

From diversity to pluralism: Is everyone included?

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Abstract

The article discusses the growing recognition of the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion in the philanthropic sector internationally. It explores how diversity goes beyond being a simple 'buzzword' and instead reflects the complex demographics and social structures in society. The article emphasises the need for philanthropic organisations to adapt to the world's complexity, and address power dynamics and discrimination in order to fully embrace diversity. The authors highlight concrete methods like diversity equity and inclusion (DEI) management that can be employed to foster more inclusive practices within organisations. They stress the significance of leadership vision and adaptability, as well as individual self-reflection, in making progress towards greater inclusion of the diverse voices that make up our societies. Importantly, the article suggests that embracing discomfort and adopting a posture of humility is key for growth and change within organisations. It discusses tools like the Wheel of Privilege and Power, which helps individuals understand their own privilege and position in society. The authors advocate for rigorously measuring diversity and discrimination in the workplace to develop action plans and implement concrete measures. They believe that research and practice should collaborate to collect and analyse data effectively. The article also mentions the need for collective and open conversations within the philanthropic sector, acknowledging historical inequalities and privileges. Overall, the article emphasises the importance of moving from diversity to pluralism in the philanthropic sector to ensure coherence and greater social justice in the pursuit of deep social change.

KEYWORDS

diversity equity and inclusion, inclusive leadership, pluralism, power, social justice

Practitioner Points

- Globally, the rising emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion in philanthropy mirrors a wider societal recognition of the imperative for fairness and inclusion.
- The article advocates diverse, equitable and inclusive practices, urging philanthropies to embrace individual and organisational changes for meaningful social impact. Fostering openness, addressing privilege, measuring diversity and embracing discomfort are essential for philanthropy's evolution towards genuine pluralism and social justice.
- Practitioners must adapt, challenge power, foster inclusive leadership, and commit to social justice, employing reflection, research and ongoing DEI efforts for a more inclusive philanthropic sector.

1 | INTRODUCTION

We have seen a clear trend over the past few years: internationally, philanthropy is increasingly recognising the importance of diversity, taken alone, or grouped with its corollary notions of equity and inclusion.¹ This seems to be largely true for the sector as a whole, globally, with of course all the specificities of each regional and cultural context, and regardless of where individual organisations are situated across the large span of progressive to more moderate, or conservative. Is 'diversity', then, 'just' a buzzword reflecting the politics of its time, or does it stand for something deeper that affects society as much as philanthropic practice? Put differently, how can we make sure we move away from the former to get closer to the latter? Following from that, what does it mean for us, as a sector, to reflect society's diversity, make inclusive choices and operate with inclusive and equalitarian practices in our work?

The considerations presented here stem from the numerous discussions that we, both wearing a 'double hat' as academics and practitioners, have had over the past couple of years about the work we have done within our organisations, training delivered outside of them, publications we have read or written, and conversations we have had with colleagues from academia and practice. They also stem from what we have observed around us, our surprise, at times frustration, at others enthusiasm as to the directions the sector is taking in Europe and in Canada. Writing from the Global North, our views carry inevitably specific assumptions about what we see around us and the specific environments in which we operate. That being said, this piece is intended as a self-critique of ourselves as professionals in philanthropy. We also hope this contribution can open up a reflection on the sector's role and responsibilities in today's socio-political context. Our objective is less to provide definite answers than to raise what we think are important points and questions for further engagement and consideration.

2 | WHAT IS DIVERSITY?

Taken as such, diversity represents the demographic mix of society. Multiple identities exist within given societies and therefore within given organisations. Diversity encompasses the wide range of differences of individuals in societies. These include but are not limited to, national origin, language, racial background, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, religion, belief, socio-economic status, civil status, immigration status, ... all of which are shaped by our backgrounds, by the contexts in which we live, as well as by individual and collective experiences. Diversity is less a 'value' and more a social fact revealing the structuring of societies. Why, then, is the philanthropic sector across the Global North—and with some notable exceptions—so homogeneous? Because embracing diversity implies a capacity to adapt to the world's complexity. It also implies a willingness to shift power relations in which our organisations are embedded and focus on both visible and less visible, at times even hidden, power dynamics and logics of discrimination.

3 | ACKNOWLEDGING DIVERSITY, PROMOTING INCLUSION AND PLURALISM

Many concrete methods exist today to address power shifts within our organisations, to call into question the unconscious—and conscious—biases we all have, and to respond to actual and potential discrimination. We do know that Diversity Equity and Inclusion—also known as 'DEI'—management is increasingly making its way into the philanthropic sector. This ranges from staff trainings and awareness raising exercises for boards, to the setting up of ad hoc DEI committees, to the definition of explicit rules and norms around hiring processes (a domain that is often also regulated by national laws), and the use of inclusive management techniques and language. However, the more we navigate and observe our professional sector, the more we are convinced that these various instruments can only work and move beyond single actions and 'statements' if two requirements are met. First, there needs to be a leadership vision and adaptability both at the top and mid-levels of an organisation. At the board level, the board chair along with board members have the power to model inclusive leadership behaviours. For example, they can show curiosity about new perspectives and approaches to problems, include different types of expertise in the discussion, invite new members from multiple backgrounds to share their experience, make sure all voices are heard and considered in decision-making processes, in particular those most marginalised. This openness can act as a bridge between the way the board has worked in the past and the way it can adapt towards more inclusion and equity, reflecting societal models philanthropy is meant to support.

Second, no matter the role that one has within an organisation, we all need to be able (and allowed) to take time for deep self-reflection. This reflection concerns both our organisational culture and our professional sector. Do we (ourselves, our colleagues, our institutions) prioritise different voices, positions, experiences, or are we rather operating in an environment that promotes a unique identity, or viewpoint, of and for the organisation? Do we 'walk the talk' in truly embracing diversity within our organisations or are we just paying lip service to the concept, for instance by asking our partners to be diverse? Do we and our colleagues have the openness (and motivation) to listen and learn from each other? Do we have the courage, the clarity, the humility to address issues of power and privilege? How can we all, individually, contribute to shifting the internal cultures of the organisations we work for, and encourage debate? To what extent are we ready to do it? What can we do more and better, collectively? What do we think are the shifts in mentality that need to take place for structural change to happen?

4 | THE ROLE OF RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGY

Answers to the questions posed above will inevitably vary according to who we are as individuals, our paths, ideas and backgrounds, but also because the cultural models we operate with vary across regional

contexts and countries. Accepting the (co-)existence of different cultural models is then also part of the challenge. An approach to diversity—that is, the social reality of the world out there—that aims to achieve inclusive pluralism—that is, an approach that involves taking decisions and actions grounded in respect for diversity²—draws its strength from its nuance. Pedagogy is key, and this is where the synergies between academia and practice are mostly useful. Importantly, from a knowledge-development perspective, we must ensure that the content of what is taught on philanthropy—whether at the academic level for students or in executive programmes for practitioners—reflects a vision for both a diversified and inclusive philanthropy. Fundamentally, we also need to make sure we give space to diverse voices and experiences that for historical, social and political reasons are less visible and include players in philanthropy or related to the sector that are not limited to the ‘usual suspects’. Finally, we need to ensure we encourage a proper space for open dialogue and respectful confrontation. This last point directly speaks to current debates that go well beyond philanthropy, on how to create inclusive environments for conversation in which everyone is invited to participate.³ Change takes time and patience, and this is precisely the reason why we suggested to organise a safe space on diversity, equity and inclusion at the 2023 European Research Network On Philanthropy (ERNOP)⁴ conference.

In our training on diversity, equity and inclusion that we teach together in the Diploma in Advanced Studies in Strategic and Operational Philanthropy at the University of Geneva,⁵ we reflect with the students (who are all philanthropy professionals) on the different types of organisational cultures that exist and in which we navigate. To begin with, we ask students to reflect on whether their organisations prioritise diverse voices, positions, and experiences or whether they rather work in an environment that promotes a unique identity for the organisation (or perhaps, a little of both). One of the other exercises we regularly do consists in facilitating an honest reflection around two ‘types’ of behaviours (along with all the possible gradations attached) we may witness in our working environments: ‘defensiveness’ (i.e., avoiding or refusing challenges and critiques) versus ‘welcoming discomfort’ (namely accepting contradictions and problems without avoiding them or ending the debate). We encourage participants to think about these behaviours at all levels in the hierarchy of their organisations.⁶ What we put forward is that in a situation of defensiveness, the structure, and procedures of the organisation (or team) are optimised to protect the organisation (or team) as it is and, largely, to dissuade change. Criticism of those with power is viewed—or at least presented—as threatening, inappropriate, or rude. People respond to new or challenging ideas with defensiveness, making it difficult to raise them. Importantly, those who constitute the ‘majority’ group spend energy defending against charges of discrimination instead of examining how discrimination might be happening. In the case of a ‘welcoming discomfort’ approach, the link between defensiveness and fear is discussed and recognised in the organisation (or team). This may relate to a fear of losing power or privilege. Caring and a practice of direct critical yet constructive feedback is developed. It is important to note that in an environment in which discomfort and

humility are welcomed, the ways in which defensiveness and resistance to new ideas get in the way of the organisation's mission are inevitably discussed. Indeed, understanding that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning is also an important step to opening space for honest conversations, and change.

Another tool that we refer to and that can be used as an instrument of self-awareness or in a group is what is called the Wheel of Privilege and Power.⁷ This is a reflective instrument, or activity, to map and explore issues of power and privilege in an intersectional way, that is, by identifying the interconnections between social categorisations that define how discriminated, excluded or privileged one is.⁸ The closer one is to the centre, the more privilege this person (or group) has. Conversely, the further away one is located from the centre, the more marginalised or potentially discriminated the person (or group) is. The wheel is a simplified way to consider how our social identities play into our own privilege or social disadvantage but also how others we work with are positioned on the wheel (and thus within society). Learning about intersectionality and how it affects all of us, allows us to respectfully communicate with peers whilst deepening our understanding of the ways in which diversity, equity, and inclusion are relevant to our society, and to the philanthropic sector.

An interesting peer-learning initiative that is worth mentioning here and that speaks directly to the above point is the Justice Equity Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) accelerator.⁹ The Philanthropic Foundations Canada's Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Accelerator Programme is a 10-month initiative for grant-making foundations led by external experts in diversity, equity and inclusion. The programme aims to strengthen foundations' JEDI capacity. Participants, which in 2021 and 2023 included 40 board and staff members, engage in peer-learning to gain a deeper conceptual understanding, and translate it into concrete action. The programme includes the development of foundation-specific action plans at three levels: individual, internal, and external.

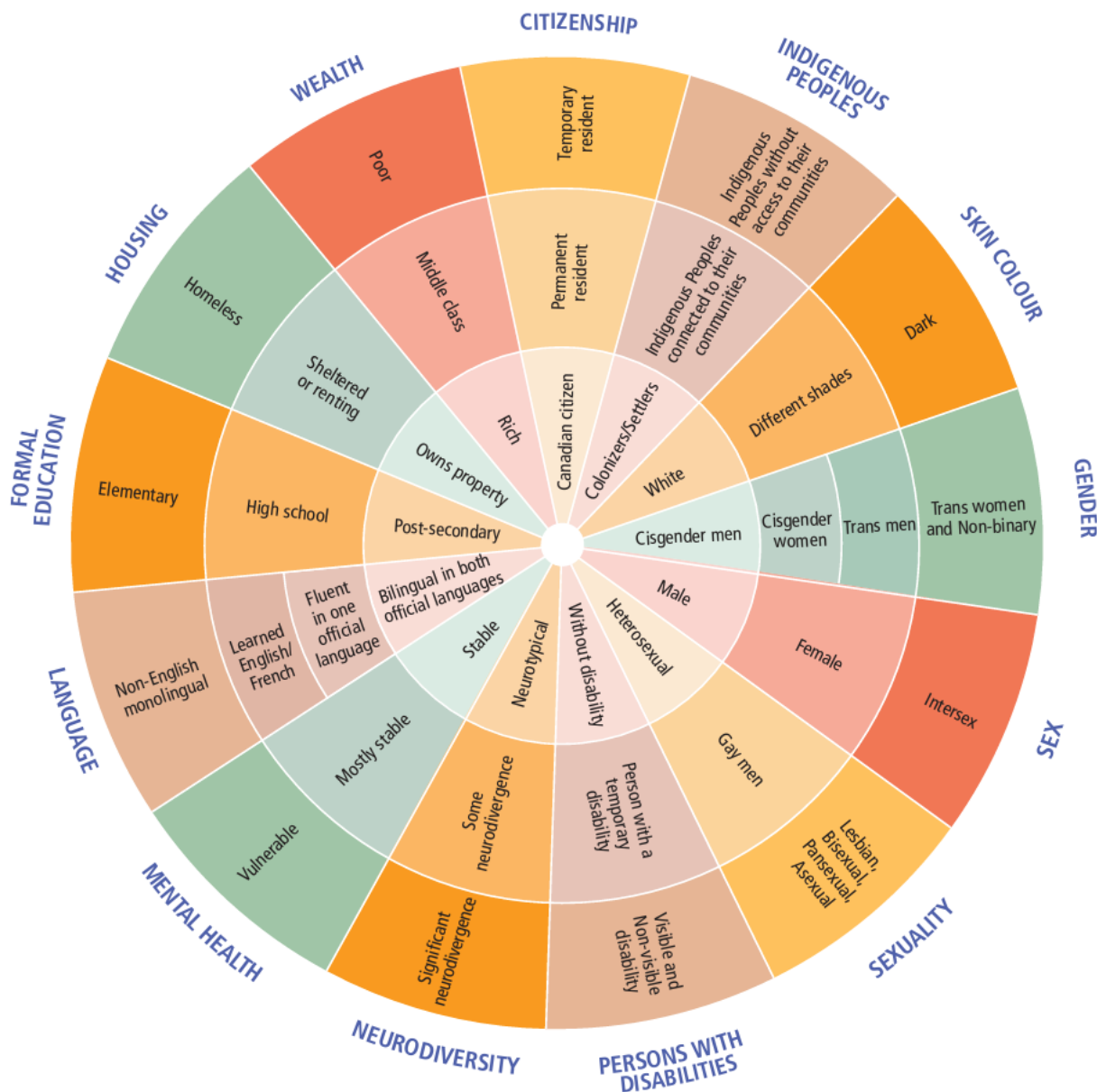
These action plans aim to address various aspects, from governance to grant-making, and involve two to four people appointed by each foundation. The programme has helped to improve internal cohesion, strengthen synergies between departments and update practices and policies. Participants have also forged new, deeper and more equitable partnerships with the organisations they support. Importantly, the focus of the programme is on repositioning foundations and peers to contribute to the public good and to advance social justice. Notably, 60% of participants have developed a JEDI action plan for their foundation and 85% have initiated changes to advance the JEDI initiative within their respective organisations.

5 | MEASUREMENT AND TRACKING ARE KEY

All the above being said, we are convinced that a first concrete step within our organisations and, more broadly, within the philanthropic sector, implies measuring diversity and discrimination in the workplace. Having reliable data based on objective features when possible

WHEEL OF PRIVILEGE AND POWER

(the closer you are to the centre, the more privilege you have)



Note: the categories within this wheel are only examples in the Canadian context, and we should not limit ourselves to them. Intersectionality is a broad concept, and this tool is only a beginning point.

(since not all countries equally allow the collection of statistical elements in the same way) and on questionnaires addressing the subjective experiences and degrees of perceived inclusion and discrimination, is fundamental to develop an action plan and take concrete measures. The synergies between research and practice become once again central to collect data properly and analyse it. Thanks to research methods, academia can be a leverage to develop data

accessible to all. This is why we both undertook in 2022 two different studies in the organisations we work for. At the University of Geneva's Centre for Philanthropy,¹⁰ the report 'Diversity on the boards of non-profit foundations in Switzerland'¹¹ was conducted through a survey of board members' profiles and by looking at how the promotion of diversity creates positive group dynamics and enhances collective intelligence, which when taken together, lead to

greater support towards social justice. At Fondation de France,¹² the study focused on gender equality in French foundations with a focus on parity within boards and how numerous foundations perceive gender equality as being a central element of the politics of diversity internally (within foundations) and externally (in relation to other stakeholders and foundations' vision of social justice and inclusion).¹³ As we see it, these studies have already opened a number of discussions within the sector, in each country, and specifically within a number of organisations.

We previously mentioned the importance of coherence, or, put differently, of 'walking the talk'. Conducting studies on the sector more widely is fundamental but, for foundations, introspection is also key. A couple of years ago, one of the two authors of this piece co-initiated, for Fondation de France, its DEI strategy. So far, the strategy which is now defined by a specific DEI internal committee with staff from all Departments and in dialogue with the board of directors, includes trainings, awareness exercises, and the launching of campaigns for more inclusive management and communication. A central dimension of this approach involves the development of an anonymous questionnaire on perceptions of inclusion and discrimination at the Foundation co-designed by a sociologist, two external DEI professionals, the internal DEI committee, and the director of Human Resources. In November 2023, foundation staff were all invited to answer and, as we are writing this piece, the questionnaire is being analysed independently. Results should be available in early 2024. Based on them, the DEI committee will build together with the board of directors its 2024–2026 DEI strategy with greater nuance, as it will have reliable data and measurements. It is hard to tell, at this stage, what exactly will the main results of this investigation be. Yet, openness, the creation of spaces for dialogue, welcoming discomfort and debate beyond roles and positions, will be essential to make sure all voices are heard, included, and that measures responding to the various needs are defined. Undoubtedly, and beyond the strict experience of Fondation de France, these tasks and pathways are never simple nor straightforward. However, they are much needed if philanthropy aims to promote pluralism and inclusion for the societies it serves, and for the organisations that make the sector.

6 | THE NEED FOR OPEN CONVERSATIONS INTERNATIONALLY TO FOSTER CHANGE INTERNALLY

To be sure, and for very different reasons, not all organisations engage in these processes. Precisely for this reason, we need to have more collective and open conversations within the sector. To be able to tackle structural problems adequately, we need structural solutions. But we also first need to acknowledge where we all come from, individually and as organisations. We need to listen and share. This also means recognising the privileges, inequalities and struggles for greater equality that have characterised our individual and collective histories, and the positionalities of the organisations we work for. In this regard, European philanthropy can learn from what

a number of Canadian organisations have been doing. Increasingly recognising its colonial past, Canadian philanthropy is undergoing a collective exercise of reflection (and ensuing adjustment) on the hierarchies of status and power society has been built upon. This implies engaging with the very process of decolonising philanthropy itself, with a clear objective: reconciliation. This process requires a shared understanding of the common past, along with the making of a shared vision for the future. The first step to the restoration of justice, though, is listening to the long-silenced voices and speak about the past, no matter how painful and complex this is. Honesty and opening up to past and present complexities can only make us stronger as a sector.

Today, several major international networks of philanthropy across the globe work directly on diversity and discrimination, on social justice, inequality as well as on inclusive leadership. To name just a few, we can think here about the Africa Philanthropy Network (APN),¹⁴ Ariadne,¹⁵ the Circle on Philanthropy,¹⁶ EDGE Funders Alliance,¹⁷ Philanthropic Foundations Canada,¹⁸ the OECD's Network of Foundations Working for Development (netFWD),¹⁹ or Wings.²⁰ The publication of this article in this special issue coordinated by ERNOP and Philea²¹ is another important case in point of the growing importance of international dialogue. Similarly, media in philanthropy also have a crucial role to play in raising awareness. For instance, what Alliance Magazine has been doing on learning from failures and decolonising philanthropy is also remarkably important to help the sector grow and change.²² That being said, we are also convinced of the need to foster more spaces for open dialogue among ourselves as well as with researchers working in these areas and, fundamentally, with the multiple stakeholders and communities we work—or could work more—with.

7 | A FINAL WORD

Opening up, welcoming discomfort, being aware of our own and our colleagues' privileges or, conversely, structural exclusion, discussing past and present inequalities, are all fundamental steps that can help us advance as a sector. These, coupled with DEI techniques as well as the measurement of diversity, of practices of inclusion and of discrimination in our organisations and ensuing action plans contribute to making sure we can move from recognising diversity to embracing pluralism. This, we are both convinced, is a matter of coherence for us as actors of social change, and a mark of engagement for greater social justice.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Even though not exhaustive, a good indicator of this trend is the number of pieces on the topic and on cognate issues that Alliance Magazine publishes yearly under the theme 'diversity': <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/theme/diversity/>.
- ² Numerous projects on the promotion of pluralism beyond the recognition of diversity exist across the world. In particular, the Global Centre for Pluralism was created in Ottawa, Canada, by Aga Khan and the Canadian government: <https://www.pluralism.ca/>.
- ³ <https://thephilanthropist.ca/2023/06/when-the-dei-discussion-offends/>.
- ⁴ <https://ernop.eu/conference2023/safe-spaces-for-philanthropy/>.
- ⁵ <https://www.unige.ch/formcont/en/courses/das-philanthropy>.
- ⁶ We borrow this type of reflection on the work on dismantling racism already done by COCo, the Centre for Community Organizations, Montreal, Canada: <https://coco-net.org/>.
- ⁷ The wheel of privilege and power was developed by Sylvia Duckworth and Olena Hankivsky for the Canadian Council for Refugees.
- ⁸ By intersectional we follow K. Crenshaw's definition and refer to the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to an individual or group, which are understood as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage (See Crenshaw, 1991).
- ⁹ <https://pfc.ca/programs-initiatives/peer-learning-initiatives/jedi-accelerator/>.
- ¹⁰ <https://www.unige.ch/philanthropie/en>.

- ¹¹ https://www.unige.ch/philanthropie/application/files/1716/6368/4485/Rapport_Diversite_ENG_WEB.pdf.
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