunity to succeed. To incorporate these practices, research projects are needed to provide insights as to why concepts such as equity are important.

I know there have been [inappropriate] things going on at sales meetings, conferences, business meetings, because there's always alcohol involved.

I know a lot of women who have been offered far less than their male counterparts for the same work. That's not talked about often enough. It's probably more [prevalent] in production. However, I would say that even front of house, the kind of boy's club [mentality exists].

We are not in an organization that really allows for that kind of professional discussion to happen. There's a lack of a professional approach to job descriptions, annual or more frequent reviews.

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