

Moving Beyond Exhaustion and Insularity

Reframing the Culture of Impact Organisations

Learning Document
Egregor Conference
18 April 2026



MOVING BEYOND EXHAUSTION AND INSULARITY

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Event Summary · Egregor General Assembly · In-person (Paris) · 18 April

2026 Moderated by: Guillaume Soto-Mayor, CEO of Egregor

Guest Speakers

1. **Fatou Ndiaye:** Entrepreneur, speaker, equity and culture consultant
2. **Tiphaine Galliez:** Consulting Director at Great Place to Work France
3. **Ruben Chaumont:** Founder of Project Meraki, expert in leadership and workplace distress
4. **Taoufik Vallipuram:** Founder of Conscience classe, Director of Démocratiser la Politique research project

Overview

This conference confronted a paradox at the heart of the social impact sector: The mission that is meant to protect others frequently destroys those who carry it. Impending our collective chances for ecological, social and civic transformations of our societies. Drawing on sector research and lived experience, speakers and community members examined how **burnout and insularity form a single, self-reinforcing system** that is rooted in organisational culture, structural power dynamics, and the unexamined myths of impact leadership.

The opening framing presented striking statistics: **40%** of impact leaders report poor mental health; **90%** feel their working conditions cause harm to the people they serve, and while **75%** consider well-being important, only **25%** actually take care of it¹. While there are no easy solutions, the discussion moved from diagnosis toward possibilities for transformation, touching on organisational justice, cognitive biases, cooperativism, capitalism, leadership myths, patriarchy, leadership myths, and inclusivity.

Part I — Introduction: Burnout and Insularity as a Single System

The opening of the conference characterised burnout in the sector not as an individual accident but as an **organisational pathology** that is produced by over-responsibility, powerlessness, and a growing misalignment between stated values and actual practices. As a result, many founders swing between feelings of omnipotence and helplessness, as dissociation becomes the core response.

The inseparable companion of exhaustion is **insularity** (“entre-soi”). Asking *who is already here, and why?* instead of *who is missing?* can diagnose the roots of the homogeneity of many organisations.

¹ Social Impact Leadership Coalition. (2023). *State of Social Impact Leadership: Well-being and Working Conditions Survey*.

The two phenomena were presented as a self-reinforcing cycle:

- **Burnout produces insularity:** Exhaustion limits perspective, closes networks, and causes a need for comfort and familiar circles
- **Insularity produces burnout:** Homogeneous teams overload the same people, the absence of contradiction allows for , and the lack of renewal generates a loss of meaning

These dynamics were traced to the **founder myth**, the “tyranny of the ideal” (referencing Sarah Durieux’s work), and the tendency to recruit people who resemble us, which reproduces the norms we set out to transcend.

Part II — Four Perspectives on Exhaustion and Insularity

Fatou Ndiaye: Audacity as the Key Lever

Fatou’s intervention was grounded in her lived experience. She co-founded a barter-based incubator that worked with **300 startups**, built a **3,000-person community**, and facilitated over **€5 million** in bartered resources. But during this experience she was not paying herself, burned out, and eventually closed the company after four years. She now describes herself as “Chief Audacity Officer”, arguing that **audacity is a muscle** that can be trained. It is the key to let people say, “I don’t know”, to recognise when the people around them all look the same, and to engage across differences and with those who hold opposing views.

Tiphaine Galliez (Great Place to Work): Organisational Justice in Numbers²

Data from a study of **13,000 employees** in purpose-driven organisations shows that the sector excels at meaning but struggles with fairness:

- **Strengths:** camaraderie, solidarity, purpose (all >75%)
- **Fragilities:** fair pay (23%), merit recognition (36%), absence of manipulation (50%), decision participation (50%), management clarity (54%), consistency between words and actions (51%), leadership embodiment (49%)

Meaning and solidarity are not enough. Organisations must invest in **managerial fairness** across three dimensions: distributive (fair allocation), procedural (transparent rules), and relational (respect, listening, absence of favouritism).

Ruben Chaumont: Four Core Human Needs at Work

Drawing on his experience conducting **1,000+ interviews** across ~70 organisations, Ruben concluded that four needs need to be fulfilled so humans can flourish:

- **Physical** — rest and recovery
- **Emotional** — self-esteem and psychological safety
- **Mental** — clarity, autonomy, and focus
- **Spiritual** — meaning and value alignment; great stated missions often mask daily contradictions

² Great Place to Work France, *Great Insights 2026: dans la tête des salariés français*, 2026

Despite the meaningful and value-driven work in impact organisations, employees struggle due to the consistent combination of **high objectives and low resources**, which translates into chronic stress. An expectation of self-sacrifice and dedication to the mission can also manifest as **lack of recognition**: When people invest a lot and feel invisible, the brain creates a self-protective withdrawal that compounds burnout.

Taoufik Vallipuram : Social Homophily and the Limits of Values

Taoufik shifted the lens to structural exclusion. He has spent four years studying social homophily, the high concentration of similar backgrounds in positions of power. He identified three consequences:

- **Harm to minorities**: Not only psychological but physical, as confirmed by neuroscience
- **Organisational degeneration**: This concentration erodes quality over time
- **Impossibility of genuine transformation**: Organisations cannot credibly serve communities they do not reflect

This means: **Values alone are insufficient**. Impact organisations cannot forget the concrete effort required to make spaces genuinely inclusive.

Part III — Community Exchange

The conference included two extensive rounds of remarkably dense audience discussion on a wide range of aspects of the topic. The main motives are synthesised here.

Heightened Pressure and the Audacity to Slow Down

Starting off the audience discussion, a generational shift was suggested: Previous generations worked **long hours** but received stability and recognition in return. Today, workers “go to work with fear in their hearts”. The topic of the panel is represented in more than just impact organisations: It affects employees of all sectors working for the collective good.

While exhaustion and insularity are a common problem, they could also be the source of a common solution. Drawing on Fatou’s concept of audacity, a key question came up: **Do we need the audacity to slow down?** And does slowing down mean retracting individually, or intentionally organising space for others?

Fatou argued that audacity begins with **being yourself unapologetically**. This should be understood not as license to disregard others, but as the confidence to show up honestly, including listening to your own signals of exhaustion. The act of stepping back can also happen at the organisational level: Decisions like a recent French company’s adoption of a **four-day work week**, was framed by Tiphaine as both a decision for organisational ecology and a “political statement against capitalism.”

Organisational slowing down is also an answer to resource inequality: Taoufik stressed that those with power must slow their own pace of investment, especially in AI and infrastructure, because continuing at the current speed **widens the gap between those who have and those who lack resources**.

Still, many founders cannot escape the same tension: it always feels more urgent to answer a donor or select a project than to attend to personal needs. Tiphaine offered her approach of having “two

feet”: Making sure to separate work and personal life and invest in your personal life to not let work dominate. In contrast, Taoufik highlighted the power that can be found in the “unity of self”. Showing up fully and authentically in all areas of life and avoiding compartmentalisation might be necessary to strive for a society in which everyone can show up in their own uniqueness.

The Burden on Young People

Another topic raised was the issue of young people increasingly struggling with mental health and isolation. Data shows that **workers under 25 now show worse mental health outcomes than those over 55**. This is a significant and relatively new gap, likely compounded by COVID, social media, and the growing use of AI as a substitute for hiring young people. Generation Z has a **disproportionately high proportion of burnout cases**³. As they enter a world characterised by ecological crisis and multiple fractures, organisations need to create spaces where young people feel recognised and can develop and use their talents meaningfully.

Taoufik offered a more hopeful view unto the youth: The working-class young people he works with are **also joyful, innovative, and sometimes more creative** than their privileged peers. **The problem is not capacity but access**: They need insight into how to be listened to and how to obtain resources. Later in the session, CEO and Egregor member Patricia Sennequier described hiring a 22-year-old “Chief Ritual Officer” from a completely different background, who immediately identified a missing ritual: a space for young employees to discuss personal challenges. This is now a permanent part of his organisation.

Inclusivity and Self-Legitimacy

Multiple interventions discussed the need for true inclusion and acknowledgement of the different realities people experience. Carole Tawema, an impact entrepreneur and Egregor Community Member, described the exhaustion and powerlessness she felt as a black woman at being positioned as isolated diversity. The concept of audacity was highlighted as a needed practice in a world in which **inclusivity is often merely tokenism**: “At the end of the day you must be very strong and if people don't want to see you, you have to go and say: Look at me. Listen to me.”

There is also the issue of **unequal social heritage**: people do not enter organisations from the same starting point. Not everyone has the same **self-legitimacy**, if in expression, in well-being, or even in the right to care for themselves. Guillaume highlighted as a key organisational challenge: To bring forward individual voices in their originality, not just as a diversity checkbox.

A possible tool could be cognitive bias training: Sexism and racism lives inside all of us because of the context we grew up in. Recognising one's own reflexes is a necessary first step toward changing them. But substantial transformation is necessary to include working-class and minority people in organisational and political spaces. One example given for unconscious bias was a critique of **Non-Violent Communication (NVC)**, pointing out that it can actually be violent for people from working-class or minority backgrounds who have lived discrimination since birth. Taoufik argued that it is “totally normal” that those who have experienced inequalities since birth do not express themselves through NVC - a taboo that remains largely unspoken in France.

³54% of those under 35 have experienced burnout or extreme exhaustion related to their work, compared to 36% of those aged 35 and over, according to the Great Place to Work France study. *Great Place to Work France, Great Insights 2026: dans la tête des salariés français, 2026*

“Whenever I am invited to a panel or project, I now ask myself: how am I concretely making invisible the people who were not invited?” — Taoufik Vallipuram

Taoufik now devotes 80% of his time to people with whom he shares **lived experiences**, not just values. His project, “Démocratiser la Politique”, proposes not quotas for working-class representation in politics, but a **cap on the percentage of upper-class people**. He advocates that this is “the only way to progressively change the social codes of those spaces.”

Capitalism, Patriarchy, the Extractive Service Mentality, and Spiritual Isolation

Capitalism was discussed as a root cause of the patterns described. In many ways, capitalism, exhaustion, and patriarchy work as an interlocking system. While it was advocated that capitalism must be removed, there was also agreement that this cannot be done through individual projects. “It cannot be done by one person. It needs to be collective.”

Within capitalism, a key issue of the French economy is that it is now majorly service-dependent. Inès d’Haultfoeuille, COO of Egregor highlighted that “Service” has become a pure economic product, detaching providers of public goods from their humanity as digital services heighten the “**extractive mentality**” with which services are treated.

It was argued that the shaping forces of patriarchy and capitalism also diminish our spiritual needs. The structure of the **patriarchy** and its reliance on exploitation and productivity have left no room for nourishment. While self-empowerment is important, it is important to resist individualism and **embrace connection** to find this nourishment.

Leadership, Ego, and Finding Ownership in Your Work

The potential of **cooperativism** as an alternative organisational model was debated. While the idea is promising, they might not be the ultimate solution. For one, they are legally very difficult to operate in France. Beyond this, they can often be facing the exact same societal issues as conventional organisations - sometimes worse, as their focus on values blinds them to the effort required for genuine inclusion.

What emerged from this exchange was that the cooperative ideal points toward something real, but the mechanism matters more than the label. Ruben suggested that maybe employees actually do not need universal consultation, but **targeted ownership**, with clear autonomy over what they are responsible for.

Many contributions pointed to the crucial role of leadership and the role of ego. **Investment in management training** should not be underestimated, since management rarely comes naturally and is an acquired skill. Leaders tend to walk a thin line between narcissism and inspiration: what distinguishes a genuinely inspiring leader is that they **give others the space to speak, decide, and succeed**. An illustrating analogy for the role of a leader is the building of a cathedral: While workers may only see one stone at a time, the leader’s job is to say, “You are not just putting one stone next to another - you are building a cathedral.”

Community member Patricia Sennequier, who is an impact investor, described 15 years of trying to build a safe and balanced workplace, when a personal tragedy made her realise that she let go of her own ambition to be perfect and embrace her vulnerabilities. She started showing emotion, saying “I

don't know," and making mistakes openly. The effect cascaded to the team, where spaces are now created to talk about personal problems and individual baggage.

"Every single conversation in my organisation now nourishes me, because I accepted my own imperfection and recognised that the adults in front of me are also responsible for their lives." **Patricia Sennequier**

Another interesting insight came from a coaching experience that Ruben shared: A CEO of an insurance company, promoted from a sales role, was spending 30–40% of his time on tasks he hated. After coaching him to take agency for a life he enjoys, the CEO delegated those tasks to someone who excelled at them. The broader point: **Ego is the set of beliefs about who we must be plus the expectations others have of us.** This illusion must be dismantled to find what is nourishing oneself.

"The cultural image of the ideal leader, someone alone, powerful, taking care of everyone, is itself the source of both exhaustion and insularity. We have built an entire culture around that image. How do we change it?" **Fatou Ndiaye**

Part IV — Cross-Cutting Insights

The System Selects for What It Produces

The system makes unsustainable work ethic and behaviours feel necessary. Funders and governance structures impose rigid timelines, relentless performance reporting, and pressure toward competitive differentiation. Founders and employees who want to do right by their mission find themselves shaped by these demands over time, reproducing the very conditions that generate burnout and insularity.

Values Are Necessary but Not Sufficient

Shared values do not automatically create inclusive spaces. People arrive with different backgrounds and experiences of power, and what feels like a safe norm to those who set it can feel alienating or even violent to those whose lived reality it fails to account for. Genuine inclusion requires concrete, sustained, uncomfortable effort. The willingness to redesign how spaces actually operate must go for beyond mere declarations of diversity and inclusivity.

Personal Coherence as a Starting Point

Multiple speakers converged on the importance of personal coherence: Being the same person across contexts. While Taoufik framed this as a spiritual discipline, Fatou as audacity, Ruben as the return to one's area of genuine purpose, the principle remains the same. This requires honest self-confrontation so that transformation is possible.

The Structural Dimension Cannot Be Escaped

The closing placed the personal testimonies within a systemic frame. When funders, governance structures, and institutional incentives push for the very culture that produces burnout and insularity, personal well-being practices become a band-aid on a structural wound. True transformation needs

collective work: Building counter-structures, alternative financing models, and communities of practice that make a different culture viable.

Conclusion — Individual Resilience and Collective Architecture

The conference showed that the roots of exhaustion and insularity in impact organisations run deep. The problem can be found in the demands placed on founders by governance structures and funders, in the weight of the mission, in the myths of ego and leadership we subscribe to, and in the wider structure of capitalism and patriarchy that we cannot escape.

While there is no quick fix, **real change is possible**. The solution lies in true commitment to multi-layered transformation, addressing the different roots of the problem with different levers: Individual commitment to audacity, organisational mechanisms for true inclusion and diversity, and a societal shift away from extractivism and towards nourishment and connection.

As founders are caught in a system that consistently asks them to produce the highest possible impact with minimal resources, a **deeper transformation** of the sector is extremely necessary. Nevertheless, the conference showed that within a flawed system, organisational practices can have a substantial impact on culture and wellbeing for founders and employees, it just requires audacity.

Further readings

Militer à tout prix ? Pourquoi nos collectifs nous font mal et comment les soigner by Sarah Durieux

Social Impact Leadership Coalition. (2023). *State of Social Impact Leadership: Well-being and Working Conditions Survey*.

The racial contract by Charles W. Mills

The top five regrets of the dying by Bronnie Ware

What White People Can Do Next: From Allyship to Coalition by Emma Dabiri

Comment limiter les comportements toxiques au travail ? in *Harvard Business Review France* by Ruben Chaumont & Yohann Macet



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Contact

contact@egregor.net

www.egregor.net