

Mutual Accommodation: A Better Way of Doing Things?

Let's discuss one of the most profound facets of the Canadian experience – mutual accommodation. At key moments in Canada's past, the need to accommodate difference – between Canadians, with our neighbours, and with our northern geography – has been central to national survival and success.

Subject Matter Expert

[Heather Nicol](#)

Acting Director of the School for the Study of Canada

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Share Your Story: Have you witnessed or experienced Mutual Accommodation in action? What was the impact?

Discussion Overview

Welcome to the new year and the 150th year of Confederation. Our community has been discussing the role of mutual accommodation as a Canadian value and as a factor in various issues facing Canada. Having explored ideas about accommodation from a more academic perspective, we would now like to turn to you to tell us your stories.

[Heather Nicol](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • February 18, 2017 at 05:46 pm

We talk about being a tolerant and accommodating society in Canada - where does this belief come from? We hope that you will share your stories with us on this discussion thread. Here is mine. As a Canadian academic I meet students from all around the world in the classroom. Their interest in Canada is outstanding. I teach foundational geography to these students who appreciate the story of Canada, its history and its culture as much as those students who have lived in Canada all their lives. The classroom is a wonderful place in which to begin to understand and shape "accommodation" among Canadians of all ethnic origins and international students of all nationalities, religions and beliefs. But this is a two-way street. We learn as much as we share. My knowledge of world religions, traditional knowledge and practice, and the cultures and geographies of European, Asian, South American and African countries comes as much from the diversity of my students as it does from my own travels and research. I suspect that the same is true for my students. We fear what we do not know, but when we have Canadians, immigrants and visitors among us who come from all over the world we can learn more, and fear less.

[Chris Grindley-Ferris](#) • March 8, 2017 at 05:11 pm

Heather Nicol wrote on February 18:

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As an emigrant from South Africa, I, like many before me, had a vision of Canada, its people and cultures. After 17 years that has changed dramatically. Apart from the geography, the population, in and around Vancouver, appear to be increasingly from the East with the accompanying languages and cultures having an ever increasing effect on the demographics. South Africa was supposed to be a Rainbow Nation where all races and cultures can live together in harmony and tolerance. If all population groups want to maintain their specific culture and identity then the proportions cannot exceed each other. When cultures have very little in common, then the majority expects entitlement, rightly or wrongly, to monopolize the country's rule of law, religious beliefs, financial dispensation, etc. It does NOT work. In South Africa, a race war is imminent. The only long term option is to have one recognized, working standard (political, cultural / language, laws etc) and expect all who decide to emigrate into Canada (or any host country) to assimilate to that country's existing, laws, languages etc. You say you have learned about world cultures from your students. They are interesting because they have a distinct culture, not because they come from a grey hodge podge of non description. To each their own, Canada has a right to have its own identity as well without the misguided guilt of PC to change and bend to all who come here.

- Post Awarded 10 DR

[Heather Nicol](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • March 10, 2017 at 12:05 pm

Hi Chris- I understand your perspective but don't necessarily share it. As someone who emigrated from Canada, and then came back, I appreciate the small things that do define societies and cultures. Moreover, as far as culture goes-I don't see it as a static thing but as evolving. There is no such thing as a culture which does not. Nowadays, with globalization, we are all increasingly open to others - to be closed is to miss out on opportunity as well s challenge. What I enjoy about my students is the way in which we come together to share similar challenges concerning life, work, family and experience, not stories about exotic cultures or long ago traditions. I don't see this as a grey, non-descript hodge podge - but as a vibrant society which I am part of and who I share citizenship and nationality with.

[Leonard Guerrier](#) • March 14, 2017 at 11:09 pm

Canada has been promoting multicult.... for so many years, yet we seem to be far from reaching this goal. Nevertheless, we will keep trying until most of us come to realize that we are stronger when we stand together despite our colors, our origins or beliefs.

[Leonard Guerrier](#) • March 14, 2017 at 11:17 pm

Before coming to Canada, I was told that this country is very welcoming and that everyone is welcome to land here and enjoy a better life. As a matter of fact, our government does everything to make this true, but most of us see new immigrants as hurdles and will not give them an opportunity to integrate. This is something that we need to transfer to our children by letting them know that most of us were

immigrants and that they would have to accommodate the new comers who tried hard to enter this glorious land.

[Heather Nicol](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • March 21, 2017 at 03:25 pm

Hi Leonard-Thank you for your post. I agree that this is something we have to do actively.

023099 • April 5, 2017 at 10:23 am

As far as accommodation , the majority of Christians that founded the new world in Canada have given up Sundays as a non work day in order for progress. This has set a precedent where religions are expected to Change and bend with progress. Unless we take back Sundays as a non work day and close all stores etc... So the laws are in place and customs already established they need to be followed. Religion as we have previously pointed must be flexible. There are no religious laws in Canada that supersede Canadian Law , this needs to be hammered constantly by leaders and media . We must identify hateful religious ideology and stop it and prosecute it as such. Most religions are peaceful in the actual text of their books . We must redact any hate speech and the Government and Authorities must point this out. Redaction will come from the leaders of these religions. Otherwise it is accommodation by complicity and for what ? We would need to look at motive: money, power, special interests...etc... Canada not succumb to faulty logic. What we see happening in Europe is terrible.

[Heather Nicol](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • April 9, 2017 at 01:39 pm

I am a little uncertain as to your point - perhaps you could clarify. Are you suggesting that we must all renounce hateful speech based upon religious belief or affiliation. Then I do agree. But lets not forget diversity and resistance to diversity goes to more than religion - which I think you are pointing out. Europe tends to be a scapegoat these days in terms of the backlash towards refugees in some places. But we don't always appreciate in North America how diverse any one country in Europe actually is - even Switzerland with its four languages, or the UK with Scotland, Wales, Ireland and England - all historically places which had different nationalities, languages and even religions.

[Darren Gregory](#) • April 22, 2017 at 08:23 pm

Heather: I can share a story about when this should have happened but didn't in the workplace, related to PTSD and disability if that's helpful?

[Harriet Worden](#) • April 23, 2017 at 12:51 pm

I was born in Canada and I'm proud of my Loyalist heritage. I am 87 years of age and I remember the years after World War 1 and World War 11 when Europeans came to make Canada their home. No matter what nationality, religion or skin colour, we were taught to accept them and make them welcome. Those new immigrants were thankful to be here and accepted our laws and I believe that that was what made Canadians so accepting. Today, it is difficult for us to accept new immigrants who want to keep their own way of life and expect us to change. I don't understand that, if they loved their way of life, why did they leave their country: mostly because they were being persecuted. I feel they should be willing to "do it our way" and be thankful that we are doing our best to make them welcome.

[Heather Nicol](#) (Subject Matter Expert) • April 24, 2017 at 05:04 am

Hi Harriet I would love to hear your stories about how new Canadians were made to feel welcome post World War I and II. I think that many of our members will not be familiar with this history. But I do wonder what you mean by 'do it our way'? There is such tremendous diversity in Canada and I am not sure whose way would be 'the way' to follow. There have been generations of non-Anglo immigrant minorities in Canada with different values, religions and languages who have contributed greatly to Canadian society. Why end that now?

[Jared Milne](#) • April 28, 2017 at 12:37 pm

Mutual accommodation is what built Canada:

-The Indigenous people who were here for millennia before Europeans arrived signed many Treaties with the Europeans as a means of sharing the land and living peacefully side by side. From the Indigenous point of view, this was an accommodation of the Europeans' presence and their place in these lands, in return for the Europeans' accommodating their own inherent rights and existing presence in what would become Canada. It was hardly their fault that the Europeans and their descendants would later break the Treaties, and continue to violate them today.

-After the Conquest, the British government passed the Quebec Act as a means of recognizing the established religious and civil practices of the Francophone peoples of New France. In return for recognizing the French-derived civil law and the Catholic faith, the British expected the allegiance of their formerly French subjects. It was successful, as the Francophones of New France remained loyal during the American Revolution, and remain with us today as New France transitioned into Lower Canada and then modern Quebec.

-A mutual recognition between Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine and Robert Baldwin, as so eloquently described by John Ralston Saul among others, was the key to gaining responsible government in Canada, making them the fathers of Canadian democracy.

-Most notably, the Fathers of Confederation used mutual accommodation as the key to their success. The Ontarian George Brown demanded "representation by population", while the Quebecois George-Etienne Cartier insisted that Quebec have particular powers to maintain and defend its Francophone heritage and culture. Some of the Fathers, including John A. Macdonald, wanted a highly centralized fusion of all the provinces, erasing their borders. Other Fathers wanted a federal system. one that allowed for "home rule" in local matters of importance to local populations, while allowing for cooperation on matters of larger interest. The genius of Confederation was its ability to balance all of these different desires into a whole that was greater than the sum of its parts. The federal Parliament distributed its seats on "representation by population", the federal system allowed for matters of civil law and education to be decided by the provinces with recognition of Quebec's distinct position and challenges. In exchange for having their most pressing and important desires recognized, each of the Fathers could then accommodate the others' desires on other important issues.

In short, mutual accommodation has played a critical role in building Canada, one which too many people remain unaware of, and that unfortunately we too often fall short of, most notably in regards to Indigenous people.

[Trent Team \(Discussion Moderator\)](#) • April 29, 2017 at 03:58 pm

After a very successful series of 30 open discussions, the current interactive Canadian Difference website is now coming to a close.

We want to thank everyone for expressing interest and, as such, recognizing the importance of an environment where insightful national discussions can take place on issues important to Canada and on the role of Mutual Accommodation.

As the Canadian Difference project moves into its next phase, keep your eye on the website over the summer for announcements, events, and resources.

The Trent Team