



Interview with Michael Bach, National Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for KPMG's operations in Canada



Posted on [October 23, 2012](#)

Why does diversity matter to KPMG?

Diversity matters to KPMG because we are a people business. We don't manufacture a product and as such, our success is dependent on the engagement of our people. We want them to be fully engaged in their work so that they can provide excellent client service. If there's something in their way, if they are being discriminated against, if they don't feel like they have the same opportunities, if they aren't being promoted properly, then those barriers are what we, as an employer, need to remove to ensure that they can be successful. And we are in a war on talent. Even in this economy, where we aren't hiring as many people as we're used to, we're still hiring. And we need to make sure that we're not excluding any group, that this is a place where anyone can come to work and be successful.

Can you give me an example, what kind of policies and practices does KPMG implement, to promote diversity in the workplace?

Our big focus right now is on the advancement of women. We've done some research and found that our numbers around women weren't decreasing but they weren't advancing at the rate that we want. Our model is fairly simple. We're not publicly traded, we're privately owned by the partners within the organization. So we want our partnership to be representative of our overall population. Our partnership is about 25% women and the overall population is 54% women. We hire very much off-campus, out of university. That's about 55-to-60% women, going into accounting programs.

Then when we get up into the partnership ranks, there's a substantial drop-off. So we put in a particular focus on the advancement of women. We've done that by increasing the focus on flexibility in the workplace (...). That doesn't necessarily mean part-time, it can also mean working from home, or compressed work weeks like doing 5 days in 4 (...). We are working on our on-ramping and off-ramping for maternity leave. In Canada, when a woman gives birth she is entitled to a year of maternity leave. There is good and bad to that policy. From our perspective, the bad of it is that you're potentially disconnected from the office for as much as a year, so we need to make sure we're doing a good job of off-ramping them, spending the time with them as they're getting ready to go on maternity leave but then doing an even better job of on-ramping them and getting them back into the workforce.

We want to keep the best. We believe really strongly that we hire the best and the brightest, and so we want to make sure that they stay within the organization throughout their career.

That's just the focus on our advancement of women internally. There are other pieces to it externally. There's a whole raft of other projects that we take on around other groups: visible minorities, skilled immigrants, the LGBT population, people with disabilities, etc. It's a pretty broad focus.

Could you expand further on the advancement of visible minorities and individuals from ethno-cultural groups at KPMG?

We've done a lot of work on visible minorities over the past few years. The population of visible minorities in Canada is quite high, particularly in the larger centers where we operate: Toronto as an example, Vancouver as another one. And if you look at our office in Toronto, it is 38% visible minority and 42% were born outside Canada. We did a lot of education around inclusive practices and how to have an inclusive office, how to work with people from different ethno-cultural backgrounds, and we have included in that work with skilled immigrants. We have to keep in mind that not all skilled immigrants are visible minorities and not all visible minorities are skilled immigrants.

An example of the work that we do in respecting cultural diversity is the global license of an offering called GlobeSmart. This is a tool where you can fill out a profile online and it will match you to different countries. So if I was going to China for example, I would answer the questions and it would say "these are some of the things you will need to be aware of when going to do business in China, when moving to China or in fact when working with a person who is actually from China"(...). It's a very powerful tool for us as a firm because we're able to understand culture differently, and we've done a lot around educating our people: we have a mandatory diversity training program, we have employee resource groups for some of our different ethno-cultural groups: one for our Muslim practitioners and another one for our East and South East Asian people. They each play a part in terms of educating and helping the organization move forward around the topic of ethnicity and intercultural connectivity.

What does intercultural innovation mean to Michael Bach? Who is better positioned to innovate in this field?

It's a good question and I don't know if I have the exact answer for you. Intercultural innovation to me is about getting the best out of people and giving them the opportunity to soar and to succeed, and not allowing biases to get in the way. (...)I think that if we can all just respect each other a little more, then we can work together and that's where you start to see innovation.

I don't preach tolerance in my work. I don't believe in tolerance, I always say my mother-in-law tolerates me. I don't want to be tolerated, I want to be respected. I don't need you to have the same beliefs that I do; I don't need you to follow the same moral compasses I do. I need you to respect

who I am as an individual and I will provide that same respect to you. If you can do that then you can get into a room and you can do magical things in terms of innovating and creating and solving the world's problems

Who does it well? I don't really know. I think sessions like this Learning Exchange are a great opportunity to come together and share experiences around the world and I think it's going to be up to every organization to define what this looks like. I think we've done a good job. Do I think we can do better? Of course, I think we can always do better. But I think we've done a good job in terms of teaching that value of respect around the office.

Finally, how can the public sector, corporate and civil society better work together to promote diversity in general, and cultural diversity in particular and respect for ethno-religious minorities and beliefs?

It's not easy. I can probably tell you the meaning of life better than I can tell you this one. I think Chancellor Merkel from Germany said that multiculturalism in Germany was a failure. And there's a lot of question as to why Canada has been so successful around multiculturalism and I believe that one of the reasons why we've been so successful is because no one in this country has ever forgotten that we're all immigrants. Other than our Aboriginal and First Nations peoples, none of us are from this country. My family has been here a long time. I'm an eighth generation Canadian. But at my core, I'm British. English, Irish, Welsh, and Scottish – there's a little bit of each in me. I understand that. I respect that. I don't do pilgrimages to Britain or anything, I don't have immediate family over there, but I still recognize that I'm an immigrant to this country. And I think that's part of our success.

I remember the story of a woman. I was doing some work in our practice in the Netherlands, and I was chatting with a woman who was Muslim. Her family was originally from Morocco but she was third generation Dutch. She was giving a presentation and one of the partners in the firm came up to her and all he said to her was "Your Dutch is very good." Of course! It's her first language! That's a mindset that suggests that she is not "pure" (and I deliberately use air quotes), then she is a foreigner. I think all of us, as corporations, countries or civil society need to get past that. If we can get through those things, as individual organizations, as countries – if we can respect all of our citizens, if we can help all of them to succeed, then we as countries succeed. And we as a planet succeed.

Every individual has a responsibility. We have a role to play in creating a world that is free from bias. That bias is taught. You're not born a racist, you're taught to be a racist. But at some point that cycle has to break in order for us to succeed. If every person takes it upon themselves to say "I'm going to respect everyone" and live and die by that, we're going to see a change in the world. A dramatic change in the world.