
Shelley Price: Storytelling the philanthropic landscape – Collective restorying of giving and sharing through Indigenous perspectives

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This Q&A is part of a [series of interviews](#) with six PhiLab researchers about their areas of study. PhiLab is a Canadian research network on philanthropy based in Montreal, on the campus of UQAM.

Shelley Price, associate professor at the Gerald Schwartz School of Business, St. Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia

You were born in Labrador and grew up in a rural community in Nova Scotia, far from your Inuit community. What was your childhood like?

I grew up close to nature and to my clan. My grandmother and almost all my uncles and aunts moved to Nova Scotia so that we could be together. Even though we were no longer living in our original Inuit community, we were living the life and values of that community.

How does your research relate to your background and to the path you took in life?

I specialize in corporate social responsibility, employee health and well-being, and ethics. These

fields of expertise are in line with the teachings I received about respecting and protecting nature, and about our responsibility toward future generations.

Your doctoral dissertation analyzes the stories in [Them Days magazine](#), a publication dedicated to Labrador's culture and lifestyle. You draw lessons for leadership that promote sustainable development and community well-being. Tell us more about your findings.

My mother received every issue of this magazine, so I grew up with the stories in it. In the Indigenous community, we learn through storytelling. It's different from the kind of transmission of knowledge on which traditional learning is based. My thesis explores how the stories of *Them Days* can inspire leadership that will lead to a more just society.

Six themes of Indigenous leadership emerge from the *Them Days* stories. What are they?

- Nallinattovunga (I am kind): Life includes suffering. Leadership includes the courage to ask for help and believe that we will receive it, because we are kind.
- Ilatjugik/ Nallinimmik Tunitjinik (compassion, being loving): Leadership includes creating communities where we feel safe.
- Nakutsavunga/ Kujalivunga (I am grateful): Leadership includes recognizing what others do for us and giving them the credit they deserve for their actions and ideas.
- Uppigivagit (I respect you): Leadership recognizes the wisdom that comes from others and from nature. It also recognizes that balance comes from moderation. This behaviour manifests itself, among other things, through respect for what nature offers us.
- katiKatigek/Atak (connect): Leadership includes the understanding that we must strive for what promotes diversity, inclusion, health, safety, well-being, and dignity.
- Sulijutsangik (resist): Leadership includes protecting and defending against oppression and exploitation.

You have continued your exploration of Indigenous narratives by publishing another report that proposes applying Indigenous philosophy to philanthropic practices. How was this project organized?

I asked five storytellers from the Innu, Algonquin, Mohawk, Cree, and Mi'kmaq nations to each share one story. From these stories, I take five lessons and invite the foundations to apply these teachings in their daily practices.

In the five Indigenous lessons for philanthropic foundations, what can Indigenous stories teach foundations about ...

... egalitarianism?

Giving and receiving are multidirectional, cyclical, and reciprocal processes. Also, one can give anonymously, with no expectation of being recognized or valued.

... the diversity of wealth?

Giving can take many non-material forms: ideas, songs, time, stories, compassion, and efforts can also be gifts.

... balance?

To ensure the survival of all, humans can learn, from the earth and animals, to act in accordance with the earth's capacity to give. We cannot extract infinite wealth from a finite system.

... justice?

Economic justice is about ensuring that individual and collective needs are met while ensuring that future generations can survive and thrive.

... interconnectedness?

Foundations exist because of everything that came before them. Their richness is the result of the collective efforts of humans, ideas, land, creatures, traditions, stories, and more.

Can you share any of the stories cited in this report?

Joshua Iserhoff, assistant director of the Eenou-Eeyou Community Foundation, recounts a conversation he had with an elder couple. The word philanthropy was not in their vocabulary. However, every time they went hunting or fishing, they would hang bundles of dried meat in the trees to give to the next person. Knowing that others would pass by, it was the custom to take only what was needed and share the rest. Philanthropy did not begin with foundations. Giving and sharing is an integral part of Indigenous culture.

In your research, you use the expression “colonialist philanthropy.” What does it mean?

The expression is used by [The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada](#) to refer to the fact that non-Indigenous philanthropy privileges colonialist values of wealth. Foundations, wealthy individuals, and corporations give to those in need. This worldview is divisive and maintains social divisions and classes. In an Indigenous context, redistribution and reciprocity are linked. Both the giver and the receiver are aware that the roles may one day be reversed. And since sharing does not only include material wealth, all types of sharing between humans are valued equally.

Many foundations use storytelling to personalize their actions. How do these narratives differ from the ones you explore in your research?

Too often, foundation narratives focus on grantees: their stories are used for marketing purposes. The stories I studied speak to the heart, mind, body, and soul. And we must try to receive them with our heart, mind, body, and soul. They will inevitably make us uncomfortable. But we must experience what the storytellers are sharing emotionally, intellectually, physically, and spiritually. By embracing this discomfort, with love, we will learn from these stories.

You suggest that foundations should use art to develop their stories. Can you give us an example?

I invite foundations to explore graphic storytelling. For example, they can invite a visual artist to sit in on discussions about their intentions for the future. He or she will translate the spirit of the

discussions into images. These images will tell a story that can inspire further thinking or clarify what was said.