

# ***INSTITUTIONALIZING DIVERSITY: WORKING ASSUMPTIONS***

*These working assumptions informed the early work of the Diversity in Philanthropy Project, precursor to the current D5 Project (<http://www.d5coalition.org>). As the work moves forward, these and related assumptions continue to inform the strategies, recommended research, and tools being developed to extend and embed this work across the sector. Please share feedback with [mecapek@unm.edu](mailto:mecapek@unm.edu) or 505.890.6466.*

**Numbers Count.** Two examples of recent research: mathematical models have been developed that prove diversity and inclusiveness trumps ability in most settings.<sup>i</sup> Once minorities on boards number three or more, opportunities for influence equalize between all members.<sup>ii</sup>

**Numbers Are Not Enough: Diversity Must Be Both Wide and Deep.** To be successful, diversity in organizations must go wide (be understood as actively including many different kinds of differences) and deep (be absorbed into an organization's culture). "Shallow diversity" organizations have a harder time being effective.<sup>iii</sup>

**Organizational Cultures Can Pose Roadblocks.** Valued traditions, history, even mission—an organization's self-identity—can mask unspoken, unnamed assumptions and unwritten rules that pose major roadblocks to going wide and deep, even with all key stakeholders' best intentions.

**Foundations Are Privileged Institutions.** Because of the inherent ratios of power defined by being asked for and awarding resources, with rare exceptions, foundations—even community and public foundations—function as elite institutions, often with less actual public accountability and oversight than organizations in other sectors. Most foundations have self-perpetuating boards.

**Privileged Institutions Expect New People to Cover to Fit In.** Elite institutions in any sector usually expect "covering"<sup>iv</sup> from new staff and board members: it is assumed that new people will "fit in" to the organization rather than the organization change to accommodate new perspectives. These assumptions are usually implicit, not talked about. Especially in smaller or family foundations, these assumptions can be framed as cherished principles, part of the founder's vision.

**Addressing Unspoken Norms and Assumptions is Key.** Surfacing and assessing these latent cultural assumptions ("naming Norm") can be a useful strategy for creating organizational cultures that give all stakeholders opportunities to succeed and organizations opportunities to innovate.

**Stakeholders Who Don't Cover Do Better Work and the Organization Benefits.**

To the extent that an organization's key stakeholders, including grantees, don't have to cover to fit in—understand themselves to be heard, encouraged, and valued—stakeholders do better work. The organization will obtain increased value of more creativity and unleashed energy—and with grantees, transparency, trust, and mutual respect: in short, organizations will be more effective.

**“Learning Organizations”<sup>v</sup> Are More Likely to Institutionalize Deep Diversity.**

Organizations that aspire to be “learning organizations”—with mechanisms in place for self-reflection that allow, even encourage, stakeholders to challenge assumptions and grow—are fertile ground for successfully institutionalizing diversity and becoming more effective.

**Institutionalizing Diversity is an Ongoing, Reflective Process.** The paradigm is not “broken/fixed” but “learn/assess/grow,” and the process is ongoing: the goal is not “bingo, we did it” but institutionalizing redundant mechanisms that sustain a vital culture of new learning as well as preserve valued traditions and history. Outcomes include integrity, effectiveness, and success.<sup>vi</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Scott E. Page. *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>ii</sup> Phil Buchanan, Ellie Buteau, Sarah Di Troia, and Romero Hayman. *Beyond Compliance: The Trustee Viewpoint on Effective Foundation Governance* (Cambridge MA: The Center for Effective Philanthropy in partnership with BoardSource and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2007).

<sup>iii</sup> Mary Ellen S. Capek and Molly Mead. *Effective Philanthropy: Organizational Success Through Deep Diversity and Gender Equality* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2006). See also <http://www.effectivephilanthropybook.org>.

<sup>iv</sup> Kenji Yoshino. *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*. (New York: Random House, 2006). See also <http://www.kenjiyoshino.com>.

<sup>v</sup> Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday, 1990).

<sup>vi</sup> For additional information, see: <http://www.d5coalition.org>.