Y4YQuébec

Diversity and inclusion in Québec's Nonprofit Sector

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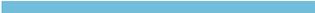
Introduction

Insufficient diversity and inclusion within the non-profit sector is a longstanding issue facing organizations across Québec, and Canada more generally. At present, the nonprofit volunteer and workforce do not adequately reflect the diversity of the province's population. Minority communities do not see themselves represented and a lack of participation excludes their lived experiences from the decision making process. There are several actions that organizations can take in pursuit of creating more heterogeneous teams that invite meaningful participation; each of which requires commitment at all levels of governance in a nonprofit.

Context

From a business perspective, diversity can be defined as *"a set of differences of individual traits including socio demographic variables and professional variables, which can be found in an organization's various levels"* (Cox, 1991; Thomas, 1991). It refers to characteristics including ethnicity, race, colour, age, gender, and sexual orientation (Canadahelps, 2018). In other words, diversity reflects all the ways individuals differ. Inclusion on the other hand, is the process of creating an environment where differences in ideas, backgrounds, and perspectives are both valued and mobilized for the betterment of an organization as well as the community it serves (Jordan, 2011).

Research shows that workforce diversity does not adequately reflect the Canadian population. For example, 70% of charity board positions in Canada are occupied by men that are a median age of 61 years and only 12% of board members in the non-profit sector are a visible minority (Thorton, 2019). Conversely, the median age in Canada is 41; women account for 50.4% of the population; 22.3% of Canadians are visible minorities (StatsCan, 2016).

Canada also has the highest rate of foreign born population among the G8 countries (Gröschl and Bendi, 2015) with the majority settling in Québec, Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. While Canada is often touted for embracing multiculturalism,

statistics show that minimal effort has been directed towards making opportunities (employment, board, volunteer and other) more accessible to all Canadians, especially immigrants (McIsaac et *al*, 2013).

Given the diversity of Canada's population, it would be fair to assume that profiles within the nonprofit sector would be more of a mosaic. Research however, suggests the opposite. Only 6% of nonprofit employees are members of visible minorities despite accounting for 22.3% of the total population and; 11% are immigrants, even though 20% of Canadians are new immigrants. This lack of representation underpins chronic disengagement and, in some cases, distrust from minorities, new arrivals and members of other underrepresented communities. From a human capital perspective, it is a missed opportunity to welcome skilled workers and new talent (McIsaac et *al*, 2013). Consequently, the effectiveness and ability of nonprofit organizations to make positive change within the communities they serve, is lessened since their target audience is excluded from discussions and the decision making process.

There are several advantages of diversifying the workforce. Forbes highlights that diversity in work teams lead to better decisions up to 87% of the time and that a team's adaptability *"is a byproduct of varying backgrounds and perspectives generating an array of insights, ideas and solutions"* (Lyons, 2019). Diversity fosters innovation as it takes multiple points of view into consideration. Consequently, the traditional ways of relating to the community that a nonprofit may employ can transition into better and more effective strategies over time. In addition, projections suggest that more than a third of Canadians will be members of minority groups by 2036 (StatCan, 2020) which further emphasizes the importance of creating work environments that better represent the communities they serve.

There are many steps organizations can take to improve both inclusivity and diversity within the work environment. The first step is education and awareness, as explained in *Getting Serious About Diversity: Enough Already with the Business Case* (Ely & Thomas, 2020). The nonprofit *Civic Action* suggests

communicating the business case for diverse leadership; implementing consistent evaluation; addressing concerns over procedures and fairness; and integrating opportunities for learning, development and advancement at all levels. Leaders and staff alike must be proactive in improving inclusivity, while dismantling practices or structures that are exclusionary.

Many organizations and CEOs make a business case of diversity by affirming that inclusion and diversity will lead to economic growth without any empirical or research findings to back this claim. Harvard Business Review challenges the effectiveness of the *"business case"* in their publication *Getting Serious About Diversity: Enough Already With the Business Case.* While there are many potential benefits that come from a more heterogeneous workforce, the act of hiring minority ethnocultural groups alone, does not equate to a thriving organization.

Literature within this field reveals that the decision making process is better performed between heterogeneous groups of participants. The suggested approach to achieve this is referred to as the *"learning-and-effectiveness"* process which argues that *"cultivating a learning orientation toward diversity enables companies to increase their effectiveness"* (Ely & Thomas, 2020). A diverse and inclusive workforce not only has participants from a myriad of backgrounds, but individuals are also made to be included and heard on the same level as any other member. Through active listening, a team is able to learn from different points of views instead of making decisions based on opinions of a homogeneous group that might lead to unanimity. The *"learning-and-effectiveness"* method will be more effective in the long term since it does not tokenize members of the organization nor expose them as a tool for economic success.

Conclusion

Organizations that do not work towards creating inclusive environments, can unintentionally reinforce exclusionary practices and structures or further marginalize individuals and their communities. Representation is essential in building trusting relationships between community organizations and the population they serve.

Y4Y believes that improving representation within the nonprofit sector would help community organizations better serve their communities. More effort is needed to create opportunities that are universally accessible to all demographics of Canadians regardless of their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, religion etc. Collaborative initiatives between organizations should also be prioritized as they can help improve awareness, develop understanding and provide training.