Wise Practices in Indigenous Community Economic Development

Brian Calliou

Leadership Faculty, Banff Center, Alberta, Canada

Brian_calliou@banffcenter.ca

Abstract

There have been many approaches to Indigenous economic development. Most often imposed, such approaches have often been assimilationist in nature, by arguing that cultural values and knowledge actually place Indigenous peoples at a disadvantage. After examining different approaches to Indigenous economic development, this article will review literature and studies of best practices in Aboriginal community and economic development. Drawing on the conclusions of these best practices studies, we have identified what we feel are the seven key factors of success for Indigenous community economic development, or "wise practices". The concept of wise practices provides for Indigenous knowledge and experience to lay a foundation for a strengths-based approach to community economic development.

Keywords

Wise practices; Indigenous economic development; best practices; cultural identity; literature review.

Résumé

Il existe plusieurs approches au développement en contexte autochtone. La plupart du temps imposées, celles-ci ont été de nature assimilationniste, en tenant pour acquis que les savoirs et les valeurs culturelles placent les Autochtones en position désavantagée. Après avoir examiné différentes approches de développement économique en contexte autochtone, cet article fera une revue des études des « bonnes pratiques ». En nous basant sur les conclusions de ces études sur les meilleures pratiques, nous avons soulevé 7 facteurs-clés, ou « pratiques éclairées » pour le développement économique des communautés autochtones. Le concept de pratiques éclairées considère que les savoirs et expériences autochtones forment la fondation d'un développement économique réussi.

Mots-clés

Pratiques éclairées; Développement économique autochtone; bonnes pratiques; identité culturelle revue de littérature.

Resumen

Existen varios enfoques sobre el desarrollo en el contexto indígena. La mayor parte del tiempo impuestos, estos enfoques han sido de naturaleza asimilacionista, dando por sentado que los conocimientos y los valores culturales colocan a los indígenas en posición de desventaja. Después de considerar varios enfoques para el desarrollo económico en el contexto indígena, este artículo hará una revisión de las "mejores prácticas". Con base en los hallazgos de estos estudios sobre las mejores prácticas, planteamos siete factores clave, o "prácticas aconsejables" para el desarrollo económico en las comunidades indígenas. El concepto de prácticas aconsejables considera que el conocimiento y las experiencias indígenas forman la base de un desarrollo económico exitoso.

Palabras claves

Prácticas aconsejables, desarrollo indígena, mejores prácticas, identidad cultural, revisión de publicaciones.

1. APPROACHES TO INDIGENOUS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There have been many approaches to Indigenous economic development, most often imposed by governments or non-governmental organizations. Such approaches have often been assimilationist in nature, by arguing that cultural values and knowledge actually place Indigenous peoples at a disadvantage. Within the assimilationist stream, is modernization theory, which views industrialization and technological advances as part of progress that is inevitable (Voyageur and Calliou 2007). Thus, modernists argue that economic underdevelopment among most Indigenous peoples is due to outmoded economic organization and ideas. If Indigenous peoples do not undergo industrialization and are unable to change with the times, then it is really of their own doing. This "blame the victim" thinking does not recognize the institutional and structural barriers that restrict Indigenous participation in the market economy. The modernization theory is reflected in the neoliberal view of a capitalist, market-driven, economic system that supports Western liberal democratic values such as individualism, consumerism, individual property ownership and wealth accumulation. Such values often set up a clash of cultural values with Indigenous peoples, who generally have a strong belief in collectivism, a spiritual connection to the land and resources, and sharing the land rather than exclusive ownership of it.

Other theories have challenged modernization theory by highlighting the overt and systemic structures that marginalize Indigenous peoples from the economy. The metropolis-hinterland theory argues that at the root of legal and political barriers are the metropolitan centers run by elites who exploit the raw materials of the hinterland regions, where Indigenous peoples generally live, and then sell the finished products back to the outlying areas (Davis 1971). Colonialist theory argues that Indigenous communities are essentially internal colonies that are exploited for economic gain by the dominant society for cheap resources, and unskilled labour (Frideres 1988, Abele 1997). Dependency theory argues that underdevelopment can only be understood by analyzing the economic relationships between developed and underdeveloped economies (Dos Santos 1971, Frank 1972). Indigenous peoples become dependent upon the productive relationships established by the capitalist metropolises of developed countries. Thus, world systems related to a global capitalist economy benefits some regions and under-develops others (Wallerstein 2004). Robert Anderson set out a "contingency" theory wherein he argues that while there are world systems at play, Indigenous peoples' participation in the global economy is contingent upon a number of factors, many of which can be controlled by Indigenous peoples themselves (Anderson 1999). This contingency approach takes agency and social relations seriously and emphasizes a community-driven approach to economic development where the community is an active agent in development and controls its pace and nature. Indigenous peoples in Canada have been advocating for greater self-government, respect for their rights to their traditional lands and resources, and for an active role in economic development on their traditional lands. Government policy has been established through history to play a role in Indigenous economic development.

2. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT POLICY ON INDIGENOUS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Historically, Indigenous peoples in Canada adapted well with the new settler populations, especially during the fur trade where they played prominent roles (Ray 1974, Elias 1990). Indigenous peoples also began to adapt somewhat successfully with the new agricultural economy along with seasonal labour (Carter 1990). It was only relatively recently that Indigenous peoples were marginalized from the economy–from the early 1920s (Tough 1992). Federal government policy certainly had an assimilationist agenda early on and residential school policy had

significant impact on Indigenous identity and cultural capital (Tobias 1976, Milloy 1999). State sponsored welfare programs also led many Indigenous citizens to become dependent (Helin 2006). Furthermore, policy and laws such as the Indian Act imposed further barriers to Indigenous involvement in the national economy and limited the possibilities of success (Voyageur and Calliou 2007).

More recently federal governments have attempted to deal with Indigenous involvement in the economy through policy. The federal government instituted a policy in 1989 entitled the Canadian Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy (CAEDS) which was a partnership between three federal government. The Department of Indian and Northern Development funded programs in community economic and resource development; the Department of Employment and Immigration funded training and skills development; and the Department of Industry, Science and Technology funded programs in business development.

In 2009, the Conservative federal government instituted a new policy entitled the Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development (FFAED). This new policy strongly reflects the Conservative government's neoliberal approach to the good society, where their efforts have been focused on opening up Canada's natural resources to the world for exploitation. This market driven approach to Indigenous participation in the national economy sees the policy focus on partnerships with private industry, a strong emphasis on northern development, especially of its natural resources, a results-based approach to any funding investments, and enabling legislation (Weir and Oppenheimer 2010). Much government policy and non-governmental organizational approaches to Indigenous economic development focused on capacity development and training, particularly in business, management and leadership development. One method to learning in these areas is the best practices approach.

3. BEST PRACTICES IN BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership development programs use a variety of methods and approaches to learn about leading and managing (McGonagill and Pruyn 2010). Besides formal lectures in post-secondary institutions, many organizational or community leaders also rely on the best practices case study approach to develop leaders and look for ways to improve (Leskiw and Singh 2007).

So what are best practices? One definition states that best practices are the "methodologies, strategies, procedures, practices and/or processes that consistently produce successful results" (Plate Foy and Krehbiel 2009: i). A best practice is "a proven method, technique, or process for achieving a specific outcome under a specific circumstance and in an effective way" (Wesley-Esquimaux and Calliou 2010: 5).

Best practices are documented case histories of innovation and performance success in a specific practice area. They provide guidelines for others to learn from because of the detailed analysis of the practice under study.

4. CRITIQUE OF BEST PRACTICES

There is an assumption that calling practices "best practices" means that they can inspire others, and can contribute to the development of leaders to improve their practices. The assumption is that these documented stories can make a difference to others who study them and that the knowledge can be transferred into action by using the best practice case study as a guide for their own project. Best practices case studies are also used as a benchmark to compare one's own community or organization against it. Although there is some truth to each of these assumptions, there is a growing skepticism about the universality of best practices.

Some commentators caution that we cannot assume that what works successfully in one situation, context or culture will necessarily work in a completely different one (Krajewski

and Silver 2008). Others have raised the issue of universality by asking how this supposed objective, universal standard of best practice can "[…] take into account context and values, subjectivity and plurality? How could it accommodate multiple perspectives, with different groups in different places having different views of what quality was or different interpretations of criteria?"(Dahlberg *et al.* 1999: 4). Thus, the term best practices is often decontextualized and cannot always be generalized into another context or culture.

Furthermore, another question arises as to what criteria determine what is "best?" It is often a western corporate standard. It reflects a certain ideological lens–that of the neoliberal market. Certainly the criteria of what successful or best practice is can differ between western liberal democracies and Indigenous peoples. Cornell argues that the middle class dream of success in the United States is not necessarily the same definition that most Native Americans have (Cornell 1987). Thus, best practices tend to reflect a hierarchical evaluative criteria that also tends to exclude local and Indigenous knowledge and ways of doing. For case studies to resonate and be relevant, they need to allow for other perspectives, knowledge, and experiences. There has been a similar assumption that western based knowledge and experience with respect to leadership, management, and business practices have an objective quality that can be universally applied to other cultures. Hofstede has argued that much of the failure of international development initiatives during the 1960s and 1970s was partly due to the lack of cultural sensitivity in the transfer of management ideas (Hofstede 1980; 1983). In fact, culture matters. Many Indigenous scholars are arguing that modern management and business practices and knowledge are important for Indigenous peoples, but that it must be reconciled with and built upon traditional cultural values and knowledge (Wuttunee 2004, Smith 2000, Redpath and Neilsen 1997, Newhouse 1993, Calliou 2005).

Finally, some commentators have argued that best practices in adult education are running the risk of eroding the traditional grounding in an ethic of the common good and of social justice (Bartlette 2008). Indigenous communities involved in successful business enterprises do so for the collective good, for social purposes, and to maintain their cultural identity (Anderson 2001).

More Indigenous people have argued that there is something missing in how Indigenous community and leadership development is approached (Wesley-Esquimaux and Snowball 2009, Thoms 2007). They argue that an approach other than best practices must be developed that makes a space for Indigenous knowledge, experiences and stories "learned on the frontlines through socio-cultural insight, ingenuity, intuition, long experience, and trial and error" (Thoms 2007: 8).

5. THE WISE PRACTICES APPROACH TO ECONOMIC AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Taking the foregoing critique into account and in order to resonate with Indigenous leaders, we adopt the notion of "wise practices" as an alternative term to best practices. Wise practices are best defined as "locally-appropriate actions, tools, principles or decisions that contribute significantly to the development of sustainable and equitable conditions" (Wesley-Esquimax and Calliou 2010: 19). Rather than aspiring to be universal like best practices try to be, wise practices are, "idiosyncratic, contextual, textured, and not standardized" (Davis 1997). Thus, wise practices recognize the wisdom in each Indigenous community and their own stories of achieving success. It recognizes that culture matters.

A wise practices approach to developing Indigenous leadership is based on what so many Indigenous scholars have argued–the importance of an Indigenous identity and strong cultural ties (King 2008, Calliou 2005, Warner and Grint 2006, Cowan 2008, Ottmann, 2006) Indigenous perceptions of leaders' characteristics also informs the wise

practices approach as is illustrated by the words of Leroy Little Bear, a Blackfoot philosopher and scholar cited by Alfred:

> […] a culture attempts to mold its members into ideal personalities. The ideal personality in Native American cultures is a person who shows kindness to all, who puts the group ahead of individual wants and desires, who is a generalist, who is steeped in spiritual and ritual knowledge–a person who goes about daily life and approaches "all his or her relations" in a sea of friendship, easygoing-ness, humour, and good feelings […] She or he is a person expected to display bravery, hardiness, and strength against enemies and outsiders. She or he is a person who is adaptable and takes the world as it comes without complaint. (Alfred 1999: 10)

Ottmann argued that Indigenous leader development began with childhood encouragement and direction from the Elders and with inspiration and support coming from other leaders (Ottmann 2005). Thus, the shared values and beliefs of the community shaped a future leader.

A wise practices model also reflects a strengths-based approach to community economic development. It recognizes that there are many gifts and strengths in a community that strategies for growth can build upon. This assests-based way of planning provides for an inventory of assests, including cultural assests (Mathie and Cunningham 2002). This is also referred to as an appreciative inquiry approach, where strengths are identified as a starting point rather than problems or short-comings (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005, Bushe 1998).

The methodology for researching and documenting wise practices is multi-disciplinary, using arts based research methods to visually capture the wise practice case study story (Brearley, Calliou and Tanton 2009). The wise practices approach allows for a community to find its voice and narrate its own story of achievement.

6. LITERATURE REVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

We will review some of the literature and studies of best practices in Aboriginal community and economic development. These studies have generally identified certain key success factors that provide a basis for understanding how or why some Aboriginal communities achieve results.

6.1 Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development

One of the best known studies of successful Indigenous economic development is the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development (HPAIED). The HPAIED began in the mid-1980s and explored why some Native American tribes were defying the odds and achieving economic success and strong community growth. There were some tribes who stood out from others in achieving success, while the majority was struggling with poverty and dependence. Initially they focused narrowly on tribal economics, especially employment and businesses but what they found was much broader and was as much social and political. One could not really understand tribal economic development without considering the entire community structure, systems and institutions. In other words, the study of tribal economic development required a holistic approach where a broader set of success factors could be identified and explored.

The HPAIED concluded that in order to achieve successful tribal economic development, there had to be a strong self-governing community that had a stable environment that investors were willing to risk investment dollars into. Only once these factors were in place, could they achieve success in their economic development ventures. The HPAIED study came up with four main key success factors: (i) defacto sovereignty, that is, they exercised local autonomy; (ii) effective institutions that match

the culture, that is, they set up rules of engagement in the community that resonated with the community cultural values; (iii) strategic direction, that is, long term strategic planning rather than short term decisions; (iv) strong, action-oriented leadership, that is effective leaders who moved their strategic vision and ideas into action to achieve results. These were strong leaders who led drastic changes in their communities, who were willing to break with the status quo so there would be improved conditions in their communities. They termed this the nation-building approach to Indigenous community economic development (Cornell and Kalt 1988; 1990; 2000, Cornell and Gil-Swedberg 1995, Kalt 1993, Jorgensen 2007).

6.2 National Centre for First Nations Governance

The National Centre for First Nations Governance, an independent, non-profit, Indigenous run institution, has developed an approach to assist in leadership development and governance which includes a set of key components that include: the people (citizens); the land (territory and community lands); laws and jurisdiction; institutions; and resources. Through the governance of these key components, they also identified the following leadership and governance principles necessary to lead and govern First Nations successfully: strategic vision; meaningful information sharing; participation in decision-making; territorial integrity; economic real-ization; respect for the spirit of the land; expansion of jurisdiction; rule of law; transparency and fairness; results-based organizations; cultural alignment of institutions; effective inter-governmental relations; human resource capacity; financial management capacity; performance evaluation; account-ability and reporting; diversity of revenue sources. They also published a best practices report that uses case studies to illustrate these leadership and governance principles (NCFNG 2009).

6.3 Institute on Governance

The Institute on Governance, an independent, non-profit public interest agency located in Ottawa, Ontario with a mission to advance better governance in the public interest, carried out a number of reports including on Aboriginal governance. In some of their reports they have set out a model with five principles of good governance that include: legitimacy and voice; direction; performance; accountability; fairness (Graham, Amos and Plumptre 2003, Graham and Bruhn 2009, Bruhn 2009).

6.4 UN Development Program

The United Nations' Development Program (UNDP) has identified nine principles of good governance for assistance to developing countries that include: participation; consensus orientation; strategic vision; responsiveness; effectiveness and efficiency; accountability; transparency; equity; rule of law (Graham, Amos and Plumptre 2003).

6.5 DIAND Governance Action Plan

The federal government of Canada's Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development created a governance action plan to guide its work with First Nations building their capacity for self-government. In their governance action plan they identified seven "key drivers or levers of capacity development for good governance" that include: a vision or sense of self as self-governing; stable and effective leadership; effective governing institutions; culture match; strategic orientation; citizen engagement; effective and stable intergovernmental relations (INAC 2000).

6.6 Friendship Centre Movement Best Practices in Governance and Management

The Friendship Centre movement in Canada has done great work to bring culturally appropriate services and programs to urban

Aboriginals and off reserve Indians. The National Association of Friendship Centres partnered with the Institute on Governance to document various Friendship Centres' best practices. The key factors of successful practices include: board governance; executive leadership; staffing; volunteers; strategic planning; evaluation; adaptive capacity; external relations; sustainability; fundraising; human resource management. They documented one best practice case study on each of these practice areas to illustrate that specific Friendship Centre's approach to achievement (Graham and Kinmond 2008, Graham and Mitchell 2009).

6.7 Conference Board of Canada

The Conference Board of Canada produced a report that examined 10 Aboriginal communities and identified six key factors to success in creating wealth and employment as part of Aboriginal economic development efforts: strong leadership and vision; strategic community economic development plan; access to capital, markets and management expertise; good governance and management; transparency and accountability; and the positive interplay of business and politics (Loizides and Wuttunee 2005). In another report on best practices in Aboriginal businesses they set out the following factors of success: purpose; clear corporate vision; winning attitude; using creativity to overcome obstacles; good location; experience and expertise; hiring people from outside the community; recruitment and retention; and developing partnerships (Sisco and Nelson 2008). In yet another report on successful Aboriginal businesses they looked at 10 case studies to form the basis of their conclusion on three main factors to success: leadership; sound business practices; and strong relationships and partnerships (Sisco and Stewart 2009).

6.8 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP)

The RCAP report identified five critical factors of success in community economic development in the following manner: restoration of power and control over lands and resources; development of a positive and encouraging social/political/cultural climate for Aboriginal economic development; development of enabling instruments for use in surmounting the problems facing Aboriginal economic development; development of a skilled and positive forward looking labour force; acceptance and willingness to engage in economic activity by the mainstream in collaboration with Aboriginal people (Wein 1999, Newhouse 1999).

6.9 Human Resources Development Canada

The federal government's Human Resources Development Canada department produced a report on Aboriginal social and economic development that set out lessons learned that they feel are important as factors for successful Aboriginal development: governance; planning and policy development; control over resources and funding arrangements; program delivery and management; accountability; capacity-building; and other requirements such as, coordination across programs, combining human resource and economic development, linking education and training to employment (HRDC 1999).

6.10 Comprehensive Community Planning Workshop

The Okanagan Indian Band in B.C. hosted a workshop on comprehensive community planning and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC) wrote a report on it setting out the lessons learned, that include: community-based and community-driven; build a planning team and process; financial resources mobilization; capacity building, planning tools and resources; inter-

governmental relations; linkages, networking and sharing of best practices (INAC 2005).

6.11 Public Works Management in First Nations Communities

The department of Public Works and Government Services Canada and INAC developed a report on good public works management in First Nations communities that explored the experiences of six communities to identify the following keys to success: vision; leadership; policies; management and administration; self-sufficiency; human res-ources; asset protection and management; accountability; and fiscal accountability (INAC and PWGSC 2002).

6.12 Indigenous Research and Education, Charles Darwin University

Indigenous scholar Darryl Cronin, of the Indigenous Research and Education faculty, Charles Darwin University in Australia, developed a paper exploring what Aboriginal people think about governance and community development. He identified the following key elements of a governance and development approach: Aboriginal authority; jurisdictional authority; cultural appropriateness; research, education and training; leadership; strengthening families; direct and adequate funding; private and non-profit sector partnerships; and capacity of government agencies (Cronin 2003).

7.   KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS

We see from this literature review of best practices on Indigenous community economic development that there are many similarities in the factors that lead to success. Drawing on the conclusions of these best practices studies, we have identified what we feel are the seven key factors of success for Indigenous community economic development. The seven success factors we identified were also informed by competency map research we undertook through The Banff Centre through

focus groups, that supported the importance of culture and identity for Indigenous leaders (Calliou 2005). We call this our wise practices model, which sets out the following seven elements of success:

1.   Identity and culture
2.   Leadership
3.   Strategic vision and planning
4.   Good governance and management
5.   Accountability and stewardship
6.   Performance evaluation
7.   Collaborations, partnerships and external relationships

We will discuss each of these seven key success factors in turn. The first key factor is "identity and culture," which is to say that leaders of Indigenous communities have stated clearly that they feel it is very important that any Indigenous leader to be competent in advocating and representing their community's interests must have a strong understanding and grounding of their culture, traditional knowledge and historical connection to their traditional territories. This became very clear in our competency map research (Calliou 2005). Other Indigenous scholars have also found this to be the case (Ottmann 2005).

The second factor is with respect to "leadership." Effective leadership is key to successful community economic development. Leaders must be action-oriented in order to bring ideas to action, lead change, and achieve results. They must practice courageous leadership in order to change the status quo and improve the conditions of the community.

Thirdly, is the key factor relating to "strategic vision and planning." Leaders must set out long term visions that inspire and motivate community members to support strategic plans that bring positive change. Such strategic plans provide a basis for decision-making and help to focus scarce resources on their collective goals.

The fourth factor relates to "good governance and management." Leaders need to set up good governance and management structures

and systems to effectively carry out the goals and program needs for communities. Building effective institutions and processes allow for leaders and managers to come and go, while the government or organizations can continue to operate. Stable governance and management sends a strong message to potential external partners who can trust that the Indigenous community or organization operates professionally.

The fifth factor is with respect to "accountability and stewardship." Good leaders and managers act as stewards of the community resources and are accountable for their decisions and actions. Being open and transparent for their decision making and spending builds community trust in them.

Next is the sixth factor, "performance evaluation." This relates to being accountable and practicing stewardship of community resources, by measuring for results of the decisions made and the dollars invested in the various strategies undertaken. Evaluating the performance of the initiatives undertaken by leaders ensures that they are achieving the most value for each dollar invested in their projects. Evaluation of human resources is another important measurement that ensures that staff performance is tied to strategic objectives and that results are being achieved.

Finally, the seventh factor is with respect to "collaborations, partnerships and external relationships." External partnerships are often necessary for an Indigenous community's success. They often need external financial support either through transfer payments or through investment. Thus, good working relationships with external funders, bankers, investors, suppliers, and trading partners are key to success. Being self-governing means having networks and trading partners.

CONCLUSION

Through a literature review of best practices in Indigenous community and economic development, we were able to draw on such research to provide an empirical basis for our

wise practices model for successful community economic development with its seven elements that increase the likelihood of success. The concept of wise practices, in contrast to the concept of best practices, provides for Indigenous knowledge and experience to lay a foundation for a strengths-based approach to community economic development. It recognizes that culture matters, and that wise practices case studies can inspire and provide wisdom that can teach us ways to build our communities and our local economies. The wise practices model sets out various elements for Indigenous leaders to become familiar with and learn aspects of so that they have the competency to lead change, inspire hope, and take advantage of economic opportunities for their communities. The economic success that can be achieved through such a model is not merely for wealth accumulation, but rather, is for the public good. It is for what one commentator described as "tribal capitalism," and another described as "capitalism with a red face" (Champagne 2004, Newhouse 2000). This represents capitalism as a means to an end−a triple bottom line approach to economic development that seeks to protect and enhance an Indigenous community's identity and culture.

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