Anishinabek Employment and Training Services

Indigenous Workplace Inclusion: Strategies for Moving Forward

Learn, discuss, succeed. Become a leader for change.

An Analysis of the Pre-&-Post Survey of Workshop Participants

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Introduction

In part, cross-cultural collaborations, led by Indigenous peoples, must reflect Indigenous norms to the non-Indigenous participants as a way of educating that audience. The *Indigenous Work Place Inclusion: Strategies for Moving Forward Workshop* began with opening remarks offered by the AETS Elder, Mr. Terry Bouchard. Bouchard's remarks provided a succinct analysis of the realities of Anishinabe and an alternative vision of the future that can be shared by Anishinabe and non-Indigenous peoples in Northwestern Ontario.

Opportunity

The young Anishinaabek finds it psychologically difficult to integrate into the mosaic of Canadian society. They hardly have any successful brothers and sisters to identify within the education, economic, and social structure of our place in this country that we introduced, we are constantly informed by mass media and people that we are stupid, undignified, savage who has many, many problems, constantly, we cannot see ourselves adapting to the roles that may exist for us. Unable to be educated and hurdle these barriers, many return to the security of the Reserves to live out their lives instead of participating in the economic growth this country has to offer.

The secondary school process, which has been exclusively designed for middle class white students, has contributed to alienate the young Anishinaabek from the old.

So, these are just some of the barriers that we face, and there may be more. But the opportunity is here, and it is time to seize on this program the presenters are offering.

One Elder once told me, Mi-no bwaa-ji-gen ji-bmaad-zii-yiin. Bwaa-ji-gen ji-mi-no-bmaad-zii-yin.

If one dreams a good life, one can live a good dream (Bouchard, 2017).

Executive Summary

Recommendations for the Future

Contextualizing Indigenous Inclusion

In general, the knowledge deficit about all things Indigenous, especially in regard to how historical factors contribute to the contemporary realities, is profound within the non-Indigenous community in Canada.

Many of the national and provincial inquiries including - the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples released in 1996, Truth and Reconciliation in 2015, the Inquiry on First Nation Youth Suicide in Thunder Bay in 2016 - have all recommended some form of mandatory education programing in schools to prevent this phenomena from taking root in future generations of Canadians.

But what of the knowledge deficit that exists in business and industry that create the policies and procedures that systemically exclude Indigenous peoples from fully participating in the workplace? How do you support people, generally good people, that want to help but don't know how? What is the overall goal?

To answer these important questions, it is necessary to understand what is at the centre of the dysfunctional relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples that has existed since Jacque Cartier landed in Stadacona in 1535. To that end we offer the following.

Epistemology & Indigenous Inclusion

Willie Ermine (1995), a Cree scholar from Saskatchewan, wrote an important paper titled "Aboriginal Epistemology." In his paper, Ermine writes:

> The year 1492 marked the first meeting of two disparate world-views, each on its own uncharted course of exploration and discovery for purposeful knowledge. The encounter featured two diametric trajectories into the realm of knowledge. One was bound for an uncharted destination in outer space, the physical, and the other was on a delicate path into inner space, the metaphysical (p. 101).

In this short paragraph, Ermine captures the essence of the conflict between two epistemic views that still exist to this day in Canada. Ermine's paper delineates the fundamental differences between an Indigenous epistemology and the epistemology of the dominant Western society. Ermine also examines how the failure to address these differences is the primary barrier to all interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadian society.

An epistemology is a set of fundamental values and beliefs that are taught explicitly and implicitly to each new generation. While epistemology guides society, we are often unaware of its presence.

If one were to ask what your epistemology is, few of us would be able to pull together a comprehensive response. Why?

The answer is quite simple. We learn our epistemology as a child through our experience of the world around us and it is reinforced throughout those early years. Consider how a child learns to catch a ball. Learning to catch often begins with play between the child and parent. The new skill may be further reinforced through play with siblings or other children. The skill is formalized and refined when children participate in sports or just on the street when they play street-hockey, or baseball, or basketball.

The point is that our brains are patterned at an early age to respond to a ball hurtling toward us and we respond by attempting to catch it. Catching is a skill that is, for the most part, unconscious in nature and early patterning is literally hard-wired in our heads and stays with us for the rest of our lives. You may not have caught a ball in decades but, if a ball is thrown, you would respond immediately with that deeply learned skill. You would not go through a cognitive process of calculating the trajectory of the object with your eyes and aligning your hands appropriately. You just do it! You would simply react to the stimulus of the ball speeding toward you. If you were 90 you would respond in the same way and attempt to catch a ball.

Our epistemology comes naturally! It is learned in the same way and we are just as unconscious of our epistemology as we are of catching a ball.

Linking Indigenous Epistemology to Colonization

Colonization, and the primary tool of assimilation residential schools, were an attempt to stop the natural process of how Indigenous children learn their epistemology from their parents by removing those children from their parents.

The secondary tool of colonization was the total disruption of Indigenous expressions of epistemology - removal from traditional land-bases, the outlawing of traditional forms of governance, the clan system, ceremony, traditional economics, music, medicine, the status of women, language - the list is almost endless.

These were all attempts to eliminate an epistemic understanding that came out of one-hundred and thirty thousand years (Zimmer, 2017) of lived experience in the Americas and yet Indigenous people are still here.

The So What Factor

So, what? This is ancient history, in the past, how is it relevant to Indigenous inclusion? There are two answers to this question that have an impact on Indigenous inclusion in the workplace today.

First, the point is that while the dominant Canadian society was enacting the many tactics of colonization to eliminate an epistemology by eliminating the expression of those values and beliefs of Indigenous people, they were building a dominant society around an equally unconscious epistemology that came from Europe five-hundred years ago and has evolved into western liberal capitalism.

Second, the dominant society is just as unconscious of their epistemology as Indigenous peoples are of theirs. We just both do our epistemology and the society reflects and rewards those that align with a complimentary epistemology. Indigenous peoples, in spite of surviving the greatest colonial experiment in the history of humanity, come to employment with an epistemic understanding that is literally in conflict with the epistemic norms that underpin the policies and procedures of business and industry.

An Example of Epistemic Conflict

Consider the following story, Karen is a First Nation woman, living in an urban centre, a single mom of three, with an educational history that includes leaving high school before completing grade 12.

> Karen's kids are older now and require less of her attention, so she returns to an adult education program and with much sacrifice and determination completes grade 12 and receives am Ontario Secondary School Diploma. One day Karen sees a poster on the school bulletin board recruiting for a Personal Support Worker Program offered by her First Nation.

> At this time in her life Karen is motivated to give back to community and has always been close to the elderly. Karen makes some inquiries, eventually applies and is accepted to the program where she gets top grades and her success is acknowledged at graduation.

> Almost immediately after graduation Karen is employed as a Personal Support Worker at a long-term care facility close to her home and the school her kids attend. The Human Resource people are kind and thoughtful at the onset.

> Karen is good at her job. She is caring, and her clients love her but there is a policy change that is the beginning of the end of her PSW career.

> New policy is introduced and Karen and another PSW have six minutes each, to wake-up twenty-five patients, wash, moisturize, check their bodies for new or worsening skin conditions, dress, transfer, to mouth care, toilet and do their hair.

> Karen is unable to meet the new policy and she is written up twice by her supervisor for contravening the new policy. Eventually Karen meets with HR and asked why she cannot

meet the needs of the new policy and her only response is, "I'm just doing what the patients are asking for. They want to talk, they are not slabs of meat. I can't throw them around, they are elders and deserve my respect. Besides, how many of you get ready for your day in just six minutes?"

Karen's arguments fall on deaf ears. The policy is the policy and if Karen cannot do the job others will. Karen is eventually dismissed with cause and her PSW career is over.

In spite of all of her sacrifice, her commitment Karen believes she has failed.

This is but one example of how epistemic conflict plays out in just one sector but this conflict is not relegated to that sector alone, there are many others examples - bereavement leave, traditional hunting and gathering times, child safety - are all typical areas where the dominant epistemology can rub-up-hard against an Indigenous epistemology.

Thinking Through Epistemic Conflict in the Workplace

It makes little sense for AETS to recruit, develop, and implement training/educational programing for Indigenous citizens if those graduates enter the workplace and leave shortly thereafter due to similar experiences. Certainly, some level of employee attrition is normal but a significant percentage, of twenty percent or more, within the first year is symptomatic of serious epistemic conflict that is often centered in existing policies and procedures.

We believe that maintaining the Indigenous inclusion status quo just adds to the spiritual wounds that further undermine the well-being of Indigenous adults who are undoubtedly suffering from existing wounds that are a result in a lack of school success that occurred earlier in their lives.

Let us be clear, there are no easy answers, there are no quick fixes but, there can be a working vision.

Recommendation 1: Building a Strategic Vision for the Future

The most effective way to encourage business/industry to evolve and become literally bi-epistemic in their policies and procedures is to teach them in a non-threatening, non-accusatory way through bi-cultural activities that reveal how systemic biases are connected to the epistemic norms of the dominant society. In short, the learning is in the doing, from within a process of bi-cultural collaboration (Kitchen, Hodson, Hedican, Hodson & Herrera, 2017).

Bi-cultural collaborations between potential employers and Indigenous employment and training agencies do not occur in isolation but require an emphasis on building strategic solutions that meet the needs of both communities. By nature, this emphasis on holism must include a cross-section of strategic Indigenous employment organizations, like AETS, other employment agencies, provincial and federal service providers, with an emphasis in gathering and publishing related research evidence - all located at a central location. To be specific, we recommend that the provincial Employment Ontario programs for the North Superior Region, should be co-located with AETS who already deliver federal ASETA programs for the North Superior Region.

Sector Education & Development

Although, two-day workshops, like *Indigenous Workplace Inclusion,* are important, and should be continued, they are introductory opportunities only, a place to build relationships, to network, to be exposed to the potential of inclusion tools. However, the type of in-depth policy and procedural review that is fundamental to increasing inclusion of Indigenous people in the workplace is just not possible in that time frame.

AETS' successful Employment and Social Development Canada, Skills and Partnership Fund (SPF), identifies the following growth sectors and associated training programs.

1. The Mining Sector
2. The Construction Sector
3. The Health Sector
4. The Forestry Sector

In the SPF proposal AETS has committed to approximately 300 trained and employed Indigenous people over the three years of the funding in those very specific sectors. This numeric goal can be leveraged to encourage specific sectoral corporations, projecting a shortfall in their labour market projections, to engage in a bi-cultural review of specific policies and procedures that often result in barriers to Indigenous employee inclusion and retention.

Bi-Cultural Review Circles

These Bi-Cultural Review Circles include senior corporate representatives mandated to institute policy changes and a small group of trained, respected Indigenous professionals and relevant First Nation representation to lead the Review Circle.

Indigenous Professional Organization

If we were to characterize the skill-set necessary for those Indigenous professionals we would include:

- A demonstrable connection to traditional Indigenous values/beliefs.
- A demonstrable connection to relevant Indigenous community.
- A significant corporate experience in Human Resources.
- A significant background in Employment Legislation.
- A background in Human Rights Legislation – provincial and federal.
- A detailed understanding of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- A detailed background in Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Calls to Action.
- Certification and experience working with adult populations in a teaching setting.

We believe that this level of policy/procedural review surpasses the promotion of a theoretical construct related to Indigenous inclusion. Clearly, this expertise can be developed but does not currently exist within AETS at this time but, expertise and a record of associated success does exist in Indigenous companies like Bridging Concepts.

As an example of the type of expertise necessary for this level of interaction, Bridging Concepts and Trina Maher has some "fifteen years of experience working with companies, governments and agencies to build stronger bridges and understanding with the Indigenous community to support recruitment and retention solutions."

It seems logical to recommend that AETS and a company like Bridging Concepts build a formal working relationship to approach corporation(s) in each of the sectors to secure reciprocal agreements based on:

- AETS supply trained graduates to specific corporations within those sectors, and
- Those corporations agree to a bi-cultural holistic review of policies and procedures and a related implementation and,
- The review would be led by a new AETS position, the Indigenous Business Specialist. and a company, like Bridging Concepts, *working under contract to AETS*.

The Indigenous Business Specialist

We recommend the creation of a new AETS position. The Indigenous Business Specialist (IBS) at AETS is the go to resource person, the operational arm and promoter of the AETS vision to business/industry, Chambers of Commerce and various Economic Development Agencies in the northwest.

The IBS is the doorway/outreach to business/industry interested in expanding their Indigenous workforce. The IBS is the lead facilitator of the Bi-Cultural Review Circles, and the primary liaison between participating businesses, and the contracted Indigenous Professional Organization.

Finally, IBS is responsible for monitoring the employment progression realities of AETS program graduates.

Recommendation 2: The Next Generation of Indigenous Workplace Inclusion Workshop

The next generation of inclusion workshop should primarily focus on building a more relevant group of attendees that reflect the sectoral commitments outlined in the SPF proposal. This is achieved by organizing a series of second generation workshops, offered at regular intervals throughout the year, and includes personal invitations to specific sectoral representatives that have communicated their labour market projections to AETS.

The secondary focus should include those attendees in the first Workplace Inclusion Workshop and the tertiary focus should be open to new attendees from business/industry in the northwest.

Whenever possible, personal invitations should be extended to First Nation community representatives (example, First Nation Economic Development Officers) geographically relevant to those primary, secondary and tertiary attendee groups. Furthermore, primary, secondary, tertiary attendees should be purposefully seated with those relevant First Nation community representatives.

The agenda should include the topics identified by the post-workshop survey respondents (see Table 10.0.) but only from the perspective of including those topics as contributing to inclusion and then exposing those attendees to the practical solutions that increase Indigenous employee inclusion and retention. Whenever possible, small group activities should focus on case studies of exclusion that can be dissected by those Indigenous and non-Indigenous tables.

Assure ample consultation time with Indigenous and non-Indigenous support organizations, for example, Bridging Concepts, Kari Chiappetta Consulting and Maamaawisiiwin Education

Research Centre, Internet Technology and related agencies involved in planning, creating, promoting and implementing the next generation of Inclusion Workshop.

Develop and submit a further funding proposal to Ontario Centre for Workforce Innovation under the Targeted Research Projects by AETS.

Recommendation 3: Expanding the Associated Research

The *Indigenous Workplace Inclusion* workshop has positioned AETS as the leader in the area of Indigenous workplace inclusion in the territory. This position can benefit both AETS, and by extension the 8,000+ citizens, the economy of Northwestern Ontario and other Indigenous agencies, service providers and education/training authorities.

Although the preceding research study provides a window on the subject of Indigenous employment inclusion in Northwestern Ontario from the perspective of those attending the *Indigenous Work Place Inclusion: Strategies for Moving Forward Workshop* the view from that perspective is limited.

In part, the related research plan was dictated by factors external to Maamaawisiiwin Education Research Centre (MERC), a limited time schedule tied to funding criteria that made a timely Ryerson University Ethics Clearance questionable.

The original research study design included a more robust enquiry of attendees by sector that included individual interviews over a longer period of time. In part, the rationale for this design was that it resulted in specific sectoral information and a detailed understanding for Indigenous inclusion that could be expanded to a longitudinal study as circumstances warranted.

A study involving humans, in any capacity, demands extensive consideration for the "respect for the person, concern for welfare and justice" (CIHR, 2014, p. 6). This is further compounded by any research that specifically includes Indigenous peoples as participants (CIHR, p. 109) who have been and, in some instances, continue to be abused by unethical researchers.

Within these principles a research study design is a thoughtful, highly ethical procedure that must include an Ethics Application to assure that the human participants are protected from unethical practice.

Other Research Opportunities

Within this emergent vision research opportunities are significant and is the only reliable benchmark of success. Those opportunities include:

- Longitudinal study related to *Indigenous Work Place Inclusion Workshops*.
- Sectorial training program evaluation.

- Research that follows First Nation employee retention and satisfaction.
- First Nation exit interview studies.
- Business satisfaction studies.
- Development of case-studies of Bi-Cultural Review Circles by sector.
- Economic impact on related First Nation communities.

Given these factors and opportunities we recommend that AETS secure the services of a research firm with demonstrable and significant experience in Indigenous research and methodologies. including successful university ethics applications, successful Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada funding proposals, Certification in TCPS2, and a demonstrable knowledge of, and experience working with First Nation communities in Northwestern Ontario.

Furthermore, we recommend that AETS and the AETS board, in collaboration with the chosen research firm, develop a research vision that ties all initiatives into a comprehensive whole.

Sharing the Knowledge

At this point in time the evidence-based decision-making philosophy dominates the charitable, municipal, provincial and federal funding environments and generally the Indigenous community lacks research expertise in this area.

In an effort to improve Indigenous research capacity and access to Indigenous research evidence, we recommend that AETS publish research and evaluation reports on-line, as well as consider developing a public relations strategy that includes press-releases that includes abridged findings to Indigenous and non-Indigenous media in Ontario and selected media across the country.

Recommendation 4: An AETS Ethics Policy & Procedures

Taking up an expanded research focus to track the education/training impact, and Indigenous inclusion over time from multiple perspectives necessitates an AETS Ethics Policy and Procedure.

An AETS Ethics Policy and Procedures:

- Are one of four requirements to be institutionally eligible for administration of Tri-Council grants and awards should AETS wish to pursue that in the future.
- Increases the control of all aspects of research that include researchers external to AETS (i.e., universities or AETS community graduate students, etc.).
- Protects AETS communities and members from culturally un-informed researchers.
- Brings reliable research generated evidence to all aspects of AETS' business.

A review of research ethics policies in Canada will result in similar consistent strategy because the guiding principles that shape them are set out by the *Tri-Council Policy Statement 2: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* in 2014 (TCPS2). This commonality is especially evident

in research involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada. The objective of this 'commonality' is to uniformly protect all human participants from abuse when engaged in research.

We recommend that AETS begin the process of developing their own Ethics Policy and Procedures.

Finally

Work Place Inclusion: Strategies for Moving Forward Workshop, is a unique attempt to begin a cross-cultural dialogue between First Nation communities and the employment community in Northwestern Ontario.

This is not a new dialogue and does not blame or shame anyone in the present for the errors of the past but rather presents a detailed analysis of how Indigenous inclusion can mutually benefit communities that have been divided for far too long.

The workshop sets out a dream that has been at the centre of an unrealized relationship that Anishinabe have held from the time of first meeting with the zhaaganaash (Europeans) as they emerged from the mists to meet on the shores of Gichigami (Lake Superior).

Mi-no bwaa-ji-gen ji-bmaad-zii-yiin. Bwaa-ji-gen ji-mi-no-bmaad-zii-yin.

If one dreams a good life, one can live a good dream (Bouchard, 2017).