

19 09

POLICY CONVERSATION SUMMARY



**FUTURE
FORWARD
THINKING**

POLICY CONVERSATION: FUTURE FORWARD THINKING

At this session Andrew Chunilall, CEO of Community Foundations of Canada, and Vinod Rajasekaran, Publisher & CEO of Future of Good, joined us to share how we can prepare our organizations to be resilient through shifts in government and in our local and global contexts.

Summary of Andrew Chunilall's Presentation:

TODAY'S PROBLEMS ARE THE RESULT OF YESTERDAY'S SOLUTIONS

As someone who works with organizations rooted in local history and predicated on endowments and legacy giving, Andrew recognizes the tension that arises in conversations about the future and change. But he maintains that we can respect history while recognizing that systems put in place in the past may no longer serve us today.

As an example, Andrew pointed to the Westminster system of government which was developed to be responsive rather than proactive, noting that even the names of Canadian ministries demonstrate a focus on preserving the past rather than preparing for the future. Because life in Canada is relatively comfortable we don't exhibit a passion for robust change. Accordingly, other countries with a stronger appetite for change are stepping into the market and setting the pace.

Two of the most significant issues for youth in Canada are affordability and climate change, and we are seeing how past priorities, and a lack of will to change course, have contributed to these challenges. If we continue along our current paths, Canada will lose relevance among the world's nations. We need to be thinking about how policy issues today can create problems 20 years into the future.

Summary of Vinod Rajasekaran's Presentation:

WE MUST KEEP UP WITH THE PACE OF CHANGE IN THE WORLD

We are living in an age of massive growth and rapid change and our learning has to match this pace. Today's approaches are not likely to satisfy tomorrow's needs.

[FUTURE OF GOOD](#) serves as a guide to the changing world for impact-focused people and organizations.

The website tracks several key shifts and identifies emerging trends related to:

- **Platforms, Places, and Spaces**
How are the ways we meet, learn, create, incubate, and work being reimagined?

- **Inclusive Capitalism and Markets**
What's next in the role of markets and business in stewarding more inclusive growth?
- **Emerging Technologies and the Human-Data-Machine Relationship**
What are the applications and implications of new technologies for social impact?
- **Canada's Social Impact Role in the World**
What are we doing to contribute to the SDGs and create innovations that have the potential to enhance global well-being?
- **Inclusion, Diversity, and Decolonizing Impact**
How can the world of impact embody and practice decolonization and reconciliation?
- **Social Impact Work: Today and Tomorrow**
What can boost the capabilities of impact-focused individuals and organizations?

EXAMPLES OF CURRENT SHIFTS

1. Activism

Greta Thunberg has digitally mobilized millions of young people for climate action. We have seen a shift in the voice young people have within politics; they are leading the conversation and setting and shaping the policy agenda for the future.

2. Donations

Annual crowdfunding growth now exceeds annual charitable donations, demonstrating that project-based fundraising is the way ahead. Younger generations are giving to causes with little concern for whether projects are led by registered charities; what matters to them is investing in solutions.

3. Automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

There is an assumption that because so much work in the social impact sector is human centred we won't lose our jobs to automation, but we will see tasks increasingly supplemented or complemented by automation, and we need to consider how that impacts the people we serve and adjust accordingly.

Summary of Fireside Chat

SEEKING DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES HELPS FUTURE-PROOF DECISIONS

Foresighting is an important skill-set to cultivate if we want to future-proof our policies and decisions. We can bolster our foresighting ability by looking to adjacent resources to expose ourselves to perspectives and information that might alter the way we think about issues and solutions. We must bring people in who are vested in challenging our biases and assumptions.

We can also fill that role at other tables. When big initiatives move forward, there's rarely anyone from foundations or nonprofit organizations involved, even though they have insights

and data that are true assets. We have to value the knowledge that we bring and advocate for a seat at the table.

Across the political spectrum we must also aim for diversity of political views when developing solutions, so we can learn to work across party lines. As it stands, our identification with particular parties limits our effectiveness — when government changes we don't know what to do besides be angry for four years. But turning that anger toward organizations that are willing to work with different governing bodies only makes it harder to fulfill our missions.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IS NOT A DISCRETIONARY FUNCTION

We need to get comfortable with the dynamism of the age we live in and permit ourselves the flexibility to constantly improve and refine. Research and Development (R&D) has been a key organizational function in the private and commercial sector for decades because they see the economic value of this work.

In the philanthropic space funders are focused on delivery, so a lot of organizations end up hiding their R&D work because they're afraid to tell a funder they're looking into a solution other than what's been funded. Luckily the value of R&D is gaining recognition in our sector, with a concentration on impact, and it's becoming more common to weave R&D into grant applications.

There is an interesting emergent field called anticipatory regulation that allows regulators to test solutions to challenges and play out multiple scenarios to see some of the potential effects of different strategies while the policy is in effect. Doing so also provides options to fall back on if the original strategy doesn't work as planned. This kind of nimble approach is well-suited to the social impact sector.

IT'S TIME TO DEMAND FUTURE FORWARD THINKING FROM OUR GOVERNMENT

We spend so much time attending to the past and basing our decisions on older generations, but what if we consider that our decisions will also be judged by our grandchildren? The responsibility is on us as engaged citizens to demand future-forward thinking of our politicians, and not settle for temporary solutions. We have to create the expectation that we're interested in the 20 or 50 year perspective and won't be bought with short-term perks.

We also need to think on a global scale. China is the only country that currently has a global strategy; the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) involves investing in strategic assets in 152 countries and international organizations to establish a China-centered trading network. Non-democratic countries tend to be more agile and able to take advantage of opportunities, but we can't afford to be dismissive of their actions. Their different government structure doesn't make them any less relevant to how the world operates.

POLICY CHANGE CANNOT SUCCEED WITHOUT CULTURAL CHANGE

The Emancipation Proclamation didn't restore equality; Black citizens in America still needed the Civil Rights Movement to gain equal rights under the law, and they still need the Black

Lives Matter movement today. That's because we face problems that need both technical solutions and cultural change.

The desire to create change can get bogged down through democratic systems, as multiple compromises are made along the way. But movements can cut through with their powerful appeal to emotion. #MeToo didn't change policy but it did change behaviour, and that is changing the way many industries and institutions operate. And now, with the Global Climate Strike, we are witnessing the cultural change that's needed to see policy change.

PEOPLE NEED SUPPORT TRANSITIONING AND ACCEPTING CHANGE

We're asking people to accept enormous consequences, such as mass layoffs and disruption in their lives. We need transition leaders and adjustment facilitators to manage the transition to a different way of living, and we need Canada's ministries to work together instead of in silos to address challenges from different angles and without giving outsized influence to narrow special interests. Initiatives to shift to a different industry, for example, are seen through the lens of training, but that focus doesn't account for the importance of culture when industry is tied to identity and place. Belonging is a basic human need, so it's important to maintain people's dignity and not vilify them for being anxious or resistant to change. In order for someone to belong to a place or group, that place or group must welcome the person in.