

Creating a space to speak: Developing a community-based communication strategy of First Nation values and world view related to community well-being and resource development

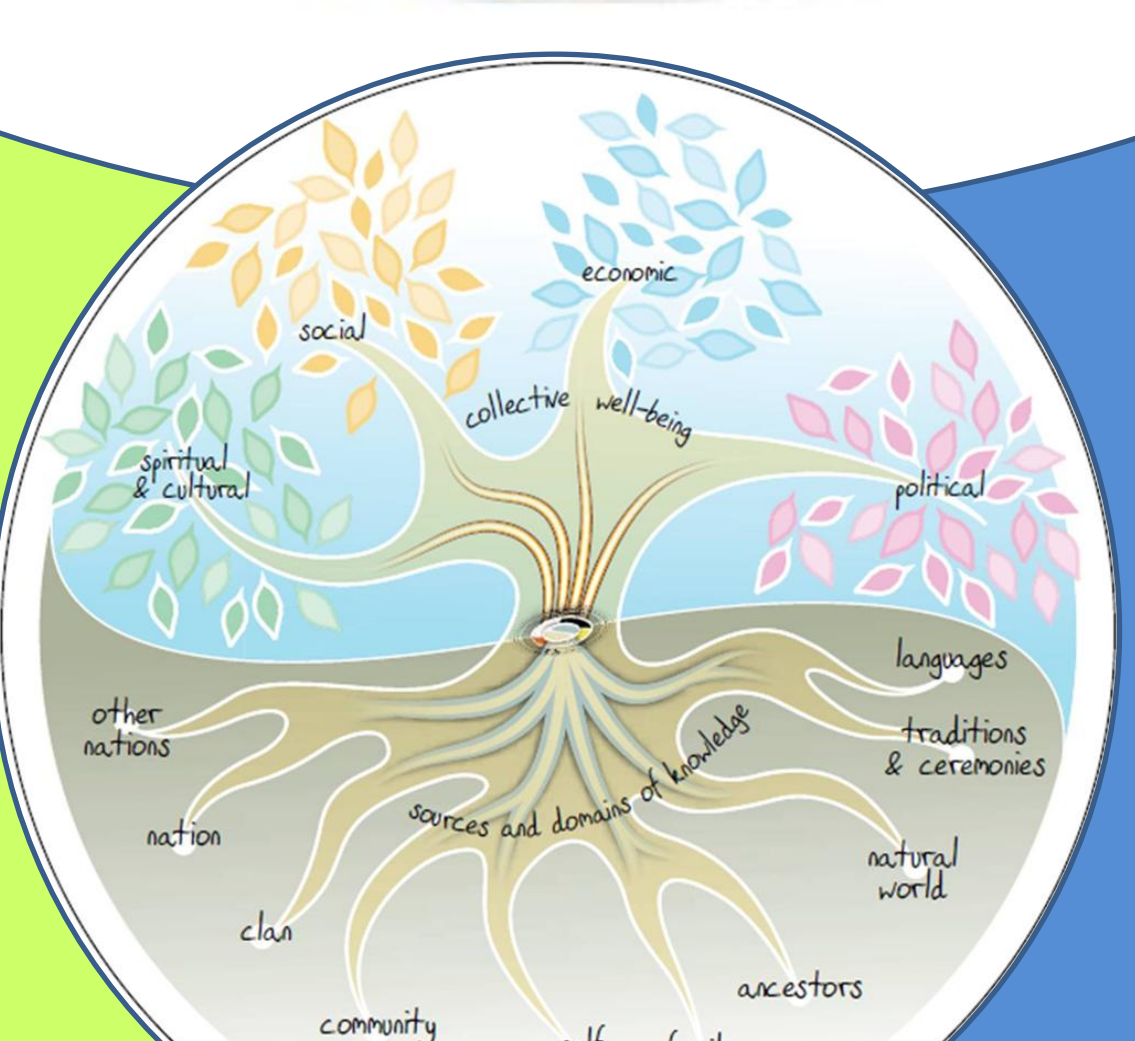
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INTRODUCTION

According to the Ontario government, resource development in Ontario's Far North is expected to increase the quality of life for the First Nation residents in the region (Far North Act, 2010). The first part of the strategy is to engage First Nations in community-based land-use planning, which entails gathering and mapping traditional knowledge, identifying traditional territories and allocating parcels of the territory for development. However, the capacity of First Nations and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources to plan and implement development in an equal partnership has been questioned (Gardner et al., 2012). Differing world views are the underpinning reasons for such inequality and when world views collide, the powerful typically prevail. Strategies of partnerships are typically based in a Western-Euro, post-colonial model, a model that has been criticised as the cause of the ill-being of Indigenous populations globally and a source of conflict among actors (Usher 1993, Green 1995, Howitt 2001, Helin 2008, Taiaiake 2009, Smith 2012).



Duckert's collage of well-being



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APPROACH

Prilleltensky (2001, 2005) defines well-being as "a positive state of affairs in which the personal, relational and collective needs and aspirations of individuals and communities are fulfilled" and further states that community wellness is achieved through the "emphasis of the values of self-determination, participation, community capacity-building, and social justice". He further emphasizes that community well-being is based on the strength of the individual and community relationship and that this relationship is solidified through cultural values and beliefs.

The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL, 2009) developed a life-long learning model (figure bottom centre) that identifies the connections between individuals and the community in a holistic learning and giving approach. This model will be used as the base for engaging participants in defining the important elements of community well-being. Participants will be asked to create a collage using the life-long learning model to be used as an elicitation medium for in-depth interviews about community well-being. The large centre figure is my personal collage as an example. Like community well-being, these collages could be very complex, thus so would be the interpretation. Time and understanding must be devoted to this project to demonstrate the interpretations are dependable, credible and confirmable.

The interviews will provide information for an open discussion within a team of the investigator and community members on how to best communicate the concepts of community well-being to various target audiences.

RELEVANCE

Kimmel (2000) in his description of culture and conflict concludes that: *in order to avoid or ameliorate intercultural communication problems and dysfunctional conflicts that they create or exacerbate requires training in cultural awareness and intercultural communication that promotes intercultural exploration and learning how to learn.*

Understanding the definitions and processes to achieve community well-being, from a community perspective, is the basis from which cultural awareness could originate. But communicating "what well-being is and how to achieve it" from a First Nation perspective is not expected to transform the process of resource development to a fully First Nation way of doing things. It is the basis for creating what Kimmel (2000) refers to as a microculture. A microculture is made up of individuals, who share understanding of meanings, perceptions, expectations and cultural norms. Bohensky and Maru (2011) call for "bridgers of intercultural knowledge" as a necessary element to integrate Indigenous knowledge with dominant society development in order to build resilient communities. These microcultures or bridgers can be the mechanism to aid in the creation of collaborative solutions to resource development conflicts.

An effective communication strategy focused on a community definition of well-being (which could include: community values, desired level of decision making and perceptions of treaty rights...) should:

- Aid in the development and implementation of meaningful consultation processes and agreements (e.g. Impact Benefit Agreements, Memoranda of Understanding, Terms of Reference);
- Reduce cost of negotiations by potentially reducing misunderstandings of what community well-being actually is (spend more time on negotiation and less on clarification); and
- Build capacity internally as opposed to training and development schemes set by the government or resource sector.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to develop a partnership of inquiry with a First Nation community in Ontario's Far North region based on Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2012) to define and communicate the meaning of community well-being from a community perspective. The assumptions are that:

- community well-being is one core and common long-term interest between all actors in the Far North development plans;
- community well-being is based on the strength of the relationship between the individual and community; and that this relationship is solidified through cultural values and beliefs; and
- for a First Nation to be well and thus feel empowered in a relationship with government or other resource developers, these actors must understand the First Nation's sense of community well-being, and defining it's characteristics.

The partners in a relationship should be looking into these relationships and values in order to develop a win-win scenario of collaboration. That collaboration is dependent on a shared understanding of each other's interests and culture (Kimmel 2000).

OBJECTIVES

- Engage a First Nation's community members in conversations to understand the core values and relationships that they see are important to providing them with a sense of well-being;
- Further our understanding of the ontological and epistemological foundations of these values by examining the community's "ways of seeing" and "ways of doing" in the context of Indigenous and Western ontology and epistemology literature;
- Work with community members to develop strategic and effective methods of communicating the connectedness of: a) elements (values and relationships) of community well-being; b) immediate and long-term needs to improve community well-being; and c) ways of achieving well-being in the community.
- Understand what elements of well-being are perceived to be under threat or improved as a result of resource development activities.