Inclusion and diversity:

Finding common ground for organizational action

A Deliberative Dialogue Guide
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Preface:

The challenge

People who share the goal of creating a more inclusive and diverse organization often assume they agree on how to achieve it. But problems develop when differences arise about the nature of the goal and the approach to be taken. Language itself may become a minefield, when words thought to be familiar seem to mean different things when others use them. Individuals may personalize the differences and feel threatened when their approach is questioned. The tensions that arise from these differences can undermine or even sabotage the change process.

The purpose of this guide

This guide provides the reading material for a deliberative dialogue process designed to assist in creating an inclusive and diverse organization. The document provides readers with an overview of the most common approaches to achieving diversity found in organizations. Through a facilitated deliberative dialogue process, participants will be guided through a discussion of the pros and cons of each of these approaches, in order to get at participants' underlying values and assumptions. By sharing these values and assumptions, we can see more clearly the main points of agreement. Finding this common ground is a first step toward creating an action plan.

What is deliberative dialogue?

Deliberative dialogue is more directed than a discussion, but less confrontational than a debate. It offers a way to talk about important issues and to wrestle with the hard choices and trade-offs that encompass every issue. The objective isn't for someone to win, but to make sound decisions that work for everyone. Deliberative dialogue is reflective, exploratory and open to all options. It requires that people listen to one another, not to find ways to rebut a point or change one another's minds, but to understand key interests and values that will help determine what action is best for all concerned. A moderator will guide the process and help participants share their opinions, concerns and values. The process does not require experts; it relies on the participants' own experiences and knowledge to move forward to action.

People with widely differing viewpoints and agendas can work together if they carefully define the areas where they agree—where their core values are the same—and where they differ. It is not necessary to see the world in the same way. It is not realistic to think that after a few hours in a deliberative dialogue process, everyone will agree on everything. Instead, the moderator will guide the group to identify the common ground—the foundation of shared interests—and clarify what people agree on, what they
don’t, what trade-offs they are willing to make and what is not negotiable. New models can be developed which incorporate the best of various approaches. From that point, participants can determine a strategy from which to begin to work towards concrete action.

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Introduction

Putting a Face on Diversity

For the most part, discussions about diversity focus on increasing access and opportunities for those belonging to groups that have historically been excluded from power, or denied rights enjoyed by others. Among those who face such discrimination are members of ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious minorities, First Nations members, people with disabilities, women, gays and lesbians, seniors and in some cases, youth.

In Canada today, cultural diversity is a fact of life. In 1996, the latest year for which there is census data, approximately 11.2 % of Canadians identified themselves as members of a visible minority. In metropolitan areas, the percentages are considerably higher, as the distribution of visible minority groups is highly concentrated and overwhelmingly urban. British Colombia and Ontario are home to three-quarters of all visible minorities in Canada. In Toronto, 32% of census respondents were visible minority members, as were 31% of those in Vancouver. Urban Alberta also reflects an increasingly diverse Canada: The visible minority population of Calgary and Edmonton stood at 16% and 14% respectively in 1996.

These proportions are steadily growing, with an estimated 200,000 new immigrants to Canada each year. A growing proportion of those arriving are from Asia and Africa. Three-quarters of those who came to Canada in the 1990’s are members of a visible minority group. It is estimated that Canada’s so-called visible minorities are set to become one fifth of the national population early in this new century.

Despite these increasing numbers, there is a substantial employment and income gap between ‘visible minorities’ and other Canadians. Women in visible minority groups had a 15.3% unemployment rate (men had 15.5%) compared to 9.4%(9.9% for men) for other Canadian women. Pre-tax median earnings in 1998 for Canadians in visible minority groups were $14,507 compared to $20,517 for other Canadians. The disparity exists among all levels of educational attainment. Of the skilled workers in visible minority groups selected for immigration in 1998, 72% held university degrees, a rate four times greater than the percentage in the Canadian-born population. Despite these higher education levels, there is still an income disparity for both low and highly educated members of visible minorities of approximately 23%.

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4 ibid
As the original inhabitants of this land, the situation of First Nations people cannot be explained as a function of recent arrival. Yet exclusion from resources and power is evident when one finds that the average employment income of Aboriginal people in 1995 was 34% below the national average. In 1995, 44% of the Aboriginal population was below Statistics Canada’s low income cut-offs, compared with the national rate of 20%. Three out of five Aboriginal children under the age of six were in low-income families in 1995, compared with the national rate of one in four.5

Equity laws have helped alleviate this differential: compared to the average annual earnings of $17,382 for all Aboriginal workers, Aboriginal men in workplaces covered by the federal Employment Equity Act earned an average salary of $42,911 while Aboriginal women earned $33,310.6

In terms of educational status, about 40% of Aboriginal earners had not completed high school, compared with only about 25% of earners in the general population.

First nations people are also more likely than others to experience Canada’s correctional system first-hand. In 1997/98, First Nations people comprised 17% of the federal prison population, even though the Aboriginal population was only 2% of the general population.

Women of course, are not a minority population, and enjoy growing strength in many sectors. Women now outnumber men in full-time study at Canadian universities. In 1999, they made up just under half of doctors and dentists, and professionals in business and finance. But in several areas, there has been little change in more than a decade: In the natural sciences, engineering and mathematics, women made up only 20% of professionals in the field in 1999, up little from 17% in 1987. Meanwhile, female workers continue to dominate in traditional “pink collar” sectors: 70% of employees in teaching, health related occupations, administrative positions and sales and service posts are women.7

The earnings of women show steady gains in recent decades, but remain at only 73% of their male counterparts for those working full-time. And while earning less, women may be doing more. The burden of domestic work still falls mainly on female shoulders: In 1998, full-time working mothers with a spouse spent almost 5 hours per day on unpaid activities—an hour and a half more each day than their male partners. The face of poverty in Canada is also largely female: 56% of all families headed by single mothers lived below the poverty line in 1997.3

Disability issues touch a broad range of Canadians. In 1991, the last year in which such data was available, 4.2 million Canadians—16% of the population—reported some level

6 The Centre for Social Justice: The Growing Gap #A24, “Aboriginals earn 34% below national average”.
of disability.\(^8\) Despite Charter recognition of their right to equal access, people with disabilities face some of the severest challenges to full participation in society. For many, the barriers are both systemic and physical. In 1998, Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers covering all of Canada except Quebec agreed to a national strategy promoting “full citizenship” for people with disabilities based on the principles of equality, inclusion and independence. In reality, the pattern of government action on disability has been to see access arrangements as optional rather than mandatory as required by the Charter.\(^9\) This pattern of inaction has resulted in high rates of unemployment and poverty, unequal access to educational and other services, and severe constraints on the full civic participation of people with disabilities.

**Creating an inclusive and diverse organization**

There are many reasons to address the issue of diversity within organizations. They range from the practical—an understanding that being inclusive benefits society at large and the organization’s functioning—to the ethical—a belief that it is just “the right thing to do”.

Many businesses see a connection between diversity and the bottom line: New faces bring an understanding of new markets. New ways of seeing and thinking allow companies to create and sell products and services suited to more peoples’ needs and wants. Businesses also understand the public relations benefits that come from improving their records in hiring and promoting women and minorities. A bank that promotes women to senior management positions may well attract more women as clients.

For non-governmental organizations working in the broader struggle for equity and social justice, representation of minority and disadvantaged groups is also more than just a question of fairness: It helps them do their work better and is essential to understanding and voicing concerns that are central to the organization’s mandate. In practical terms, a homogeneous voluntary sector will not draw upon the fullest possible range of skills and support from staff, volunteers and donors and is unlikely to succeed in meeting the needs of a diverse clientele. In focus groups conducted by the Canadian Council for International Cooperation\(^10\), youth and visible minorities in particular reported feeling excluded from the NGO community. It was made clear that organizations will fail to connect with the public at large if they do not reflect our increasingly diverse population.

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\(^8\) *Health and Activity Limitations Survey*, Statistics Canada, 1991


Choices

This process takes as its starting point three choices. The way in which these choices have been framed is the product of an extensive literature survey, interviews, and a focus group conducted by CCIC. Although each choice provides an approach that organizations adopt, and the underlying assumptions, there are elements that overlap between them. Each choice presents the issue as seen by someone who supports that approach. While each choice has its supporters and its critics, there will be elements to like and dislike in each model.

1. Some people say that certain groups have been systematically disadvantaged or excluded from organizations. They say that the systems and structures in organizations reinforce power and privilege of the majority group. They believe that the organization must identify the target group most in need of justice and remove the “barriers” that are excluding this group from fully participating.

2. Some people say that we are more similar than different and everyone should be treated equally as individuals in the organization. They believe that the organization should have an open door policy and give everyone an equal opportunity to succeed. They recruit the most qualified people regardless of their background or culture and provide training and mentoring to equip them to succeed in the organization.

3. Some people say that the barriers are found not only in the structures and systems but also in the culture of the organization. They believe that for actual change to occur, people’s diversity must be valued and ways must be found to integrate these new skills and experiences into the organization.

These choices are not mutually exclusive, but they do lead to a distinctive course of action. You are not being asked to choose between them. Instead these choices are presented as a framework for discussion by illustrating how people value different things and see the issue differently. The deliberative dialogue will help the group move toward common ground on your own set of values. These shared values will help you develop a model appropriate for your organization.
The choices in practice

To help illustrate the choices, we will use the situation of a fictional organization and its organizational change process:

Friends of Fresh Air, a non-profit environmental group, recently ran an open competition to select a new Executive Director. The organization was later stung by criticisms from an unsuccessful candidate that its interview and selection process was biased in favour of white, male candidates. It was true that the candidate chosen for the job was white and male, as were the Chief Financial Officer and a majority of the organization’s Board of Directors. But the outgoing Executive Director, along with the managers of Communications, Human Resources, and Policy and Research were all female, as were four-fifths of the rest of the staff. In addition, two Board members plus one-tenth of the staff were people from ‘minorities’. The staff as a whole—males and females—considered themselves progressive individuals who were sensitive to issues of equality and inclusion.

The Friends of Fresh Air Board ordered a review of internal procedures to determine if there was evidence of bias, and to identify measures to ensure a balanced perspective by the organization.

As you read through each of the choices below, you will see how the review process for this organization, Friends of Fresh Air, might have looked if the change leaders within the organization had chosen that particular approach.
CHOICE 1: Remove the barriers

**Issue:** Organizations have systemic and structural barriers—workplace mandates, policies, rules and procedures—that, intentional or not, reinforce the patterns of discrimination found in society. Together, these create an uneven playing field blocking minority groups from fully participating in the organization. These practices and structures are widespread and are backed up by institutionalized power. The values of those in power get built into organizational systems, which in turn reinforce the majority values. Everyone may have equal opportunity to enter an organization, but the door is shaped to fit people from the majority culture. If we don’t fit, we are put at a disadvantage: either not able to make it through the door, or having to alter ourselves in order to pass through.

**Broad Remedy:** Create an inclusive organization by removing the barriers, so that those who have endured systematic discrimination are given respect and the chance to advance on the same basis as others. If need be, we must change the way we do things to accommodate the unique needs of the most disadvantaged. While many groups face systemic discrimination, we prefer to work on behalf of one target group at a time, so that our efforts are not watered down. We should change our procedures and overall structure to enhance the participation of target groups. We believe we must all explore negative attitudes that we have learned, and confront our own prejudices. We also feel a responsibility to work outside our own walls for changes in society at large, so that everyone has access to organizations such as ours.

**Examples of activities:**
- training that centres on learning how the target group feels and facing up to negative prejudices
- removing disadvantages and barriers such as making accommodations for physical access
- more transparent policies on hiring and promotion
- revised policies and procedures, to accelerate hiring & promotion of target groups
- harassment guidelines
- flexible work arrangements
- working with agencies representing target groups to develop action plans

Choosing this approach, Friends of Fresh Air focussed on increasing the voice of people of colour in decision-making within the organization. They initiated a recruitment program to increase the number of people of colour on the Board over a three-year period. They reviewed the hiring procedure for the Executive Director position, and determined that they needed to broaden their outreach for postings of their jobs to a more diverse contact list. They also found that requiring Canadian work experience excluded most people with valid experience from other countries. The statement of qualifications was revised to include a more general requirement for “a university degree in a related field”. Work experience was examined for content, not location. They also provided training in diversity and gender awareness to all members of staff and management.
Voices in support:

1. This is the only way to deal with problems of systemic discrimination that handicap certain groups. We don’t all have an equal start. We need policies that face up to this fact and do something to address it.
2. Individuals should not be held solely accountable for their own success or failure. This ignores social factors that contribute and puts too heavy a burden on our shoulders.
3. Taking affirmative action measures can rapidly improve the representation and advancement of the target group. This can in turn break cycles of under-representation by bringing in members of the target group who lead the way for others.
4. By taking this approach, we can fundamentally change power structures in a workplace.
5. We can make our organization more effective by taking into account the fresh perspectives of the target group.
6. By dealing with prejudices we all have buried inside, we effect powerful social change at the individual level.

Voices in opposition:

1. This approach creates a split world with we/they dialogues that emphasize our differences. This will lead to frustration, impatience, confrontation and conflict. If we think only about our differences, we won’t see our common ground.
2. Our uniqueness is ignored. All members of the majority group are labeled “privileged”; all target group members are seen as “disadvantaged” regardless of our real backgrounds.
3. This approach doesn’t touch the informal rules and practices that govern our workplace—the networking, the scheduling practices, and all those other things that keep the winners on top. It doesn’t go deep enough to where change is really needed: our workplace culture.
4. If we focus on promoting target group members, but only into specific niches, we may increase the numbers and promotions of the target group, but people will feel “token” and dehumanized. We won’t really be weaving their skills and perspectives into the organization as a whole.
5. The kind of steps needed to bring about this kind of change is going to take time, energy and resources that will distract us from carrying out our central mission and objectives.
6. If we are focusing only on the needs of a single group at a time, how will others feel, and won’t it take us forever? Many of us have faced discrimination. We will feel our issues are trivialized or overlooked. We will have to wait for our ‘turn’ and that could take years.
7. How do we know what barriers to remove? If our group is not already inclusive, we’re going to be blind to many of the real barriers within our structures and underlying culture.
**CHOICE 2: Level playing field**

**Issue:** People are all individuals, more similar than different and deserve to be treated equally. Everyone must be given equal opportunity to succeed in the organization and no one should be discriminated against on any basis. Discrimination actually occurs when people are boxed into a category and treated differently according to their attributes and culture. There are times when some of us may be at a disadvantage if we are new to the way the organization works and are not initially equipped to compete equally.

**Broad Remedy:** Our organization must give priority to ensuring that people are all treated well and have equal opportunity to participate. We advertise widely to encourage diverse groups to become involved in our organization. We hire the best, without discriminating against anyone on the basis of their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation or other diversity. Everyone has equal access to opportunities and individuals are given the training and mentoring support to succeed in the organization. We recognize that everyone has prejudices and we address these if they arise. Overall, we are sensitive to one another’s character traits, personality quirks, preferences and backgrounds, and everyone is appreciated regardless of their differences. We do not group people together into any particular ‘types’. By making sure that we have a strong, stable organization with clear rules on eligibility and promotion, we are able to attract people from diverse backgrounds into the organization.

**Examples of activities that might be undertaken:**
- team-building meetings and activities
- individual training in the tools needed for success in the organization: assertiveness, conflict management, problem-solving, presentation skills, etc.
- programmes that prepare people to take leadership roles
- one-on-one counseling to address individual challenges
- mentoring and career-development programmes
- compliance with existing legislation
- wide-spread job and volunteer opening announcements to attract diverse audiences

In choosing this approach, Friends of Fresh Air scrutinized their posting for the position of Executive Director for evidence of discrimination. They concluded that, since the job had been widely advertised, and all of the requirements could be met by qualified people, regardless of their sex or culture—and had been in the past–there was no evidence of bias. The under-representation of women on the Board was noted however as a concern. A Board renewal initiative was undertaken with an eye towards gradually increasing the number of minorities and women, as qualified candidates were identified. In a follow-up review of the hiring process, a number of women on staff came forward to say they felt uncomfortable in voicing their views at staff meetings. These individuals were offered courses in assertiveness and leadership training. It was also decided that any new staff hired would be provided with an orientation to familiarize him or her with the how the organization functions.
Voices in support:

1. This system succeeds because everyone has equal access within the organization. You rise or fall on the basis of merit. You are not judged by who you are, but by how you contribute to the organization.
2. No one is boxed into cultural, racial, gender or other stereotypes. Everyone is valued as a unique individual.
3. This approach lets us put our organization’s primary goals first. These are more important than individual or group achievement.
4. Team loyalty is strengthened because we focus on what we have in common, and everyone is clear on what is needed to succeed.
5. We find ways to ensure that people are treated equally. Whenever someone starts out with a disadvantage we take steps to mentor them and give them opportunities where they are encouraged to succeed under the same expectations as everyone else.

Voices in opposition:

1. This approach is built on a level playing field that doesn’t exist. It ignores real disadvantages that some groups face in trying to get a foot in the door.
2. This approach subtly pressures people to suppress their differences, expecting everyone to assimilate into the dominant culture of the organization. It forces people to adapt, not the organization. This ends up reinforcing a majority point of view.
3. Because real differences are ignored, disagreements are seen as “personality” differences. This increases tension, and keeps us from working out our problems.
4. By ignoring difference, we’re failing to use our diversity to the benefit of the organization. We should be learning more about each other, so that we can learn from one another.
5. Having an open-door policy does not ensure people will come in. If people see only one culture reflected in the organization, they are not likely to want to enter.
CHOICE 3: Benefiting from difference

Issue: People from diverse backgrounds and cultures are disadvantaged because their ways of doing things (their skills, work styles and attributes) are not valued within the organization. Changing the structures and systems in an organization is recognized and important but does not address the informal rules and behaviours that are part of the accepted culture in the organization. For example, an organization may have a hiring policy that requires a certain number of minority candidates to be interviewed. When the interviews are held, however, the informal practice of selection may expect someone to describe their own strengths. For some people this is seen as undeserved self-promotion and their cultural norms expect them to downplay their own virtues, thereby not fulfilling the expected selection criteria. The differences inherent in people’s backgrounds are too often not valued and the organization should celebrate rather than disadvantage people because of them.

Broad Remedy: Our organization must be conscious of people’s differences, see them as strengths, and focus change on making the best possible use of these differences. In addition to making structural and system changes, we must also ensure that the organizational culture begins to respect and value other styles and attributes too. The views and talents of all groups should be encouraged and used to the advantage of the organization. We need to promote and value decisions and choices at work that draw upon our cultural background or identity. We need to make others feel comfortable doing the same. The route to equity is not to eliminate or deplore differences, but to accommodate them, celebrate them and use them effectively—across the board. People who bring diverse experiences are sought to join the organization, without emphasizing or putting priority on any specific difference or group.

Examples of Activities:

- carefully examining both formal and informal workplace practices and assumptions to find hidden biases (e.g. meeting styles favour those with quick and argumentative verbal skills)
- changing policies and procedures to remove hidden biases (e.g. revising performance evaluation criteria; providing flexible work arrangements)
- corrective measures focusing on acknowledging differences and valuing them
- consciousness-raising and sensitivity training to promote tolerance and appreciation of difference
- specific learning about the cultural and social history of many different groups
- focus on all groups, not any specific target group
- learning patterns of one’s own prejudices
- inter-personal skills training
- demonstrating how other styles and approaches can benefit an organization’s skill set
• finding ways to use the unique strengths of people’s diverse experiences to the benefit of the organization.

Following Choice 3, Friends of Fresh Air took the criticism of male bias as an opportunity to review its policies and practices in terms of whether they helped or hindered the organization in drawing out the strengths of all groups represented. One of their findings was that the organizational culture around the approach to time management was lax. This meant a lot of unscheduled overtime, and meetings scheduled for odd hours, sometimes evenings and weekends. In reviewing the hiring procedure in question, they noted that the hiring committee had stressed the need for a flexible schedule. This in effect screened out the top female candidate, who had three children and was open about her parental commitments. Others within the organization—two part-time students, three other parents and one woman who was caring for an elderly relative—also pointed out that they felt unable to fully participate in decisions because of the norms around scheduling. The organization decided to implement a formal policy regarding the scheduling of meetings, confining them to between 9:30 am and 4:30 pm. Provisions were also added for participation by teleconference.
Voices in support:

1. By valuing our differences, we are maximizing the benefit to the organization as a whole. Members of all groups are encouraged to provide input across the organization.
2. We feel integrated, not assimilated or different. We feel valued on our own terms. Organizational “norms” are not imposed.
3. This approach is non-confrontational. No one is accused of discrimination or of having an unfair advantage.
4. Our approach to diversity supports rather than distracts from the achievement of our aims. The organization internalizes differences among employees so we can learn and grow because of them.
5. Recognising different perspectives makes us more aware of hidden biases. When we see the world through different lenses, we realize how our own lens is actually focused on a particular culture (i.e. that of the majority) rather than being colour or gender blind.

Voices in opposition:

1. By concentrating on differences, we reinforce stereotypes rather than break them down.
2. This approach ducks the tough issues about prejudice and racism. It gives us an easy out to avoid confronting our own prejudices. We can distance ourselves by focusing on what we like about certain groups, while not facing the “negative baggage” we carry.
3. By focusing on recognition and celebration, we are pretending that simply calling something “valuable” will make it so. There are still deeply rooted and unspoken organizational values that give preference to the styles and attributes of the majority group.
4. If we don’t also take some kind of affirmative action, this approach will do nothing concrete to increase diversity if it does not already exist.
5. People may be channeled into jobs that are said to be important, but actually have little value in the criteria for leadership. It won’t be long before they feel “ghettoized” and realize that they have no way up in the organization.
Resources


