

Canadian Workplace Culture



UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA





The University of Alberta acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, and respects the histories, languages, and cultures of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.



**UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA**

Meet your presenters



Sharon Gong
(She/Her)



Jennifer Harney
(She/Her)



**UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA**



Learning Outcomes

- Recognize differences between collectivist and individualistic work cultures and how it affects workplace interactions
- Understand five key characteristics of Canadian Workplace Culture
- Discuss power dynamics in Canada and norms surrounding relationships with coworkers and superiors
- Explore Canadian workplace language and conversation etiquette
- Be familiar with your rights as an employee and international student



**UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA**

01

Collectivist vs. Individualist Culture

Collectivist vs Individualist Culture

What does that look like in the workplace?

Collectivist

- Collaboration
- Group successes and failures
- Needs of the group over needs of the individual
- Less competition



Collectivist vs Individualist Culture

What does that look like in the workplace?



Individualist

- Independence
- Individual successes and failures
- Autonomy and more fluid team structures
- More competition

02

5 Key Characteristics of the Canadian Workplace

1. Egalitarian rather than Hierarchical

- “Rags to riches” culture as opposed to “know your place”
- Every employees’ ideas matter
- Someone’s title is not always obvious based on visual queues
- Employees are rewarded and empowered for taking initiative and additional responsibility
- Canadians view entitlement very negatively
- Explicit directions will not always be given

“Don’t hesitate in being wrong, don’t hesitate to ask- Nobody is going to scold you for asking a general question.”

-Past U of A Co-op Student

“For example, at one point the supervisor who was working with **** was away for a week or two. I think that **** got stuck waiting on the supervisor for most of that time - it would have been better to reach out earlier in that situation.”

-U of A Student
Evaluation

2. Indirect Feedback

- Negative feedback is often “sandwiched” between compliments
- Non-verbal gestures and facial expressions are important to a message
- How speech is worded (eloquence) and information is presented (written or visually) is more highly valued
- Outright challenging or criticising work or ideas is often done in private
- Context is important in an indirect environment as opposed to a direct environment in which information is given on “as needed basis”

FIGURE 2.2. EVALUATING



2. Indirect Feedback

ANGLO-DUTCH TRANSLATION GUIDE

WHAT THE BRITISH SAY	WHAT THE BRITISH MEAN	WHAT THE DUTCH UNDERSTAND
<i>With all due respect ...</i>	<i>I think you are wrong.</i>	<i>He is listening to me.</i>
<i>Perhaps you would think about ... I would suggest ...</i>	<i>This is an order. Do it or be prepared to justify yourself.</i>	<i>Think about this idea and do it if you like.</i>
<i>Oh, by the way ...</i>	<i>The following criticism of the purpose of the discussion is ...</i>	<i>This is not very important.</i>
<i>I was a bit disappointed that ...</i>	<i>I am very upset and angry that ...</i>	<i>It doesn't really matter.</i>
<i>Very interesting ...</i>	<i>I don't like it.</i>	<i>They are impressed.</i>
<i>Could you consider some other options?</i>	<i>Your idea is not a good one.</i>	<i>They have not yet decided.</i>
<i>Please think about that some more.</i>	<i>It's a bad idea. Don't do it.</i>	<i>It's a good idea. Keep developing it.</i>

3. Importance of Soft Skills

- “Culture fit” is a big part of hiring in the Canadian workplace
- Important to build “rapport” with bosses and co-workers
- Building connections - job market “who you know” over “what you know”
- Transferable skills - between and within jobs

“I would recommend that ***** continue to grow and improve her oral communication. This includes, increasing her level of confidence when having group discussions and facilitating/leading technical presentations.”

-U of A Student Evaluation

In Demand Soft Skills for Engineering

- Management and Supervision
 - Communication
 - Consulting
- Problem Solving and Decision Making
- Planning and Organization

Source: <https://arrivein.com/career-ca/most-important-skills-required-for-engineering-jobs-in-canada-tips-for-newcomers/>



4. Focus on Teamwork

- Despite being a more individualist society, management style in Canada is usually very participative and team focused
- Decision-making is often done as a team
- Offices regularly put a focus on team building
- Interrupting others is considered rude
- There is an expectation to show interest in others' work, interests, and achievements
- Offering assistance to others who are under stress or falling behind is both helpful and allows you to build relationships



5. Networking and Visibility

- Networking is important in Canada for both finding jobs and career advancement - it is your way to access the “hidden job market”
- You build your network within any position you are working - and outside of work, too
- Managers in Canada aren't usually watching everything you do so it is up to you to keep track of accomplishments and achievements and bring them to light during appropriate situations



03

Professional Relationships and Power Dynamics

Equality in the Workplace

- **Discrimination based on age, gender, sexual orientation, or race is illegal**
 - Regardless of job title, position, or experience, everyone is encouraged to share their views
- **Everyone is regarded on a first name basis**
 - Don't use Manager/Sir/Ms/Mrs/Miss/Mr/President, etc when addressing someone
- **Differences are valued**
 - Cultural, work experiences, generational differences are respected and having different perspectives in the workplace is appreciated. Don't be scared to speak up and offer your thoughts

Power Dynamics in the Workplace

Power in Your Organization

- **Legitimate Power**

- Managers and supervisors have the power to assign tasks and require behaviours from their employees. Employees also have powers from the government, which hold their employers accountable.

- **Reward Power**

- Providing feedback, determining salaries, nominating peers are all forms of reward power.

- **Coercive/Punishing Power**

- The act of firing or threatening to fire someone for underperformance, ostracizing someone who does not contribute, withholding information from unliked colleagues are forms of coercive power.

Power Dynamics in the Workplace

Relationships and Networking

- **Expert Power**

- An individual's possession of knowledge or skills from their own brain, this is not granted or controlled by the organization they work for.

- **Referent Power**

- Charisma and respect define referent power. Those with high referent power may not be ranked the highest within an organization.

Power Dynamics in the Workplace

Relationships and Networking

- Social networks are groups of people connected to one another through interdependence or similarities. These are essential because they generate power for their members and members are more likely to share information with each other and think of each other when asked for recommendations.
- Networking is not just asking people to help you with job searching, it's also about maintaining a meaningful connection and relationship with people.

04

Language and Communication

Small Talk

- **An important part of the Canadian Workplace**
- **Exchanging polite “how are you”s is expected**
- **Socializing with coworkers is normal but it shouldn't get carried away**



Acceptable socializing:

- Having a chat during coffee and lunch breaks
- Chatting for a bit when arriving or leaving for the day
- Talking while waiting for others to arrive to a meeting

Unacceptable socializing:

- Long and unrelated to work phone conversations
- Long office chats during office hours
- Gossiping or spreading rumours
- Using slang and foul language

Small Talk

- Any controversial or potentially offensive topics are generally avoided
- Usually topics are informal, ice-breaker type conversations

Should I Talk About it at Work?: A Very Ridiculous Game

- The Weather
- My digestive issues
 - Hockey
- My favourite political party
 - White Lotus
- My church fundraiser
- How my coworkers are all going to hell
 - The World Cup
 - My favourite restaurant
 - My favourite vegan recipe
- How praying would make a difference in my co-workers life

Office Language

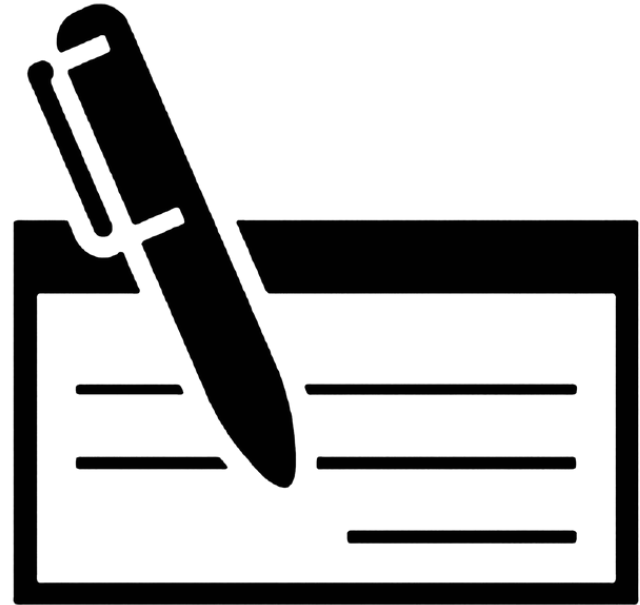
- Office language is generally more formal than everyday conversation with friends and family
- Respect and courtesy are highly valued and courtesy words such as “please”, “thank you”, and “you’re welcome” are musts
- Keep in mind that politeness in Canadian culture does not always mean agreement or interest
- Idioms and euphemisms are very common in the Canadian workplace
- Getting “laid off” or “let go”
- “Back to the salt mines”
- “Taking the bull by the horns”
- How familiar are you with Workplace Idioms: [Go to Kahoot.it](#)

05

Rights of Employees in Alberta

Employment Standards

- Jobs in Alberta must pay at least \$15 an hour - this is also Co-op policy
- Pay cheques may include the following deductions:
 - Federal and provincial income tax
 - Employment Insurance (EI) premiums
 - Canada Pension Plan (CPP) contributions
 - Money authorized by a collective agreement, such as union dues



Employment Standards

- Overtime is hours worked more than 8 per day or more than 44 per week, whichever number is greater. Overtime should be paid at 1.5 time but there are exceptions
 - Depending on your contract, overtime can be mandatory
- Canadians have the right to refuse unsafe work
 - “An undue hazard is a serious and immediate threat to health and safety that the refusing worker actually observes or experiences at their work site.”
 - Unsafe work conditions must be reported immediately
 - Alberta employers generally take safety very seriously
 - Generally speaking, unsafe or dangerous work can include working with or near equipment or machinery, the physical condition of the workplace, or not having the appropriate training or qualifications to perform the work safely.

Bullying in the Workplace

Bullying is

- rumours and gossip
- making offensive jokes or comments
- using insults or put downs
- blaming, scolding, criticizing and belittling
- excluding or isolating
- discounting achievements and stealing credit for ideas or work
- disciplining or threatening job loss without reason
- using offensive language or yelling and screaming
- physically abusing or threatening abuse

Bullying is NOT:

- enforcing workplace policies and procedures
- evaluating or measuring performance
- providing constructive feedback
- denying training or leave requests with good reason
- discussing disciplinary action in private
- dismissing, suspending, demoting or reprimanding with just cause

Bullying and Discrimination

- To be considered bullying it must be a reoccurring behaviour
- If the bullying or negative acts towards a person are focused on race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religious beliefs, gender, gender identity, gender expression, age, physical disability, mental disability, marital status, family status, source of income and sexual orientation it is considered discrimination
- Discrimination in the workplace is prohibited by the Alberta Human Rights Act, most workplaces will have internal authorities to deal with complaints of discrimination or bullying
- The first recommended step, if you feel targeted at work, is to approach the person responsible.
 - if you do not feel comfortable doing this, you can speak to your direct supervisor - if they are the person responsible the issue can be brought to their supervisor or HR

Experiencing Discrimination in your Work

Term

- Take written notes of events with as much detail as possible including names, dates and witnesses
- Keep screenshots or photo evidence of any written proof - email to yourself
- Be in contact with your Co-op Advisor - it is okay to contact advisor to let them know you are not happy with things taking place at work but that you do not wish to escalate it further at this time



References

"9 tips for adapting to Canadian workplace culture - achève." [Online]. Available: <https://achev.ca/9-tips-for-adapting-to-canadian-workplace-culture/>. [Accessed: 15-Jan-2023]

"Adapting to Canadian work culture as a newcomer," Arrive, 04-Mar-2022. [Online]. Available: <https://arrivein.com/career-ca/adapting-to-canadian-work-culture-as-a-newcomer/>. [Accessed: 15-Jan-2023]

C. C. for O. H. and S. Government of Canada, "OHS legislation in Canada - right to refuse : OHS answers," Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 15-Jan-2023. [Online]. Available: https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/legisl/right_to_refuse.html. [Accessed: 15-Jan-2023]

"Cultural Dimensions Summary Explanation," CPA. [Online]. Available: <https://www.cpaalberta.ca/>. [Accessed: 15-Jan-2023]

"Culture and influence in the workplace: Individualism vs collectivism," peoplehum. [Online]. Available: <https://www.peoplehum.com/blog/culture-and-influence-in-the-workplace-collectivism-individualism>. [Accessed: 15-Jan-2023]

L. Goldstein, "Workplace Values from You're Hired...Now What?," The Working Centre. [Online]. Available: <https://www.theworkingcentre.org/jobs>. [Accessed: 15-Jan-2023]

McMaster University - Student Success Centre, "Canadian workplace culture for international students," Student Success Centre Canadian workplace culture for international students Comments. [Online]. Available: <https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/canadian-workplace-culture-for-international-students/>. [Accessed: 15-Jan-2023]

New Canadians, "Adapting to the Canadian Workplace Culture," New Canadians, 05-May-2022. [Online]. Available: <https://newcanadians.tv/adapting-to-the-canadian-workplace-culture/>. [Accessed: 15-Jan-2023]

"Newcomers' guide to working in Alberta - alis," Government of Alberta, 26-Jan-2022. [Online]. Available: <https://alis.alberta.ca/look-for-work/additional-resources-for-specific-audiences/for-newcomers/newcomers-guide-to-working-in-alberta/>. [Accessed: 15-Jan-2023]

S. Rothenburger, "Forms of power in the workplace," Mentor Works, 09-Jan-2023. [Online]. Available: <https://www.mentorworks.ca/blog/business-strategy/power-at-work/>. [Accessed: 15-Jan-2023]

Q+A