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# Obstacles to socioeconomic integration of highly-skilled immigrant women

## Lessons from Quebec interculturalism and implications for diversity management

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of obstacles to socioeconomic integration faced by highly-skilled immigrant women (HSIW) to Quebec, followed by a discussion of Quebec's socio-political context and interculturalism, in an effort to better situate these obstacles. With these in mind, implications for diversity management are discussed.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper is largely based on a review of the immigrant integration, interculturalism and diversity management literatures pertaining to the socioeconomic integration of highly-skilled immigrants. It focusses on the socioeconomic integration of HSIW in the Quebec context.

**Findings** – The authors find that researchers should continue to examine aspects of the social and political contexts in which immigrant integration and diversity management take place when conducting studies in these areas. The authors also encourage continued research pertaining to specific groups, as these may bring to light-specific dynamics that can lead to exclusion.

**Practical implications** – This paper includes implications for diversity management in organizations seeking to foster inclusive practices with regards to ethnic minorities and immigrants in general, and HSIW in particular.

**Originality/value** – The paper sheds new light on immigrant integration and diversity management in Quebec by bridging the gap between three areas of study that are interconnected but seldom discussed together: socioeconomic integration of immigrants, interculturalism and diversity management in organizations.

**Keywords** Quebec, Diversity management, Highly-skilled immigrant women, Interculturalism

**Paper type** General review

## Introduction

For the past two decades, Quebec has adapted its immigration policy to counter the consequences of an ageing population, and a transition toward the "knowledge economy." It is in this context that increasing the inflow of young, highly-skilled and Francophone immigrants became a short-term as well as a long-term strategy (Quebec, 1990). However, despite high education levels, recent immigrants experience many obstacles to socioeconomic integration. Unemployment rates, income gaps and levels of deskilling exceed those of the native-born as well as that of older immigrant cohorts (Reitz, 2007a, b; Arcand *et al.*, 2009). Factors explaining these difficulties are well documented in the international literature concerning highly-skilled immigration and include: the non-recognition of foreign diplomas and skills, the lack of experience on the

local job market, the lack of certain social networks or difficulty accessing them and finally, prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination (Reitz, 2007a, b; Syed, 2008; Arcand *et al.*, 2009). Although there is an increasing amount of research on the specific obstacles faced by immigrant women in certain national contexts, what is less explored is the specific issues they face in the workplace, as well as the different HR and diversity management approaches that can facilitate their socioeconomic integration. The aim of this paper is twofold. First, we explore how the socio-political context contributes to obstacles faced by highly-skilled immigrant women (HSIW) in Quebec with regards to their socioeconomic integration, in an effort to better inform decision makers with regards to integration policy. Then, based on this, we offer insights into how decision makers in organizations can review their human resource and team management practices in order to better integrate this group, by applying the principles of interculturalism. We do so by offering a selective review of the academic literature on immigrant integration, interculturalism and diversity management, then applying it to the case of HSIW in Quebec.

This paper is organized as follows. In the first section, we provide an overview of the context of immigration to Quebec, including the socioeconomic integration of highly-skilled immigrants. Second, we present the main obstacles faced by highly-skilled immigrants and HSIW in particular. Then, we explore elements of the Quebec socio-political context that shape intercultural relations and immigrant integration. Finally, we explore how organizations can learn from interculturalism in order to better integrate a diverse workforce, particularly HSIW.

## Quebec immigration policy and highly-skilled immigrants' socioeconomic integration

Canada is a nation built on successive waves of immigration, based on economic and nation-building needs (Walker, 2008), and to this, the province of Quebec is no exception. In 1967, a points-based selection process based on individual characteristics was implemented to encourage skilled immigration. This policy encouraged recruitment in non-European countries and further diversified the origins of new Quebecers. In 1968, Quebec created its own Ministry of Immigration and began to control the selection of economic immigrants. In 1986, clear goals were established to increase the influx of economic immigrants, goals reiterated and reinforced in 1991 to promote the demographic, economic and linguistic development of Quebec with the help of young, educated and Francophone immigrants (Quebec, 1990).

What is relatively new is the massive influx of highly-educated immigrants to Quebec. Since 2006, for example, more than 150,000 newcomers have arrived to Quebec. Of these, an increasing number are skilled workers. In 2012, for example, more than 55,000 immigrants landed in Quebec, of which more than 34,000 were selected through the "skilled workers" category (Immigration et Communautés culturelles Quebec (ICC), 2013a, b).

In spite of their rich human capital, immigrants to Canada and Quebec face challenges to socioeconomic integration, similar to those faced by skilled immigrants in many countries (see, e.g. Syed, 2008). Indeed, high unemployment rates, income gaps and deskilling persist, and they are even worse for newer cohorts (Reitz, 2007a). The situation seems particularly problematic in Quebec, compared to other "high-immigration" Canadian provinces such as Ontario and British Columbia. For example, unemployment rates are consistently higher for highly-skilled immigrants than for highly-skilled workers born in Canada, and this gap is larger in Quebec than in the other two aforementioned provinces. This situation could be partly explained by

the higher proportion of immigrants in the last five years in Quebec (ICC, 2013a, b). In addition, the wage gap between foreign-born and native-born university-educated workers is growing, and those with diplomas earned outside North America and Europe are at a greatest disadvantage (Yssaad, 2012). Finally, deskilling, on the other hand, is slightly less problematic in Quebec, but according to Boudarbat and Connolly (2013), the gap between immigrants and the native-born is increasing and it is highest for immigrants with diplomas obtained outside North America and Europe. Thus, although unemployment rates are lower for immigrants in Ontario and British Columbia than in Quebec, those who are employed are more likely to be so at levels beneath their skill level, especially if they have foreign diplomas.

### Obstacles to highly-skilled immigrants' employment success in Quebec

The barriers to socioeconomic integration of immigrants to Canada are well documented (Reitz, 2007a) and resemble those faced by highly-skilled immigrants internationally (Syed, 2008). First, non-recognition of foreign diplomas and skills is an important obstacle for this population (Reitz, 2005). In Canada, professional orders and colleges often require years of retraining, or the taking of expensive tests in order to allow immigrants to practice in their field (Action travail des femmes (ATF), 2009). This may be worse in Quebec than in other provinces such as Ontario (ATF, 2009). For other professions, government bodies may not always grant equivalencies that reflect the levels expected by the immigrants (ATF, 2009). The lack of precise criteria to evaluate diplomas can be particularly problematic (ATF, 2009). Even with these equivalencies, employers might be reticent to hire immigrants with foreign diplomas because they do not know the actual value of their diplomas and may want to avoid the "risk" of making a bad decision (Reitz, 2001).

Second, the lack of experience on the Canadian job market appears to be an important barrier for immigrant workers (Reitz, 2001). This is in apparent contradiction with the selection criteria for immigrants, which awards points for foreign experience, which in turn is seldom recognized by employers.

A third factor that can influence immigrant socioeconomic integration is the types of social networks they have or do not have, and the ability or not to mobilize them. On the one hand, access to networks within ethnic communities may help immigrants settle, and they may even help them get a first job to fulfill their immediate needs, but they seldom help them find highly-skilled employment (Nakhaie, 2007). On the other hand, the lack of ties to the host community and to members of their occupational field cuts immigrants off from many job opportunities and other information such as cultural norms and common practices within their profession in the host country. One Quebec study found that, although weak ties are thought to be useful in providing new information and opportunities, the weak ties to Quebecers created by immigrants may be too weak to be useful (Arcand *et al.*, 2009). This could be related to a form of ambivalence toward immigrants that may be felt by some Quebecers, related to the socio-political issues we shall discuss shortly.

The lack of language skills can also be a barrier to socioeconomic integration. Although the Quebec government attempts to reduce this barrier by favouring French-speaking immigrants, their French language proficiency may not be as high as expected. Also, some immigrants may have accents, making communication difficult and employers may be reluctant to hire them, just as the immigrants themselves may face temporary difficulties in comprehending the Quebec accent (ATF, 2009). Finally, most immigrants settle in Montreal and then learn that often, both French and English are job requirements (Arcand, 2006; ATF, 2009).

Finally, as in any society, prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination are realities of the Quebec job market. Recently, Eid *et al.* (2012) conducted a testing study in Montreal, sending out comparable resumes with either a foreign or native-born sounding name to apply for jobs in a variety of fields. The study showed how having a foreign-sounding name has a negative impact on the probability of being contacted by the employer to be called back for an interview. Discrimination stemming from prejudice and stereotypes is studied abundantly in the social-psychological and sociological literatures (Dipboye and Colella, 2005) and it is not our aim to discuss them here. We shall argue, however, that such exclusionary attitudes and behaviors can also be influenced by socio-political context; the specific context in which immigrants are expected to integrate in Quebec poses specific challenges, especially to HSIW. Before addressing this question, we discuss obstacles faced by HSIW in Quebec.

*Obstacles faced by HSIW in Quebec*
In the skilled worker immigration category, the three most important declared professions for women are in the following fields: business, finance and administration (21.2 percent), social sciences, teaching and public administration (16.2 percent) and natural and applied sciences (13.1 percent). In comparison, for men, natural and applied sciences is the most prevalent declared professional category (28.6 percent), followed by business, finance and administration (12.6 percent) and social sciences, teaching and public administration (10.6 percent) (Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Diversité et de l'Inclusion (MIDI), Direction de la recherche et de l'analyse prospective, 2014). Thus, men may be in a better position to find employment given the relative labor shortage in some areas of natural and applied sciences, namely, information and communications technology (Information and Communication Technology Council, 2010). Although some might expect the health professions to be particularly problematic for foreign skills recognition, these are not where the majority of immigrants to Quebec hope to practice. It may be worth mentioning, however, that immigrant women are twice as likely as immigrant men to have declared these professions (9.8 vs 4.9 percent, respectively).

Whereas unemployment rates are generally lower for women than for men born in Canada (Boudarbat and Connolly, 2013), this is not necessarily the case for immigrant women compared to their male counterparts. In addition, the employment rates of immigrant women are systematically lower than that of their male counterparts or of the Canadian-born. Despite being twice as likely to hold university degrees than the native-born, immigrants to Canada are more likely to hold positions requiring little education (Galarneau and Morissette, 2008). In Quebec, available data indicate that the rate of deskilling for the native-born is lower for men than for women (Chicha, 2009).

The aforementionned data supports the argument that certain obstacles to socioeconomic integration affect immigrant women more strongly than men (Chicha, 2009; ATF, 2009; Salaff and Greve, 2003). For example, if the non-recognition of foreign credentials is problematic for many immigrants, it may be worse for women, who tend to have fewer financial resources, and more time constraints related to family responsibilities (ATF, 2009). In addition, it may take longer for women to start procedures if they focus on their family's integration before their own (Chicha, 2009), making the process longer and potentially more discouraging. Another example is that of social networks: if they are important on the Quebec job market and immigrants are at a disadvantage for not having ties to Quebecers, this may be worse for women for a variety of reasons. These include: that their networks tend to be less varied and more family and community based (Potter, 1999) and that they are more likely to accept low-skilled

employment in order to support their family (Chicha, 2009), thus potentially drawing them away from professional networks (Gauthier, 2013).

In her Montreal study, Chicha (2009) found that family strategies were among the most important factors explaining the underemployment and/or deskilling of HSIW. Among her sample, 68 percent suffered from moderate or severe deskilling, mostly due to priority being placed on their husbands' careers, having young children and not having access to childcare. These findings are in line with other studies in Quebec as well as internationally which have demonstrated that married immigrant women tend to place more emphasis on their husband's careers, meanwhile accepting low-skill, low-paying jobs in order to meet their family's basic needs (Chicha, 2009; Salaff and Greve, 2003). In some cases, this may be related to cultural norms; this is particularly true of Maghrebi or Latin American immigrants who represent a large proportion of immigrants to Quebec. Although these choices are often made in the perspective that they are temporary, they become especially problematic because, the more time one spends away from one's area of expertise, the more difficult it can be to reintegrate it, due to skills becoming out-dated, or having a gap in one's résumé.

In Quebec, immigration agents and community organizations play a central role in the integration of newcomers. The province funds them and relies on them to provide services such as employability programs. However, some studies have shown that these services are not well adapted to the needs of highly-skilled immigrants, especially women (ATF, 2009; Lenoir *et al.*, 2009). Indeed, many social practitioners appear not to differentiate between skilled and unskilled immigrant women, for example, in the strategies, the training, or the workshops on résumé writing and interviewing techniques that they recommend (ATF, 2009). In addition, the services offered do not always take into account the specific concerns of women, such as the need childcare, more precarious immigration statuses (many are not principal applicants, many others are sponsored), and a higher likelihood to suffer from discrimination (ATF, 2009). Furthermore, the training they offer is rather technical and is not always informative regarding certain realities of the job market, or of specific fields, such as agronomics where immigrants may be seen as unfit to work on certain projects since they do not have knowledge of the local agricultural market (ATF, 2009). Finally, in their study, ATF (2009) found that many women of color felt that some community workers held stereotypes, such as the idea that black women are too slow to be nurses in Quebec, in spite of their diplomas and experience. Some may also have infantilizing attitudes toward them, for example considering that immigrant women do not "need" to obtain skilled employment.

Access to childcare also constitutes a major obstacle for immigrant women with young children because affordable childcare can be difficult to obtain in Quebec (Chicha, 2009). Quebec offers state-subsidized childcare, but the waiting lists are notoriously long. This is particularly problematic for newcomers who already have children, and who do not necessarily have the resources to afford private childcare. This may hamper immigrant women's ability to search for a job, given the unequal distribution of childcare responsibilities and other domestic tasks within the family unit (ATF, 2009). Perhaps paradoxically, many women eventually turn to childcare as a means to gain employment while being able to care for their own children (ATF, 2009). This strategy, however, can contribute to isolating and further marginalizing them, not to mention confining them to a traditionally feminine and thus devalued role.

As mentioned previously, many immigrants to Quebec are selected among other things for their knowledge of French. However, English is often requirement for many

jobs, especially in the Montreal area (Arcand, 2006; ATF, 2009). Although English classes do exist, they are not funded the same way French classes are, and their schedules and costs can become an obstacle to immigrant women with limited financial and time resources.

Once they start looking for employment in their field, immigrant women are subject to particular forms of prejudice and stereotypes. Several researchers have suggested that specific stereotypes regarding ethnic women make them appear as being more fit for unskilled, temporary and/or care work than highly-skilled work (Schrover *et al.*, 2007). In Quebec, this is markedly salient for one group of immigrants, those from the Maghreb, who since the beginning of the 2000s constitute one of the most important immigrant groups to the province. Indeed, if September 11 and recent events in Quebec have sparked negative attitudes toward groups and individuals identified as "Arab" or "Muslim," some authors suggest that this is worse for women, especially those who wear a headscarf, since they are particularly vulnerable to stereotypes about being submissive or prioritizing family over work (Arcand *et al.*, 2009; Vatz Laaroussi, 2008). This is consistent with what is experienced by Muslim women in other "western" countries such as Australia (Dreher, 2006).

We now turn to an exploration of the current socio-political context in Quebec, in order to better understand how it contributes to creating and maintaining obstacles faced by HSIW in regards to their socioeconomic integration.

## The Quebec context: interculturalism and immigrant integration

Quebec's policy of interculturalism can be characterized as a "hybrid" between Canadian multiculturalism and French republicanism. Canadian multiculturalism recognizes that Canadian society is a pluralist one and considers all cultures to be equal. Unlike the US "melting pot" or France's republican approach, Canadian multiculturalism encourages the preservation of ethnic identities (Houle, 1999). Interculturalism can be seen as a bridge between multiculturalism and more assimilationist approaches, attempting to avoid ghettoization, exclusion and/or assimilation (Arcand, 2006). This approach encourages open dialogue, reciprocity and respect between cultural communities, without implying that all values are equal, and always with the recognition that there is a majority group. In this approach, integration is conceptualized as a two-way process, requiring both efforts from newcomers to adapt to certain facets of Quebec culture and values, and from established Quebecers to show openness and a willingness to embrace diversity (Bouchard, 2012). In the Quebec context, the majority group is of French descent and shares a certain number of values, which it wishes to preserve (Bouchard and Taylor, 2008). These values include French as the common language of public life, democracy, pluralism, secularism and gender equality (Bouchard, 2012).

Although some authors question the existence of such "shared values" (White, 2014), this idea is often repeated in the media and plays a role in interethnic relations. The need to preserve this culture and these values are made particularly salient by this group's double status: first as a minority of Francophones in an Anglophone country; and second, as a majority within a province, attempting to integrate other minority groups, formed by (more recent) immigrants. In line with the aforementioned values, one strategy has been to promote French as a common language, as a bridge between cultures (Bilge, 2013). However, it appears that in practice, knowledge of French by immigrants is insufficient in fostering common understanding and inclusion. This may be attributable in part to recent events, that have brought culture and nationality back to the forefront of public debate (Bilge, 2013). We turn to this issue next.

*Quebec interculturalism: policy and public opinion*
One way interculturalism is put into practice by policy makers is by encouraging the
revision and renegotiation of common practices held by the majority in order to ensure
the protection of minority rights. This can be done by the application of reasonable
accommodations in the workplace and public services. Reasonable accommodations
are the result of specific laws whereby employers are under the obligation to find ways
to modify norms or practices in the workplace if these are found to be discriminatory
toward members of certain groups (persons with disabilities, women, etc.). These
modifications must not discriminate against others or pose excessive constraints on the
organization. In recent years, the term has been associated with measures taken to
accommodate individuals from religious minorities. This association was crystallized
in 2007 when the Government of Quebec held the Consultation Commission on
Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences.

These consultations sparked some societal controversy as they exposed a range of
fears and stereotypes held by certain Quebecers toward immigrants and ethnic
minorities. Some of these were fueled by mediatized anecdotes concerning individuals
demanding to be served by a member of their own sex when obtaining public services,
or not to interact with members of the opposite sex while attending state-funded French
classes. Bilge (2013), analyzed the discourse of certain socially conservative political
figures, who argue that the cowardice of political elites, brought about by a sense of
being historical victims, makes them unwilling to "stand up" to immigrants who make
"unreasonable demands" (Bilge, 2013). This situation can be confusing for newcomers
who are unaware of the historical tensions between Francophones and Anglophones in
the province (Arcand, 2006), and who may not understand why some Quebecers may
be hostile or ambivalent toward them (consciously or not).

One recurring fear of some Quebeckers is that, allowing certain religious freedoms
may come into contradiction with Quebec values such as secularism and gender
equality. This tension is particularly salient for Quebecers given their history of
domination by the Catholic Church, which was rejected during the Quiet revolution
starting in the 1960s (Bouchard, 2012). Furthermore, the reasonable accommodations
debate, many authors suggest, further exacerbated anti-Islamic or anti-Arab sentiment
fueled by the September 11, 2001 events (Lenoir *et al.*, 2009). Thus, concerns over
having to accommodate "outrageous" religious demands, or stereotypes regarding
Muslim women (Bilge, 2013) seem to have made many employers reticent to hiring
immigrant women perceived as being Muslim or Arab. Some authors contend this
context may explain in part why this group is among those with the highest
unemployment rates in Quebec (Lenoir-Achdjian *et al.*, 2007). This can be particularly
problematic for Maghrebi women, especially those who are clearly identified as Muslim
because of their headscarf. This group is especially vulnerable to marginalization since
discussions emerged in 2013 regarding the possibility of banning "visible religious
symbols" for public sector workers as part of a "Charter of values" submitted by the
then-governing Parti Quebecois. The arguments for this practice included ensuring
that secularism was respected in the State apparatus, while promoting gender equality
by discouraging the alleged control of Muslim men over Muslim women symbolized by
the headscarf, in what Ho (2007) calls racialized paternalism. This Charter was
criticized for many reasons, namely, the marginalization of the women it claims to want
to protect by barring them from public sector employment, as well as undermining
gender equality by adopting a paternalistic view concerning women's choice to wear
the headscarf.

In the public sphere, this fueled wider debates on the degree to which immigrants are expected to integrate into Quebec society and adopt their norms and values. In some instances, this fueled anti-immigrant sentiment, often intertwined with an anti-islamic discourse. In one highly mediatized case, a small town drafted a "code of conduct" clearly aimed at potential immigrants, prohibiting such acts as stoning and burning women alive. When coupled with specific stereotypes regarding immigrant women, this type of discourse can be considerably problematic for their integration, whether they are Muslim or not. In addition, HSIW are notably vulnerable as these stereotypes are virtually incompatible with the "classic" image of professionals or managers.

## Implications for diversity management in organizations

Quebec's desire to promote equality and to integrate its diverse population into the workforce is illustrated by the fact that most of the public sector, as well as organizations that receive contracts from the Quebec government, are subject to equal opportunity legislation. However, this legislation has failed to ensure adequate representation of ethnic minorities in the public sector. A detailed critique of such programs has been done elsewhere (Chicha and Charest, 2013). We note one important limit: as with such legislation elsewhere in the western world, it does not explicitly target immigrants, nor is it well equipped to deal with the intersections of various identities such as race and gender (Syed, 2008).

In the private sector, many organizations in Quebec have embraced – to varying degrees – a certain number of business case-oriented diversity management practices. This is particularly true in Montreal, which is home to nearly 80 percent of immigrants to Quebec (Arcand, 2006). However, this approach is not without criticism. For example, viewing diversity as a means to gain profit can be seen as instrumentalizing diversity, and ignoring ethical concerns such as acknowledging and correcting historical disadvantage (Davel and Ghadiri, 2008). Furthermore, the business case approach becomes more complex in smaller cities since the institutional integration infrastructure is less developed and the general population (thus potential coworkers and managers) is less familiar with cultural differences. In addition, the business case argument of having a diverse workforce to cater to a diverse customer base may not be as effective where the local population, and thus the potential customer base, is more homogeneous.

In the next section, we will outline elements managers in general, and human resource managers in particular, should consider when supervising or trying to integrate a culturally diverse workforce including HSIW. This analysis can prove useful to managers who must be aware of the larger social context in which their organizations operate, including ethnocultural relations and the characteristics of immigrants (such as socioeconomic profiles, education levels and areas of expertise), in order to be more attentive to the needs of such a workforce (Arcand, 2006).

### Revisiting human resource practices to foster inclusion

The first step in managing a diverse workforce is hiring one, and doing so requires being sensitive to how recruitment, selection and hiring practices that may appear neutral and objective can in fact favor privileged groups and exclude marginalized groups. In this paper, we focus primarily on these practices as they are the most researched in the immigration literature in Quebec. For example, using the social networks of existing employees to recruit new ones may lead to those recruited being demographically similar to those in the existing workforce, whereas recruitment via

various methods may help reach a broader scope of potential workers (Granovetter, 1995). This is especially important to consider in the case of highly-skilled immigrants, who may not have ties to employees with desirable jobs in their profession in their social networks, or, if they do, these employees may not think of them when asked if they know someone who could fill a potential position. It is also of particular concern for immigrant women who spend a considerable amount of time creating and maintaining networks useful for initial settlement of their families and less time fostering professional contacts (Arcand *et al.*, 2009).

Also of concern for HSIW, even if foreign skills are recognized "officially" after a comparative evaluation from the Quebec Government, employers may be reticent to hire immigrants with foreign diplomas. This may be especially true of certain business sectors or geographic areas such as smaller cities and rural areas, in which employers are not accustomed to managing immigrant workers and where many businesses are small and medium sized. This is thus particularly relevant in Quebec, given the importance of small- and medium-sized businesses, and the existence of policies encouraging immigrants to settle in less populated regions. In addition, this can be especially problematic for women labeled as belonging to stigmatized groups such as Arabs or Muslims, since the local population has not been in contact with such groups.

Finally, another area where exclusion can occur is during the selection process. Indeed, faced with candidates from certain groups, interviewers may act differently (Durivage *et al.*, 2009). In addition, norms may differ, and interviewers may misconstrue a candidate's behaviors and evaluate them negatively, just as the candidates may transgress cultural codes they are not accustomed to. For example, whereas in some societies, such as in the Maghreb, it is expected that one will have access to a job based on their diplomas, in Quebec, candidates are expected to "sell" themselves and (perceived) confidence can influence an interviewer's decision. Such opposing expectations can put immigrants at a disadvantage, perhaps even more so for women who are not generally socialized to act in such a way. Further research is needed in order to confirm this last point.

*Applying interculturalism in the workplace*
There is a burgeoning literature concerning interculturalism as a way of managing a diverse workforce within organizations, which encourages actors in the workplace to recognize dominant cultural norms and to adapt them when they cause prejudice to minority groups, while protecting the rights of the majority group and avoiding the creation of new conflicts (Arcand, 2006). It also advocates dialogue, openness and collaboration in order to include all persons in the workplace regardless of cultural background. This approach is promising in that it is in line with the integration policy orientations of the province but also, in that by promoting dialogue and valuing diversity, it provides a space in which to rethink and renegotiate existing policies to make workplaces more inclusive, as opposed to a "best practices" approach.

Before incorporating diverse workers into an organization, managers must understand that practices in their workplace are not necessarily universal and that their evaluation criteria are not necessarily objective nor applicable in all contexts (Arcand, 2006). This entails recognizing that practices deemed "normal" or "objective" in one country are actually rooted in culture (Arcand, 2006). Chevrier (1996) for example, showed how engineers from different countries have different conceptions of their profession and thus, of how one is to go about accomplishing one's work and working with others. In the Quebec context, one potential clash is between more

individualistic North American values and more collectivistic Maghrebi, French or Latin American cultures. These may reflect themselves in conceptions of, and expectations toward, individual responsibility and cooperation. However useful it can be to try to understand these types of cultural differences in organizations, one must bear in mind that they are socially constructed. Thus, it is imperative not to essentialize these differences, such that they do not in turn fuel and "justify" certain forms of racism (Emongo and White, 2014).

Inspired by an interculturalism approach, Davel and Ghadiri (2008) present a model for managing diversity based on learning, as opposed to resistance, the moral case and the business case. The learning model recognizes Janssens and Zanoni's (2005) argument that there is a potential danger in essentializing culture and reifying categories or groups. It also acknowledges that what constitutes diversity can be constructed in organizations according to what is considered relevant in contributing to or hindering organizational goals (Janssens and Zanoni, 2005). The model proposes to view diversity not as differences between the attributes of individuals themselves, but as differences in ways of working, while also recognizing commonalities such as general knowledge. In this sense, differences between employees become learning opportunities supported by openness and dialogue. That is not to say, however, that interculturalism ignores power relations and ensuing conflict. Instead, it regards conflict as a potential learning experience, which requires openness and respect on the part of all parties involved. It also takes into account different ways in which conflict is apprehended and resolved while recognizing that this can vary according to individuals and contexts. In this context, managers must be able to develop intercultural competence, defined by Meier (2004, p. 184) as "the capacity of an individual to know how to analyse and understand situations of contact between persons (and between groups) of different cultures, and to manage and value them keeping within the organization's objectives."

Finally, managers may adopt a practice that is legally framed and encouraged by interculturalism: reasonable accommodations. This practice is based on the knowledge that in some cases, applying the same rules and practices to every employee in every context may in fact lead to discrimination against members of certain groups. This is the basis behind the concept of equity, in contrast to equality: if equal treatment calls for applying the same, "objective" criteria to all workers in human resource management practices, doing so might actually replicate existing inequalities. Holidays are a clear example of this. Indeed, if days like Christmas and Easter are national holidays in Quebec, historically in order to allow workers to celebrate (Christian/Catholic) religious holidays with their family, the question of whether workers of other faiths are entitled to ask for days off on their religious holidays becomes quite relevant. If the dominant group can have days off to celebrate religious holidays but not minority groups, the case for discrimination could be made. The potential for conflict must be acknowledged, however, as some workers may feel minorities are obtaining advantages that they are not. It thus becomes important to clearly explain the nature of such accommodations. Furthermore, some accommodations can be generalized to benefit all employees, such as more flexible schedules to allow for family responsibilities or other obligations, which can be particularly helpful for immigrant women.

In sum, adopting an intercultural approach based not on the essentialization of cultural (or gender) norms but on the recognition of a diversity of ways to work and resolve conflict, we contend that organizations can be better equipped to see beyond stereotypes and encourage employees to work together in more inclusive ways. This in turn can be beneficial for all employees, including HSIW.

**Conclusion**
In conclusion, we have provided an overview of the main obstacles to highly-skilled immigrants' socioeconomic integration in Canada and in Quebec, both in general and pertaining to women in particular. Then, we turned to elements of the socio-political context in Quebec and how it can contribute to creating or maintaining such obstacles. Policy makers can help eliminate such obstacles by continuing to implement employment equity legislation in general, and by taking steps to better understand the needs of HSIW, but the process also requires organizations, especially human resource and team managers, to review their practices in order to be more inclusive. Guidelines to do so exist, notably in the managing diversity literature, but we have shown that applying the principles of interculturalism provides a larger framework to create more diverse and inclusive workplaces.

The research community can learn from the Quebec case as it shows how specific socio-political contexts shape the experiences of HSIW. In Quebec, this context includes a Francophone majority province trying to integrate cultural minorities, while striving to ensure its survival in an Anglophone majority country. This dual status may be particularly problematic for immigrants as they are met with two paradoxical attitudes: that of being seen as helpful to ensure francophone survival but also being feared as potentially undermining certain values such as secularism and gender equality. This situation echoes Ho's (2007) analysis of current debates in Australia, which leads us to conclude by calling for further exploration of how such contexts shape the integration experiences of HSIW internationally.

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