

Whu Neh Nee (Wise Ones) Carrier Leadership Traits and Practices

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Abstract

First Nations people in North America have suffered oppressive government policies and discrimination over the past few hundred years. Through these challenges they have survived and continue to work toward rebuilding wellness in their communities. When working to support the health and wellness of Carrier people, it is important for organizations to practice leadership from a culturally appropriate context. Cultural values are reflected in leadership practices and thus any leadership practices based western theories may challenge the authenticity of Indigenous Carrier organizational operations and outcomes. This study examined leadership practices and traits from a Northern Carrier First Nations perspective. The intent of the research is to help leaders in Carrier organizations to select leaders with appropriate traits, and train them to practice in culturally relevant ways. This qualitative study included interviews with six Northern Carrier leaders from various nations, clans and leadership roles. Semi structured interviews were conducted and thematically analyzed to reveal key findings. Themes emerged for leadership traits and practices in the areas of action and thinking. This exploratory research highlights a need for further inquiry into Carrier leadership practices and traits.

Keywords: Carrier, First Nations, Indigenous, aboriginal, leader, leadership, practices, traits

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The study of Carrier specific leadership traits and practice is important to Carrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS), an organization mandated to provide culturally relevant services to meet the unique health, social and legal needs of many northern Carrier Nations. When leadership principles are applied to First Nations people and initiatives through western theories and philosophies, negative impacts to Carrier self-determination efforts are possible. Western theories and leadership values may not fit within a Carrier First Nations cultural context. Thus, aspects of culture, which influence leadership style and practice, must be considered carefully (Nichols, 2004). Prior to data collection, the researcher anticipated that themes identified through data analysis would align with some western leadership theories in part, including servant and authentic leadership styles. It was further anticipated that some leadership styles would emerge that do not fit into these western theories, but would align more closely with Indigenous values around leadership. Although North American Indigenous groups are separate with unique cultures, it was further anticipated that some leadership practices which appear in North American Indigenous leadership scholarship would be found in common with Carrier leadership ideologies.

Background

Prince George, Vanderhoof, Burns Lake, and surrounding areas are located on the traditional territory of the Dakelh-- the name the Carrier people use to refer to themselves, which translates to "people who travel by water". The demographic of individuals presently residing in the traditional Carrier territory are predominantly descendants of European settlers, who began colonizing the area in the late 1700s (Morice, 1978). The Carrier language consists of various dialects from Nation to Nation, all of which fall under the Athabaskan language group (Poser,

2014). Although some of the Carrier dialects are at risk of becoming extinct, there are still fluent speakers in many of the communities (Poser). The Carrier traditionally follow a clan and *bah'lats* (feast) system which includes aspects of their governance system, spirituality and maintenance of social order. This researcher's personal experience in working with Carrier people has revealed different cultural norms than the majority of the population in north central British Columbia.

The Carrier people share the Canadian legacy of colonization that is linked to poor health, social and educational outcomes (Chrisjohn, Young & Maraun, 1997; Rogers, DeGagne, & Dewar, 2012). Carrier children were forced to attend the Le Jac residential school on the shores of Fraser Lake, B.C., where many reported they could not speak their language, practice their culture or visit their families until the summer months (Moran, 1997). Bridget Moran notes that many of the children suffered physical and sexual abuse. For many children, the experience at Le Jac resulted in a loss of identity and culture. Both Residential school survivor's and their descendants often suffer from intergenerational effects stemming from their experiences of separation from their families and culture, as well as the militant disciplinary style of the residential school nuns and priests (Moran). In addition to residential school attendance, policies implemented by the Canadian government further supported the agenda to assimilate First Nations. For example, the implementation of the Indian Act banned the practice of *bah'lats*, which resulted in a further loss of culture and disempowerment for the Carrier people (Fiske & Patrick, 1990). The Kenny Dam flood, which was done to create power for the Alcan aluminum smelter in the 1950s further resulted in the displacement of numerous Carrier villagers, whose ancestral lands are now under water (Peebles, 2012). Many Carrier people strongly feel the inter-generational effects of colonization, and look to elected and organizational leadership to

address complex health and social issues in a culturally relevant manner; however, with the current elected tribal chief system implemented by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2015), there are no prerequisites for Chiefs to demonstrate administrative ability, education or skill. Presently, lack of funding to provide services for First Nations people further compounds the challenges for the Carrier people.

Now that First Nations finally have more authority over the institutions that affect their lives, strong and effective leadership is needed for First Nations to fully assert tribal self-determination. Eleven Carrier Nations have chosen to have Carrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS) provide their health and family services until they are able to assume these services on their own. Carrier Sekani Family Services is mandated to establish a comprehensive infrastructure for social, health and legal programs, for the eventual take-over of these services, consistent with the Tribal Council's objective of working towards Indian Self-Government (Hunter, 2011). Many First Nations organizations are developing governance initiatives that are aimed at providing culturally relevant prevention and intervention initiatives to restore family unity and holistic wellness (British Columbia Assembly of First Nations, 2010). In recent years, First Nations in British Columbia have formed the First Nation Health Authority. This first of its kind, Canadian First Nations lead health authority has a mandate to provide culturally relevant health services for British Columbia First Nations. Locally in northern British Columbia, some First Nations are developing partnerships with natural resource corporations to create economic opportunities for their Nations (Bridges, 2014). Most recently, a land mark court decision in favor of First Nations land rights has given more power to Nations to exercise their hereditary rights over their land (Terry, 2014). Strong, effective and culturally relevant leadership is

needed to manage initiatives aimed at ensuring new opportunities are beneficial and create measurable outcomes for First Nations people.

Leadership theories and practices created in the dominant western culture may not fit within the constructs of the Carrier people. Julien, Wright and Zinni (2010) note that western based leadership theories present a cultural bias toward the creators of the theories, and as such may not fit within a Carrier leadership context. A noteworthy view within the Carrier culture is the holistic belief that all things are connected. As such, Carrier beliefs and practices cannot be fully compartmentalized to fit under any singular theory or method of examination (Julien, et. al., 2010). This inability to compartmentalize Carrier beliefs and practices includes leadership practices, which cannot be easily generalized across various First Nations cultures. As very little scholarship was available specific to Carrier First Nations leadership, it was difficult to identify both what constitutes a culturally relevant Carrier leadership practice, and what leadership traits could be identified in potential leaders. As a First Nations organization, Carrier Sekani Family Services needs clear definitions of Carrier leadership practices and leadership traits to develop leaders to ensure that strategic goals can be met in culturally relevant ways.

Literature Review

Existing literature examining Carrier First Nations leadership, as well as scholarship for other North American Indigenous leadership practices and traits are the focus of this scholarly literature review. While individual North American Indigenous cultures are separate and unique, some Carrier leadership qualities, practices and structures share similarities with other North American First Nations. Similarities and differences between Carrier and other North American First Nations will be the focus of this literature review. This review of the literature is organized as follows, first, an overview and analysis of the scholarly articles reviewed in this paper will be

provided. An overview of common themes found in Carrier and other North American Indigenous scholarship will be examined. The common themes will be organized into two categories leader personality traits and leadership practices. This exploration will be followed by an overview of contradictions found within the Carrier literature.

The inquiry revealed a gap in the scholarship related to Carrier specific leadership traits, and practices. While there is a growing interest in research on First Nations leadership, the literature is difficult to access across the various journals and scholarly disciplines (Calliou, 2006). Only two of the sources examined outlined some Carrier specific leadership traits. These two sources will be compared to other North American Indigenous scholarship.

The first source was found in grey literature, a Master of Arts thesis titled, *Should the clans decide? the problems of modeling self-government among the Carrier-Sekani Indians of British Columbia* (Aasen, 1992). This thesis is the only peer-reviewed source identified after an extensive search of published and unpublished literature on Carrier leadership practices. The study outlines some leadership traits and practices for *Aza'ne* (Hereditary Chiefs) within the Carrier clan system. It also provides information about other Carrier leadership roles, including those of elected tribal chiefs.

A definition of Carrier leadership outside of the hereditary and elected chief system is noted as “those individuals who were good at something and gave directions to others” (Aasen, 1992, p. 76). Vine Deloira (1969) defines traditional Indigenous leaders as people who had attracted a following based on their own personal merit, in whom anyone was free to follow. Thus Leaders are identified as such by the action of leading, and through their demonstrated ability create a followership. This definition is shared across other North American Indigenous practices (Metoyer, 2010). Aasen based her inductive ethnological study on a thorough review

of published and unpublished historical sources, coupled with fieldwork consisting of informal and formal observation and interviews. Many of the literary sources used in the study were historical accounts from individuals involved in colonizing the traditional Carrier territory, including Catholic Church Priests and Indian Agents (Morice, 1978). Because of the historical biases around First Nations people by the colonizing European settlers, coupled with the second hand accounts of history, these sources must be viewed with scholarly caution. Despite such limitations, the central thesis, through observation and interviews, identified many historical and modern accounts of Carrier leadership which are valuable to this inquiry.

The second Carrier specific source is a book titled, *Cis Dideen Kat: When the Plumes Rise, The Way of the Lake Babine Nation* (1990) written by author and scholar JoAnne Fiske, and Betty Patrick, a Lake Babine Nation hereditary Chief and former elected Chief. This book examines traditional governance as it relates to Carrier laws through the *bah'lats* system. Most of the information contained in the book is based on Indigenous law and as such was not useful to this inquiry. There were a few exceptions, where some leadership information regarding the role, traits and practices of hereditary Chiefs were useful to this inquiry, and as such are included. JoAnne Fiske has received some criticism from the local Carrier community for publishing what is claimed to be incorrect information regarding the *bah'lats* practices of the Lake Babine people (W. Adam, personal conversation, March 17, 2014). Despite the criticism, the book is still heralded by the majority of the Babine people as the main printed resource on their *bah'lats* system and Babine culture.

The remaining eight sources examine various aspects of North American Indigenous leadership through a variety of leadership roles and environments. Study participants include Indigenous leaders from public health, government, youth services, justice services, industries

such as entertainment, information technology, finance, as well as Indigenous student leaders. All of the studies used a qualitative design with the exception of one literature review. Four of the studies involved participants from one First Nation, while the remaining studies involved participants from a variety of Nations. One of the studies appeared to use leading questions, which may have skewed the results. Despite these shortcomings, the findings across the literature correlated with Carrier leadership traits and practices, and as such were useful to this examination. Across the literature from Carrier and other First Nations across North America, themes and contrasts were found in two areas: leadership traits and practices.

For the purpose of this examination, leadership traits refer to the personal attributes of those who lead, which are deemed to be central to the success of that individual to invoke followership. With the very limited amount of Carrier scholarship available, it is possible that more leadership traits may be shared by the Carrier people even though such traits were not directly noted. While there were many traits throughout the literature, which were noted, as essential for effective leadership, a few areas, including respect, holistic health, and spirituality were noted in the majority of the studies.

Many Carrier tribes historically consisted of a group of hereditary Chiefs, all of whom had power based on respect. Respect for hereditary Chiefs was earned by their demonstrated skills, wisdom, and abilities (Aasen, 1992). It was through an individual's demonstrated knowledge and skill that the Carrier people determined if a leader was worthy of following. In the Carrier hereditary Chief system, *Sky'zeh* (future Chiefs) are identified at a young age and groomed to assume roles in the family, clan, community and *bah'lats* system. These traits are associated with an individual being chosen to assume a hereditary Chief name and accompanying role (Fisk & Patrick, 2000). Hereditary Chiefs are groomed to assume their role,

often for decades before they are deemed ready by the clan's hereditary Chiefs. Although there is sparse literature available on Carrier leadership traits and how they are mentored, some sources show similarities to an authentic leadership theory approach. Hereditary Chiefs must lead by persuasion versus authority, and earn respect through good communication and demonstrated healthy lifestyle and values choices (Aasen). They must consider the needs of the people above their own needs and view leadership as an act of service to the community (Aasen). Similarities exist between Carrier leadership practices and Servant leadership theory, where leaders must also have good communication skills, lead by example and exemplify positive values (Northouse, 2010).

Available scholarship shows that Carrier people share a view with other North American Indigenous groups that leadership is an act of service. The concept of servant leadership was first coined by Robert Greenleaf (1991), and is built on the concept of serving the highest good, and ensuring the wellbeing of others as a foundation to leadership practice. Servant leadership has gained attention from scholars and leaders alike in recent years (Russell & Stone, 2002). Many of the studies quoted participants who noted that they did not see themselves as a leader, but rather as a servant of the people (Aasen, 1992; Julien, et al., 2010; & Minthorn, 2014). Aasen notes that the Carrier people describe someone in a position of authority as a "servant to the community" (p. 87). Minthorn's study of leaders from various North American tribes found a commonality in the view that leadership involved great personal sacrifice to ensure the wellbeing of the community.

Knowledge of community history and culture was noted as an important quality for a First Nations leader. Cultural knowledge ensures that leaders are best able to meet the unique needs of the community and not repeat the mistakes of the past in regards to colonization, or

apply mal-fitting solutions to problems (Fiske & Patrick, 1990; Minthorn, 2014; Ritchie, Wabano, Young, Schinke, Battochio & Russell, 2010; Rousell & Giles, 2011; Simms, 2000). With both the implementation of the Indian Act (Indian Advancement Act, 1884), which banned cultural ceremonies and practices, and the loss of culture and identity through residential school attendance as well as the 1960's scoop, it was noted across the literature that North American Indigenous people strongly feel the intergenerational effects of colonization (Chrisjohn, et al., 1997; Rogers, DeGagne, & Dewar, 2012). Carrier people share the view with other North American Nations that a strong knowledge of culture and history is an important quality for leaders to possess.

A strong spiritual connection is a leadership quality that Carrier and other North American Indigenous groups view as important. The shared North American Indigenous view of the interconnectedness and mystical nature of all things and is often referred to as the First Nations world view (Durand, 2006). It is noted across the literature that spirituality must form the center of a leaders practice (Julien et al., 2010; Rousell & Giles, 2011; Metoyer, 2010; Nichols, 2004). Julien et al. (2010) describe how leaders must pay attention to their dreams for messages on how to proceed when faced with important decisions. For the Carrier clan leadership specifically, it is noted that "absolutely everything must be done in line with the creator" (Aasen, 1992, p. 70).

A final leadership trait noted across the literature is for leaders to earn the respect of the community by demonstrating a healthy and balanced life based on the values of the people. Ritchie et al. (2010) note the importance of having healthy relationships and links this to one of the reasons that community members would have respect for their leader. Living a holistically healthy life, which is balanced between mental, spiritual, physical and emotional well-being, is

important for leaders (Julien et al., 2010; Nichols, 2004). In Carrier leadership practices specifically, it is noted in both Aasen and Fiske and Patrick that only individuals who are respected by community are chosen to become hereditary Chiefs.

Leadership practices refer to the actions that leaders can take which enable them to successfully lead others to accomplish goals. The Carrier specific resources noted only a few leadership practices that apply under the aforementioned definition of actions that a leader can take to invoke followership. There were many practices noted across the North American Indigenous literature; however, two appeared quite prominently across all Carrier and non-Carrier sources: collaborative decision making, and the use of persuasion versus authority.

Collaborative decision making was noted across many leadership theories as important for invoking followers to participate in action to create desired outcomes through a team effort (Northouse, 2010). Without shared goals and buy in from all stakeholders, groups may not work together effectively, and this ineffectiveness works against planning and coordinating efforts. Carrier Chiefs always consult with other Chiefs, within and outside of their clan, before making an important decision (Aasen, 1992). Aasen further notes that the great Chief Quaw of Nak'azdli had a brother who was very intelligent, and was often consulted before Quaw himself. Metoyer (2010) notes that in First Nation cultures, nobody can speak on behalf of another person. Relationships and trust are a necessity for people to make decisions together. Individuals must be able to share thoughts and feelings freely, and truly listen and understand each other in order to collaborate effectively. Minthorn, (2014), and Rousell and Giles (2011) both made reference to the importance of relationships to enable collaboration in decision making. Carrier people share the view with other North American Nations that collaborative decision making is an important leadership practice.

Many North American Indigenous groups, including the Carrier, share the view that leading should occur through persuasion instead of using authority. This practice was clearly demonstrated in a study of youth camp leaders, where the program staff was able to engage the youth and community members by use of persuasion, while the program manager, who used an authoritative approach, was unable to engage the same youth and community members (Rousell & Giles, 2011). Many evidence-based leadership theories and approaches tend to fall under a more egalitarian approach and employ the use of collaborative decision making (Northouse, 2010; Rousell & Giles). The role of the leader is noted as someone who inspires and motivates people to want to take action (Aasen, 1992; Metoyer, 2010; Nichols, 2004). A few of the studies mention that effective First Nations leaders use traditional storytelling and legends to motivate people into action, rather than taking a more direct approach to communication and delegation (Julien et al., 2010; Metoyer, 2010). The leadership practice of using persuasion versus use of authority was shared between the Carrier and other North American Nations.

Although there are commonalities noted across the Carrier and North American Indigenous leadership studies, a puzzling discrepancy has also emerged. Aasen (1992) notes that Carrier people viewed their leaders as the first among equals. A few of the sources specifically highlight the point that leadership consists of practices carried out by an able person vs. a position that the person holds (Aasen; Julien et.al, 2010; Metoyer, 2010). This appears to differ from the Carrier hereditary Chief system, where it is noted that when a person becomes a hereditary Chief, that person is considered to be a noble, much like a member of the Royal Family (Fiske & Patrick, 1990). This contradiction requires further inquiry to understand fully and identify possible implications for leadership practices outside of the *bah'lats* system.

Methodology

This study examined leadership specific to Carrier First Nations using a qualitative approach to postulate key leadership traits, and practices. The study will answer the research question concerning the necessary leadership traits and practices required to effectively lead Carrier organizations in a culturally relevant way. The answer to this question was uncovered by collecting and thematically analyzing data from interviews with Carrier First Nation leaders. The purpose of this research was in response to Carrier Sekani Family Services desire to offer culturally relevant youth and adult leadership training. The research will be used to inform Carrier specific leadership training provided to community champions, youth program participants, and organizational managers.

A qualitative research approach was chosen for this inquiry based on the exploratory nature of research, as well as the need to emphasize the cultural values of relationship building and communication of First Nations people (Minthorn, 2014, Rousell & Giles, 2011). The cultural practice of following an oral tradition to share information and use of storytelling (Julien, et al., 2010, Metoyer, 2010) fit well with a qualitative, semi structured interview approach. The process of asking open ended questions and allowing participants to engage fully in the process will ensure research takes place in a culturally appropriate manner. Qualitative design allowed for the exploration of the topic of Carrier leadership, along with its traits and practices, while nurturing existing and new relationships between the researcher and participants.

Participants

Participants were selected in early 2015 by identifying a list of Carrier leaders and community members from a variety of clans, professional backgrounds and socioeconomic status. Nations included to identify leaders were Lheidli T'enneh, Saik'uz, Nadleh Whut'en,

Stellaquo, Takla Lake, Yekooche, Burns Lake, Lake Babine, Wet'suwet'en, Nee Tahi Buhn, Skin Tyee and Cheslatta Carrier Nation. Carrier community members and leaders were approached in person and via email, and asked for their recommendations for which Carrier leaders they recommended as possible participants. This snowball approach was much like the method used to find research participants in the study carried out by Julien, et al. (2010), *Stories from the Circle; Leadership Lessons Learned from Aboriginal Leaders*. Using such a methodology to identify research participants ensures that the researcher's personal bias do not affect selection of participants. Leaders with the most recommendations were chosen, taking care not to select more than one leader from each Nation, and accompanying family and clan affiliation. The purpose of the study was explained, and a request for participation posed to all prospective participants.

Procedures

Permission to conduct research with member Carrier Nations was sought and granted from the Carrier Sekani Family Services Executive Director of Research, Strategic Management and Primary Care through a letter of request. Participation was requested both in person, and through letters of request to potential participants. The participant leaders were interviewed up to the point of key theme emergence based on findings from Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) who found that a minimum of six interviews are required for key themes to emerge, and that saturation usually occurs within 6-12 interviews. Six interviews with Carrier leaders took place with interview times varying from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. The time and location of all interviews was set up around the times and locations requested by the research participants.

Semi structured interviews were used to collect information on the participant's opinions, experiences, and perceptions on the topic of Carrier specific leadership. Interview questions

were focused around culturally relevant leader qualities and practices, which encourage followership. Interviews began with unstructured questions such as, “What is it like to be a leader of the Carrier people?” and were followed by more pointed questions targeting Carrier leadership practice and leader qualities. Audiotaping occurred with participant’s permission to capture conversations, which were then transcribed by the researcher. Transcriptions were provided to participants to check over for accuracy and provide additional feedback. To mitigate the risks associated with the researcher’s lack of cultural affiliation with the target group, consultation with participants took place as needed after the transcriptions were disseminated. These consultations were further done to ensure the data was understood in proper the cultural context to which it was intended. Field-notes were taken for the duration of each interview and included notes on the environment, gestures or movements, as well as any other comments which could be used to provide context to the interview and process.

Analysis of the data occurred throughout the study using a qualitative approach to uncover the traits and leadership practices used by the Carrier people. Transcriptions were analyzed “literally, reflexively and interpretively” (Check & Shutt, 2012, p. 302). The data was categorized into themes, subsequently relationships between the themes were considered. Hard copies of documents were also coded using colored highlighter pens and the same numbered coding system. Similarities between themes and subcategories was used to form an understanding of Carrier leadership practices and leader qualities. Transcripts were entered into electronic files, which were numerically coded by participant number and themes. These codes transcripts were then were organized to fit major themes and subcategories. The level of reflexivity was examined through reviewing field notes, and comparing it to the data and overall conclusions of the study. Once the thematic analysis was complete, a copy of the research report

key findings was provided to the participants. Permission was sought and granted to use specific quotes in this research report.

Results

Leadership was defined by the participants as individuals using their skills to promote change as a service to others. Many of the research participants noted that leadership was a role equal to all others who use their skills within the community. This description of leadership was eloquently defined by a participant who noted, “Being a leader is helping and being of value”. Three of the six interviewed noted that they didn’t see themselves as a leader, only as one person among equals who are helping the community. In addition, a theme emerged that leaders are defined not only by what they do, but by how holistically balanced they are in their mental, spiritual, physical and emotional wellness. Respected leaders have balance in their lives. The data further indicated that Carrier people view the world through interconnected thinking and view themselves and their leadership actions as interdependent with their communities. As such, it is important to consider the interconnected nature of the themes identified in this study.

Leaders clearly noted that they learned how to lead through observing others and taking on increased responsibility. Throughout all of the interviews, each participant noted that they had family members whom they had observed in leadership roles. It was observing these leaders that shaped their leadership practice. As one participant noted “I learned by watching my grandmother. She took me to meetings all of the time, and she talked to me about important things that were going on in government and in the Nation”. Another noted that they “learned through trial and error”. Through the process of contemplating different outcomes and scenarios, the leader made decisions which impacted their knowledge on how to effectively lead others. Carrier leaders learn how to lead effectively through mentorship and a process of trial and error.

The findings show that respect is a key trait required for Carrier leaders to emulate. The qualifying criteria for this theme included personality traits that are required to have relationships built on reciprocal and compassionate engagement. Respect was noted more times than any other trait, and was described as reciprocal in nature. As one participant noted “You genuinely care for others. You have to be respectful and kind to others. In turn you gain respect”. Another participant noted, “above all else, (the difference between western and Carrier leadership styles is that) Carrier leaders must lead from the heart”. Other traits noted as required for being respectful and gaining respect in the community included humility, patience and empathy. These traits all support leaders to have respectful and healthy relationships with others.

The ability of leaders to establish and maintain functional and healthy relationships with others in the community based on respect is important to Carrier people. This theme has clear links to many of the others including respect, communication, trustworthiness, and confidence. The use of humour was noted as an important practice for Carrier leaders to employ, as well as avoiding gossip. Avoiding gossip was listed as particularly important to the leaders who are hereditary chiefs. Inclusivity emerged as an important attribute to maintain relationships within the larger community or organization. This was clearly noted by a participant who said a leader must “be inclusive, and listen to those who may not otherwise have a voice”. The role of healthy boundaries in relationships was also noted, as a method for preserving personal energy and balance, and to empower others to be independent. “You must protect your boundaries so that people don’t take advantage of your authority, with the goal to create independence for the people”.

Thorough data analysis clearly revealed that the use of good communication skills is an important aspect of Carrier leadership. A communication skill of particular importance is

listening. Within the data, listening was the second most noted practice with participants expressing its importance on 19 occasions throughout the interviews. Listening to others enables leaders to have a real understanding as to what is going on, and what is needed to address issues. As one participant noted, it is important for leaders to, “Listen generously. Don’t just listen for what you want to hear and discard the rest”. Another communication skill of noted importance was the ability to facilitate conflict resolution conversations. “Sometimes I feel like a referee or a peacemaker; I encourage people to get along and work together and support one another”. A surprising theme, which was also evident within communication, is the need for leaders to be “totally on the spot with regards to advice”. Interestingly, providing direct feedback was noted as occurring in a very direct fashion without concern for feelings. As one participant put it (providing feedback is) “not as a sugar coated, hold your hands, and talk about your feelings (feedback), but as an unflinching honesty”.

The data further demonstrated that Carrier leaders need to exude and possess a high level of personal confidence. To fit within the theme of confidence, the trait must be demonstrated in the way a person carries himself or herself. Such a way must enable the Carrier leader to be authentic and have a high level of personal esteem, all of which can be detected by others. Confidence was noted as a trait, and not a skill that can be taught. Effective Carrier leaders were noted to be genuine and emit a charisma which others are attracted to. As one participant noted, “It’s an inner strength that people gravitate toward”. Another described confidence as “the ability to just command the room when they walk in”. When a leader is confident, there is a natural tenancy for people to trust them.

Another theme that became clearly evident from the data analysis is trustworthiness. Carrier community members and staff need to know that their leader has their best interests at heart. If a

leader says one thing and does another, their behavior will breed distrust and a lack of confidence in their leadership from followers and the larger community. As one participant noted, “You cannot do and say different things”. Reliability and accountability were both noted as important aspects of trustworthiness. One participant noted, “If you aren’t going to be trusted, you aren’t even going to be looked upon as a leader”. Carrier people view the attribute of trustworthiness as an absolute necessity for someone to be viewed as a leader.

Thorough data analysis revealed that the ability to lead with conviction is also an important trait for leaders to possess. Leaders noted that necessary attributes for successful Carrier leaders to have include dedication to the vision and the ability to persevere against all odds. Being driven will ensure that leaders are prepared to “go the long haul, to achieve goals – no matter how long it takes”. Drive enables leaders to fulfil the vision with passion, and fully engage in the process. As one participant put it, “We need our young leaders to get that passion, that fiery passion back - to right the wrongs of the past”.

The most evident theme noted by all of the participants is a need for leaders to know Carrier culture. Over the course of the interviews on 20 different occasions participants noted that Carrier culture is of utmost importance for Carrier leaders to know. It was further noted that in order for leaders to be successful they must also have a solid understanding of the differences between Carrier and western culture. “A leader is a person who has the ability to walk in both worlds”. Good leaders were further noted in the data as “Rooted in culture, but thinking globally”. Another leader noted that, “Culture is huge. You have to know your culture to teach it. You have to live it”. Possessing an understanding of the culture provides leaders with the insights they need in regards to community norms and ethos, on which to understand community needs, and apply appropriate leadership.

Findings show that it is important for Carrier leaders to possess an ability to set and achieve goals. Good leaders were noted to set and achieve goals by applying their communication skills to build a shared vision, and ensure there is understanding of roles and responsibilities. Building a shared vision ensures that the larger communities needs are being met. Communication was noted as important within goal setting to help leaders create buy in. As one participant noted, it's important to "get them to feel it, and feel like they are part of the cause". Another participant described communication as an important part of goal planning activities to "communicate the vision so there is total understanding". Providing guidance and support to ensure that people are able to complete their part of the plan was also identified as important. One participant noted that it's important for leaders to "Visualize it, and actualize that vision - because if there is no action, you are just a visionary".

The concept of interconnected thinking emerged as a very prevalent theme across the data. As one participant put it, "The concept of interconnectedness is important; interconnectedness meaning your mind, body, and spirit. It could also mean land, water, air and family. All of those are interconnected. You have to have that kind of vision moving forward rather than being (engaged) in linear thinking". Interconnected thinking involves having a good understanding of what is going on in the community, as well as understanding community history. One participant noted that it's important to "know all of the subtle nuances in community". In particular, half of the participants noted the importance of understanding the role that the Catholic Church played in history of First Nations colonization.

As a part of interconnected thinking, "the ability walk in both worlds", meaning having extensive knowledge of First Nation culture and norms, as well as western culture and norms is important to Carrier leadership. Examples of this were reflected by many of the participants who

noted that dedication to learning was important. When asked for further details on learning, the leaders noted that western ideas hold equal importance to Carrier ideas around higher history and values, and includes higher learning through academia. Knowledge and wisdom from both worlds enables Carrier leaders to think outside of the box and contributes directly to their ability to effectively lead others and see the larger picture. When a leader has the ability to use interconnected thinking to apply to situations, they are able to provide good advice. As one participant put it; “When you are a leader it’s because you provide good guidance. You are there for support”.

Another theme, linking in closely with the preceding theme of interconnected thinking, is for Carrier leaders to have the ability to make good decisions. Specific to decision making, leaders were noted to possess an understanding that “their decisions will affect the entire community”. Effective Carrier leaders were noted to consider the full impacts of their decisions instead of reacting to situations. “They have a considered approach to what the consequences (will be) including long term consequences”. It is important for Carrier leaders to have good decision making abilities.

A few of the participants noted that it is important for Carrier leaders to support others to problem solve vs. providing orders. “I try to get them to think of different scenarios as to what could solve a problem, and the possible outcomes of each, rather than telling them – you should do this, or you should do that. It’s easier to just tell them but that doesn’t help them learn to think for themselves”. Two of the participants noted that helping others to make good decisions is important culturally because there is a basic understanding in Carrier culture that individuals have an inherent free will. It is culturally favorable for Carrier leaders to support collective decision making rather than imposing orders, and therefore limitations to free will.

Discussion

This research, conducted to identify Carrier specific leadership traits and practices, shed light on the importance of specific elements to ensure cultural relevance to the Carrier people. Carrier people define leadership as an equal role in which individuals use their gifts to provide service to their communities and learn how to lead through mentorship, and taking on responsibilities. Specific themes emerged around respect and relationships. Carrier leaders respect others and through their respectful engagement, gain respect from the community. Leaders have a high value for respectful relationships, and are noted to employ excellent listening and communicating skills as well as providing direct feedback to others. They are confident and have the ability to enlist the trust of their community members. Knowledge of Carrier culture, coupled with understanding of western culture and higher education, is also important for Carrier leaders to be effective. Carrier leaders are confident and lead others with conviction for shared goals and outcomes. These leaders set collaborative goals and lead others to achieve them through the use of good decision-making. Carrier leaders employ an interconnected thinking process, which incorporates thinking holistically about all possible outcomes and how it may affect entire communities, or future generations. Finally, it is important for Carrier leaders to support group decision-making rather than imposing orders.

Although the study had some limitations including a smaller sample size, and limited generalizability, the sample size was acceptable for this type of exploratory research. To address common method variance, it would be beneficial to further this research by including interviews with individual community members and teams reporting to Carrier leaders. Future research would expand to a larger group of leaders and employ a quantitative or mixed methods approach to clearly identify traits and practices. Nonetheless, this research is useful for Carrier individuals,

Nations and agencies who want to identify culturally relevant leadership practices and leader traits. The findings will be able to share insights about Carrier leadership and should illuminate pathways to the creation of programs to strengthen leadership for the Carrier people.

Some interesting concepts emerged from the data that would be advantageous to explore further. Two of the participants that hold hereditary chief names noted that there are different kinds of leadership including organizational and clan leadership, which have separate definitions and applications. Additionally, an interesting contradiction exists between the scholarship, and what was reflected in the data. A need for leaders to be spiritual was noted many times in the literature; however, spirituality only emerged as relevant to Carrier leaders in the context of possessing mental, physical, emotional and spiritual balance, and through interconnected thinking by two of the participants. It would be interesting to further explore a possible discrepancy regarding the role of spirituality as it relates to Carrier leadership. It may be advantageous as well for future study to compare results from this research to empirically evidenced leadership practices and theories in mainstream western literature in order to note any commonalities, in particular with servant and authentic leadership styles.

Summary

While individual North American Indigenous cultures are separate and unique, the Carrier people share numerous similarities in their definition and learning of leadership with other Nations. Between the literature review and the data, a shared definition of leadership emerged as individuals who attract followers based on their knowledge and applied skill. Carrier and other North American Indigenous leaders view leadership as a service they provide to their communities, and learn leadership through mentorship. It was noted that leaders must live holistically healthy lives by having balance in mental, physical, emotional and spiritual wellness

to be respected and viewed as a leader. One of the most interesting attributes to leadership to note is that having a balance is a part of what defines someone as a good Carrier leader rather than an action that a leader makes.

Leadership traits shared between the data and the literature review include leaders who emulate respect to others and in turn receive the respect of their followers and greater community. A theme emerged around the importance of relationships for Carrier leaders. Respected leaders are able to develop and maintain healthy relationships with others through good communication skills inclusive of active listening, and resolving conflict. The importance of developing respectful relationships is also evident in the data for leaders to be trustworthy. They are also noted to have an inner confidence and strength, to which others gravitate. Carrier leaders respect others, and through their respectful engagement gain respect from the community. Through respectful engagement as well as demonstrated care and concern for others, Carrier leaders gain respect.

In addition to respect, effective Carrier leaders apply leadership with a high level of passion and conviction for leading others to reach desired outcomes. Passion and conviction ensure a leader is able to stick with a goal until it is fulfilled, no matter how long it takes. The ability to set and achieve shared goals through the use of communication, support is important for Carrier leaders to possess. When goals are created collaboratively, and clearly outlined with the needed steps for achievement, the results are favorable outcomes. Good communication skills are a requirement for Carrier leaders so they can share information clearly with many different stakeholders, actively listen, facilitate conflict resolution, and provide advice. A leader's ability to achieve goals enhances their trustworthiness, and contributes to her or his level of respect in the community. The most surprising theme regarding a leadership skill to emerge

from the data was for leaders to provide on the spot, very direct and respectful feedback. Passion and conviction along with skills to collaboratively set and achieve goals are important skills for Carrier leaders.

The ability to walk in both worlds, with a clear understanding of Carrier culture and western thought, is important for Carrier leaders. Cultural awareness and knowledge enables leaders to have a clear understanding of community needs and ethos and enables a leader to make effective leadership decisions. Without cultural knowledge, leaders are not able to identify and manage issues within the community appropriately. Cultural knowledge is noted as holding equal importance to western knowledge. Carrier leaders must possess an understanding of western ideals, thoughts theories and systems in order to lead effectively. Some of the ways leaders can enhance their ability to navigate both worlds are through academia, spending time in the community and participating in cultural events. It is important to note that culture must be lived and experienced.

Interconnected thinking and effective decision making are important skills for a Carrier leader to possess. The use of interconnected thinking enables leaders to see all the angles of any given situation. Interconnected thinking enables leaders to make good decisions for their organizations and communities. The ability to set and achieve goals is directly linked to interconnected thinking. This ability ensures that understanding the history, which affects the situation, as well as the long term consequences are considered. Finally, the practice of collaborative decision making and leading by persuasion rather than by authority was revealed as important to ensure that the inherent free will of others is not compromised.

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