
Guest editorial: Indigenous priorities for equality, diversity and inclusion

In the realm of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) theory and practice, a critical but often overlooked perspective emerges from Indigenous communities (Pio, 2021). Traditional EDI frameworks focus on intersections of identity, society and organization. Indigenous priorities delve deeper, reflecting the rich tapestry of our worldviews and ways of being. These, in turn, are deeply woven into our identities and how we interact with the world around us (O'Sullivan, 2022; Ruwhiu *et al.*, 2021). This special issue centers Indigenous voices from diverse regions including New Zealand, Australia, the Pacific, Vietnam and Zimbabwe. By sharing their lived experience and challenges they face, these scholars offer invaluable insights that can strengthen the field of EDI. These include considerations of our unique knowledge systems and ways of being, self-determination and justice and the unique challenges these raise for Indigenous communities.

EDI frameworks have played a vital role in promoting fairer and more inclusive societies (Köllen *et al.*, 2018). However, traditional EDI approaches, rooted in Western thought, often neglect the unique contexts and challenges faced by Indigenous communities (Nkomo, 2021; Pio, 2021). This creates a gap in understanding, where valuable insights on knowledge, identity and community are absent from EDI discussions. The challenge lies in decolonizing EDI scholarship. We must move beyond the narrow, Western assumptions imposed on Indigenous populations during colonialism and perpetuated through assimilation practices (Kidman, 2020; Nkomo, 2021). This requires dismantling these assumptions and creating space for inclusive EDI that recognizes and honors Indigenous voices (Lovern, 2017; Pio, 2021; O'Sullivan, 2022; Verbos and Humphries, 2012).

Colonization's catastrophic consequences for Indigenous Peoples worldwide include loss of land and access to resources, suppressed culture and identity, collapsed social and economic systems, a higher burden of poor health and disease, lower life expectancy and racial violence (Cornell and Jorgensen, 2019; Lovern, 2017). Indigenous Peoples are typically rendered invisible within political economies of knowledge "forged in the interplay of power relations between coloniality and free-market capitalism" (Kidman, 2020, p. 247). Colonizers and governments actively suppressed Indigenous movements and knowledge systems. Replacing traditional ways of life with imposed ideologies was deliberate and systematic (Banerjee, 2008; Cornell and Jorgensen, 2017; Pio, 2021). For example, our experiences as Indigenous Peoples intersect with identities related to gender, class, culture, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual capacities and sexuality. However, the imposition of colonial gender binaries created patriarchal structures, policies and practices that have had devastating consequences for Indigenous communities, particularly for Indigenous women and those who identify as queer and gender diverse (Sullivan and Day, 2021).

Despite laws and policies designed to promote EDI, Indigenous Peoples still face significant obstacles. Individual biases and systemic barriers prevent them from fully participating and succeeding in society (Julien *et al.*, 2017; Ruwhiu *et al.*, 2021). Within that context, organizations have been, and continue to be, forces of domination and suppression for Indigenous Peoples, as well as for many other minority peoples (Pio, 2021; Verbos and Humphries, 2012). More specifically, despite increasing Indigenous engagement in a range of professions, occupations and fields, coupled with expectations on employers to engage in diversity initiatives, many Indigenous Peoples still navigate Eurocentric, masculine, hostile



organizational cultures and structures in their careers (Andrade *et al.*, 2021; K.I.N. Author Collective, 2020; Julien *et al.*, 2017). Research suggests culture, traditions and language play a significant role in career experiences and decisions of Indigenous Peoples. However, expectations of “fit” continue to underpin human resource management (HRM) processes such as recruitment, selection and promotion, effectively undermining the experiences and aspirations of Indigenous employees (Staniland *et al.*, 2020). Employers and managers will need to think beyond recruitment for diversity and consider how to better support the careers of Indigenous Peoples in a wider range of activities and throughout their tenure within organizations (Julien *et al.*, 2017; Staniland *et al.*, 2020).

Indigenous forms of organization – and the mobilization of people both within and between nation states – has been important to their collective struggle for recognition of Indigenous rights (Cornell and Jorgensen, 2019; Julien *et al.*, 2017; Smith, 2012). As such, Indigenous scholarship has emerged as a powerful force of resistance and challenge to the “status quo” of management and organization studies (Bastien *et al.*, 2023; Love, 2018). Understanding the unique priorities of Indigenous communities within EDI scholarship and practice is crucial. It allows scholars to approach EDI differently, to ask different questions and consider different methods within this field. This can lead to a deeper understanding that empowers scholars to engage more effectively with Indigenous communities, respecting their experiences and incorporating valuable Indigenous knowledge into the overall conversation on EDI. An Indigenous perspective has the potential to “redesign” (Lovern, 2017) EDI scholarship and offers opportunities for diversity and inclusion while celebrating Indigenous distinctiveness and ways of being (Julien *et al.*, 2017; Ruwhiu *et al.*, 2021; Verbos and Humphries, 2012). Importantly, in the spirit of collective responsibility, we need to address and better understand the diversity that exists across and within our own communities, acknowledging the role of both structural and agentic factors that contribute to our contemporary experiences (Paradies *et al.*, 2013).

Contributions to our special issue

In the special issue focusing on Indigenous priorities for EDI, we bring to the fore diverse Indigenous perspectives that speak to, interrogate and offer alternative understandings to the prevailing institutional logic informing EDI scholarship and practice. With the initial call for papers, we were particularly looking to understand the role of Indigenous paradigms and systems of knowledge as well as perspectives of identity, relationality, reciprocity and connectedness in the organizing of EDI. We encouraged work that ranged from micro-agentic, meso-institutional and macro-national approaches to the study of EDI from within Indigenous contexts, whatever that may have been or may have looked like. The papers received acknowledge the complex landscape of Indigenous geographies of inclusion (and exclusion) that draw us into considering Indigenous priorities on and approaches to diversity and related concepts across a broad spectrum of geo-political spaces (Lovern, 2017; Olsen, 2018; Paradies *et al.*, 2013; Pio, 2021; Sullivan and Day, 2021).

Our special issue therefore offered a platform for Indigenous people and voices to share their experiences and perspectives on scholarship and practice related to EDI. We saw the need for a shift that would allow for Indigenous scholars to participate on their own terms without feeling the need to conform to existing models or frameworks (Bastien *et al.*, 2023; O’Sullivan, 2022; Ruwhiu *et al.*, 2021). The papers found in this special issue represent voices that have often been marginalized in traditional EDI journals, which have typically focused on EDI in mainstream organizational settings. The authors who contributed to the special issue explore broader systemic issues, which create opportunities and address barriers which enable Indigenous participation in society and the economy on their own terms. The contributions allow us to foreground the priorities identified by Indigenous researchers and communities.

We invited contributions that would challenge what Indigenous EDI is to consider how these phenomena are understood and practiced and to scrutinize society, work and organization. The papers published in this special issue offer insights into unique empirical contexts. For instance, papers focus on; Māori people and perspectives and the context of Aotearoa New Zealand (Nimbus Awhina Staniland, Diane Ruwhiu and Kiri Dell), the Cham people of the Ninh Thuận province in Vietnam (Tuyen Dai Quang, Vang Quang Dang, Tho Alang and Hoang Van Nguyen), the San minority in Zimbabwe (Kudakwashe Chirambwi), as well as the First Peoples (Mark Jones, Pauline Stanton and Mark Rose) and Pasifika diaspora (Inez Fainga'a-Manu Sione, Andrew Harvey, Jaimee Stuart, Matt Statham, Naomi Pelite, Faamanuia Aloalii and Ruta Aloalii) in Australia. This special issue delves into the heart of Indigenous priorities, all of which are inextricably linked to the concept of self-determination and the fundamental right of Indigenous Peoples to govern themselves and define what truly matters to them (Brayboy, 2005). The articles showcase various aspects of these priorities in action.

The first Indigenous priority for EDI is *cultural preservation*. This encompasses the right to maintain and revitalize their unique knowledge systems, languages, traditions, spirituality and practices. In these papers, we see the resolve, resilience and self-determination of First Peoples in Australia (Jones *et al.*), the conservation of culture in research processes grounded in Pasifika ways of knowing and doing (Fainga'a-Manu Sione *et al.*) and the implementation of authentic Māori epistemology in research through Indigenous methodology (Staniland *et al.*). Indigenous cultural preservation is deeply intertwined with the principles of EDI through the promotion of recognition, respect and inclusion for a rich and diverse cultural heritage.

A second priority is *achieving justice* by addressing historical wrongs, facing injustices and addressing systemic inequality. These priorities, when viewed through the lens of EDI, become a call to action – for Indigenous Peoples to define their own meaningful futures based on their values, traditions and ways of knowing. In the valuable contributions to this special issue, we reveal the systemic exclusion of Indigenous minorities from accessing and managing natural resources within their ancestral territories (Chirambwi), the historical exclusion of First Peoples from settler society undermined by racism and discrimination (Jones *et al.*), the lack of equity in business procurement processes (Malcom *et al.*) and the lack of engagement with Indigenous research methodologies and priorities within diversity scholarship (Staniland *et al.*). All of which the authors seek to overcome or offer ways forward.

We welcomed submissions that highlighted Indigenous priorities related to *ways of being* and *positionality*, which amplify notions of identity, relationality, reciprocity and connectedness and how they play out in the organizing of EDI. This is reflected in the focus on communities of interest and by embedding Indigenous knowledge and methodologies within the research design itself. For instance, Kahurangi Malcolm, Frae Cairns and Tania Pouwhare are practitioners as well as advocates and commentators who write powerfully deep within their empirical worlds. Other writers reveal how connections between participants should be prioritized in research processes over content (Fainga'a-Manu Sione *et al.*), who share three Pasifika methods (talanoa, e-talanoa and teu le vā) with us. How relationship-based practices, as opposed to transactional reconciliation, which often ignores lived racism, must be given preference (Jones *et al.*), how building reciprocal relationships through ecosystems can address colonizing processes (Chirambwi) and how Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wahine research processes take critical research to a new level in doing authentic research (Staniland *et al.*). Decolonizing methodologies and the survival stories of the San people are commanding insights in Chirambwi's article, and Jones *et al.* draw spirit from Indigenous Standpoint Theory (as practice and theory) to embrace both activism and liberation in privileging Nilangany Ngarrungunil (the owners of knowledge) in their astounding account.

Another theme in our papers is *prosperity* – a strategy which has the potential to grant Indigenous communities the freedom to determine how they develop their economies and manage resources for the benefit of their people. Contemporary Indigenous economic initiatives take place in the context of enduring colonial legacies (Dell *et al.*, 2018) and operate among systemic and intersectional discrimination based on factors such as gender, race and sexuality (OFIFC, 2017). Quang *et al.*, reveal the prospect of tourism benefit sharing (TBS) for its ability to provide effective community advantages whereby local authorities can share the economic benefits from tourism revenue more equitably with Indigenous communities to achieve better outcomes for those communities. Malcolm *et al.* highlight the role supplier diversity could play in encouraging businesses to purchase from operations owned by Indigenous Māori and underrepresented or minority people; hope in, and the prospect of, supplier diversity is also part of a second paper which further uncovers the aspirations of economic self-determination of the Founder Generation in Australia (Jones *et al.*). The papers delve deep into exploring systemic issues and offer insights and solutions which may create opportunities for Indigenous participation in society and the economy and on their own terms. Fainga'a-Manu Sione *et al.* examine the potential value in Pacific churches, community organizations, government organizations and a university coming together to provide for Pasifika communities.

Conclusion

All papers in our special issue in some way speak to self-determination, justice and control over traditional lands and traditions (including representation). Elevating Indigenous voices and supporting self-determination are cornerstones for a more robust EDI field. This fosters a just and inclusive society that celebrates the richness and diversity of human knowledge and experience, ultimately leading to better outcomes for all. While the priorities discussed by our authors are indeed central tenets of Indigeneity, drawing from our systems of knowledge and knowing, shaping identity and worldview, it's important to remember that these experiences are expressed and lived in unique ways by individual scholars and communities.

Future research in EDI can be significantly enriched by delving deeper into Indigenous perspectives. Key areas of exploration include understanding Indigenous practices for equality and inclusion that have the potential to inform EDI approaches by giving voice to those communities who have historically been underrepresented. Further work could be extended on identifying the challenges and opportunities that arise when integrating Indigenous perspectives into EDI. Indigenous communities have often been subjects of research without their consent or with unequal power dynamics. This challenges EDI scholarship to develop more ethical and equitable research practices, ensuring Indigenous communities are genuine partners in the research process. This will involve navigating power imbalances, building trust and developing culturally appropriate methodologies. Crucially, ongoing collaboration with and between Indigenous communities is paramount. Their voices and lived experiences must be central to developing EDI frameworks that are not only inclusive but also meaningful and impactful for Indigenous Peoples themselves.

Our intent in this special issue was not to prescribe a list of Indigenous priorities, for that would stand contrary to the nature of our worldviews and ways of being. Indigenous priorities are connected to the living heart of who we are and how we engage with the world around us. Our hope is that these core aspects become a springboard for broader EDI scholarship. By prompting new ways of engaging with and questioning what constitutes Indigenous priorities, these contributions can lead to a more nuanced understanding of EDI.

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