

THE SOCIAL NORMS OF PREJUDICE AND INCLUSION

Building metrics to strengthen social cohesion

RESEARCH PROSPECTUS

Context

The Challenge. As much as we may know how invaluable our differences are, there continues to be persistent prejudice and intolerance. While Canada is not yet experiencing the disturbing rise in intolerance taking place elsewhere, the problem in Canada and its corrosive consequences remain well entrenched; the status quo is intolerable for too many people in a country that likes to pride itself on embracing diversity.

Dismantling prejudice is a daunting challenge because it is so firmly embedded in society, and resistant to legal and policy interventions. Prejudice and intolerance are a function of people's internal orientation (values, beliefs, opinions) and the collective social norms that govern what is acceptable behaviour (how people believe they can act in social situations). The former is very difficult if not impossible to change, but the latter offers much greater potential for progress. How people choose to act is more important than what they think and feel, and actions can be influenced more effectively than attitudes and beliefs. This makes social norms the key to tackling prejudice head on.

The Goal is to understand our social norms with respect to prejudice and inclusion, so that we can strengthen how we live together with differences. When we understand these social norms we can establish metrics and key indicators of social cohesion; and with this, develop policies and strategies that strengthen positive norms and "de-normalize" negative ones.

Why Social Norms are important. Social norms are widely held expectations about what is and is not acceptable or appropriate behaviour in particular settings and situations. Such norms are well entrenched but can change over time, and sometimes as a result of intentional efforts. Perhaps the most stunning example involves the change in social norms around smoking. Just a generation or so ago, smoking was the sign of the sexy, interesting maverick; today it has become effectively "de-normalized" as inconsiderate behaviour and poor health habits. Regulations banning smoking in indoor spaces are essential but it is more than laws that govern behaviour (by contrast, consider jaywalking – also legally forbidden but socially accepted and rarely sanctioned).

Social norms, unlike laws and rules, are not explicitly articulated but their power is in the unstated conditions of social engagement. Social norms play a key role in the dynamics of prejudice and intolerance. They create the frame for behaviour towards the "other." Changing these silent but behaviour-defining social norms may be a key strategy for reducing the prevalence of prejudice and intolerance in our society. But changing social norms first requires that they are properly understood, and there has been no relevant empirical research on this topic in Canada (or almost anywhere).

The first step is to conduct baseline social research with the Canadian population to empirically define our current social norms related to prejudice and intolerance. Once we understand our social norms and have proper metrics, we will then have the tools to start reshaping them.

2/ ...

The Research

The Environics Institute for Survey Research and the Mosaic Institute are planning a landmark research project to map selected social norms in Canadian society pertaining to treatment of individuals and groups from specific parts of society that most widely experience prejudice and intolerance. The research will provide empirical measures of the norms in terms of their overall strength, their distribution across the population (e.g., by region, community size, demographic characteristics). A second dimension of the research will focus on how individuals within these targeted groups experience the breaking of these norms.

This research is intended to serve as a foundation for future research to identify how social norms are evolving over time, and for more in-depth focus within specific communities, population subgroups and organizational culture. Once social norms are clearly defined and measurable, strategies can then be formulated around changing them. Because this research will break new ground, it presents a tremendous opportunity for demonstrating leadership in developing the knowledge required for effectively addressing the endemic challenges of prejudice and intolerance in our society.

Phase 1: Baseline survey of social norms in Canada. The first phase is a national survey with a representative sample of Canadians (aged 18 plus), along with oversamples of specific ethno-cultural populations. The survey will be conducted online, as the most appropriate mode for measuring social norms. We will work with the Research Partners to define precise scope and scale: this would include agreeing on geographic and demographic parameters; including youth, ages 15-18.

Phase 2: Follow-up targeted research. Based on Phase 1 results and insights, a second phase would focus on particular population groups or within organizations interested in understanding the social norms dynamic among their staff/employees. This research would be conducted in partnership with one or more specific organizations focusing on their target populations.

Timetable. Phase 1 will be conducted over a five-month period, commencing once the project funding is in place. The timetable for Phase 2 will be based on what organizations/sponsors choose to participate.

Budget

Phase 1: \$120K – \$150K (range reflects options for population coverage).

Phase 2: To be determined based on target population and sponsor focus.

Partnership Opportunities

We are seeking research investment partners. This research will be instrumental in providing valuable intelligence for both the public conversation about dismantling prejudice and organizations interested in strengthening social cohesion within communities, whether defined geographically, organizationally or socially. Being involved from the outset offers a unique opportunity to demonstrate leadership in the diversity and inclusion space. Benefits of partnership include:

- Full recognition as a Partner
- Input into research design and scope
- Participation in the public release
- Pre-release briefings and access to all the data and analysis
- Customization for your organization in Phase 2

For more information:

Keith Neuman, Ph.D., Environics Institute (416) 969-2457 or keith.neuman@environics.ca

Pamela Divinsky, Ph.D., Mosaic Institute (416) 644-6000; ext 620 or pd@mosaicinstitute.ca

The Environics Institute for Survey Research conducts original public opinion and social research related to issues of public policy and social change. The Institute's primary mission is to survey those not usually heard from, using questions not usually asked. Survey research - properly conducted and published - helps all of us better understand our world as it is today, how it's changing, and where it may be heading. Environicsinstitute.org

The Mosaic Institute is committed to dismantling prejudice. Our approach is to make it as easy as possible for Canadians to experience our differences as beneficial and enriching. Our education programs, social initiatives and dialogues are designed to get people to see beyond categories, and experience the value of the individual.

Mosaicinstitute.ca
