BUILDING OUR INNER FIRES: GIKINOO'AMAADIWIN (GAINING KNOWLEDGE) WITH FIRST NATION LEADERSHIP

by

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Miigwechiwendam

(s/he is thankful, is grateful)

To Shkagamik-Kwe (mother earth), my mother, Michelle Ray, without you, none of this would be possible, gizaagin (I love you).

To my great-grandparents, John and Sophie Ray—because of your strength and courage, I am who I am today – gi makwenmin (I remember you).

To my grandparents, Sylvester and Rosie Ray—Miigwetch, for showing me that we always look after family regardless of what happens in life - Gi meznin (I miss you).

To my best friend, Dad, I am beyond grateful for the guidance and teachings you have given to me personally and professionally; above all, miigwetch for your time. Time is the greatest gift one can give, and you've given a lifetime of yours. Miigwetch for your leadership. Chum, gananaaasowaabmin (I admire you).

Maddie, your wisdom is well beyond your years. You teach me to grow, and you are my daily inspiration. To say I love you is an understatement; your spirit is beautiful —Nskaaktoon n'wiijkewenming (I treasure our connection).

To Chris, you are my soulmate in every definition of the term. You make me a better version of myself every day, and I am so grateful for your unconditional love and support. To walk this physical path with you is my greatest honour—N'odenh gdwaan (you have my heart).

Maaminonendam

(s/he thinks about, considers, realizes, notices something)

I gratefully acknowledge the dedication of the Aki, as the Land is truly our first leader. To the knowledge-keepers that shared in this learning—your advice, wisdom, bravery, and laughter that was given to this learning was good medicine. My community and family of Flying Post First Nation. The opportunity for me to learn was always supported and appreciated more than words. To my Miikana and Noojimo Circles, I am grateful to serve both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to generate meaningful collaborative work—our work truly is a gift.

To the many Indigenous athletes, mentors, and scholars that I have had the opportunity to look up to and stand beside over the years including my drum group, I would need another dissertation to name you all—you know who you are, and you have truly shaped me as an Anishinaabe Kwe. To Nipissing University, you allowed me the flexibility to have my education work for me. I could never have imagined becoming an academic—Miigwetch for creating space for me. To my advisors, Dr. Parr, you supported me from my first class. I will be forever grateful for your commitment to learning and unlearning and your ability to help me push so many boundaries. Dr. Peltier, your brilliance is humbling, and your way is kind. Your guidance has been impactful not only on this learning but also for my life journey. Miigwetch.

To my committee, I will be forever grateful for your kind support. Dr. Pitawanakwat, your honesty and integrity are something I admire and value. Dr. Scheffel, your kindness and ability to weave a story is humbling. To Dr. Absolon, this process started our journey together—Miigwetch for being there through every step; you have become family to me.

Abstract:

Dibaajimowin

A story.

Gikinoo'amaadiwin (gaining knowledge) is a critical concept in life; sharing knowledge with others and giving time is arguably the greatest gift that one can give to another. I would, therefore, like to acknowledge the Elders, Chiefs, and Senior Administrators who shared with me their knowledge from the Wabun Tribal Council communities; without them, none of this would be possible. The overall purpose of this journey was to learn about their experiences in First Nations elected governance to develop recommendations for supporting current First Nations leaders and newcomers moving forward. This learning, undertaken by me as an Anishinaabe researcher, gathered the knowledge shared from Elders, senior administration, and current Chiefs to support them during their time in political office. As Anishinaabe people, we are born into a political and research world that requires we acknowledge our location within the context of inquiry. I, therefore, acknowledge that I grew up as a daughter of a First Nation Chief, and I am a professional consultant. I have the privilege of an inside view, both personally and professionally, of how politics within First Nation communities operate. I have observed the wholistic (emotional, physical, mental and spiritual) nuances experienced by political leaders over their lifetimes.

My search, inquiry, and dissertation journey are framed by a metaphorical framework of building a fire. The significance of my work roots in generating Indigenous Knowledge and in considering its practical application and relevance to Indigenous leadership. This work contributes to the design of a leadership program for the Chief, Council, and senior

administration that can be used within Wabun Tribal Council or other First Nations, as they deem relevant. Specific implications for learning are offered for individuals, community members, as well as the First Nations governance circle.

Keywords:

First Nations leadership, First Nations governance, First Nations leadership development, First Nations learning, Indigenous research methodologies.

Conceptual and Organizational Framework

My ancestors and family are all storytellers. Richard Ray baa (personal communication, October 4, 2019) shared with me that, for generations, "a campfire was not just a place for warmth—it was a place to gather, share stories, and learn." Perhaps it is for this reason that during the winter of 2016, I had a vision of building a fire to explain my proposed learning journey. This vision came from my spirit, and I acknowledge this as a gift. Absolon (2022) discusses that some Indigenous people have a wholistic understanding of vision as a gift and that we can see all of life (p. 122).

In November 2017, I sat with a knowledge keeper to discuss this vision. Holding my Semaa (translated to tobacco in English) in my left hand (closest to my heart), I expressed that I had been visualizing my learning journey as a fire. I wondered if this was because many of the most memorable teachings I had received had been around a fire. My use of fire to conceptualize my learning journey differs from its use in the traditional firekeeper teachings for Indigenous men and in the Creation story. I use the knowledge that I have been given about building a fire to serve as a reminder that Indigenous knowledge is not static and is very much alive (Absolon, 2011; Wilson, 2008). As Anishinaabe people, we should "trust our instincts and remember our teachings" (R. Spade, Obakamikang, personal communication, November 2017).

This vision serves as both a metaphor and a conceptual framework for this learning journey. Metaphors have been well used in academic research, often shaping inquiries and projects into stories (Campbell, Parr, & Richardson, 2009; Peltier, 2015; Rheault, 1999; Wilson, 2008).

Early on in this academic journey, I was invited by my professors Dr. Michelann Parr (my co-supervisor) and Dr. Susan Elliott-Johns to reflect on a few questions, including the goals for PhD students in Educational Sustainability at Nipissing University:

> Educational Sustainability means that within the program, students and faculty members will be asking questions that take into account the social context in which we live and consider the ways in which the world is interrelated. (Nipissing University, 2022, para 3)

As an Indigenous academic, I could not think of a more inclusive and relevant approach to learning since the foundation of my worldview is that everything is relational and, therefore, connected. My co-supervisor, Dr. Cindy Peltier (2015), shared a similar experience during her PhD process:

> I found it difficult to frame my thinking and work within existing models or theoretical frameworks, since they were based predominantly on Western academic theory. Due to the subject matter, I was determined to ground this work in Anishinaabe teachings, and to ensure every aspect of this work remained congruent with an Anishinaabe worldview, ontology and epistemology, that is, within the Indigenous research paradigm. (p. 39)

As an Indigenous scholar, I have been inspired to think, speak, and act from the centre of our Indigenous being, our culture, and our ways of life (Absolon; 2011; Dumont, 2002; Simpson, 2014; Wilson, 2008). Congruent with an Anishinaabe worldview, my ways of knowing, being, and doing are wholistic and interdependent; the theoretical and methodological approaches applicable to my learning journey are often woven together uniquely. Throughout the dissertation, I explain my ways of knowing, being, and doing in a way that readers can fully experience (regardless of their lens). I invite you to gather around my campfire, listen to the story

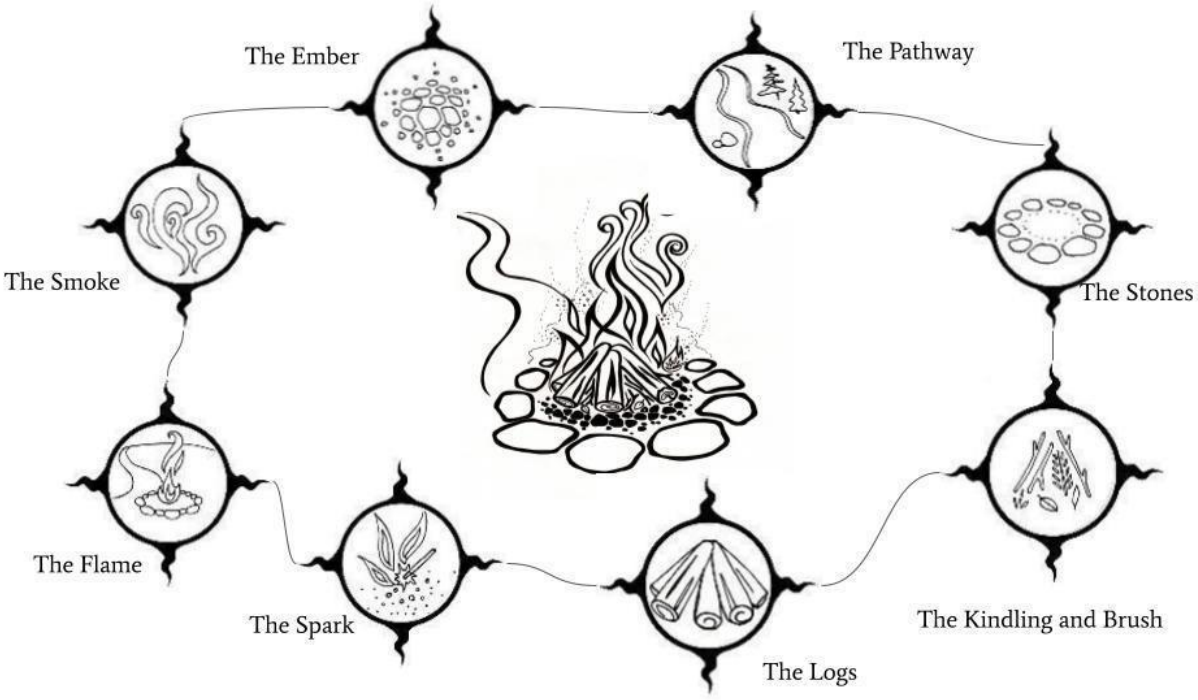
I am about to tell, and learn from various others who willingly shared knowledge of practices to support elected and administrative First Nations leaders.

A Guide to Navigating This Learning Journey

Being around a fire is something that has always connected with me wholistically. I can feel my heart, mind, body, and spirit just as the fire has many elements to it. As I reflected on my vision, I began to connect and translate these elements into a framework. The fire as a framework has offered me a pathway to embody an Indigenous search methodology. Figure 1 contains a visual representation of how I conceptualized the fire as it was gifted to me and later represented by Anishinaabe artist Jennifer Taback (Shawanaga First Nation) and her team at Design dePlume.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Note: Image was created by Anishinaabe artist Jennifer Taback (Shawanaga First Nation) and her team at Design dePlume.

As my learning journey progressed, I thought more deeply and conceptualized what is meant by each individual component of the fire. While the fire serves as the conceptual and organizational framework for my learning journey, its individual components serve as section headings of the dissertation as described below.

The Pathway. My story and what led me to this particular place, this specific learning journey.

The Stones. My ways of being as an Anishinaabe learner. Values, ethics, and worldview that ground this learning and serve as foundation and protector.

The Kindling and Brush. My ways of knowing. Indigenous Intelligence. Western influence.

The Logs. My ways of doing. The methods. Added to the fire as it grows. The approach used to gather the stories. The way meaning is made.

The Spark. Ignited only when the stones, kindling and brush, and logs are prepared in a good way. The question and motivators that drive this learning.

The Flame. Individual stories generated from the knowledge-sharer's wisdom. Minwaajimo: s/he tells good news, tells a good story.

The Smoke. A billowing, collective recommendation formed of all the knowledge that was gifted.

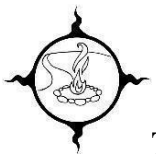
The Ember. The knowledge that is transferred to leaders for generations to come.

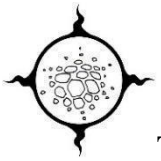
In this dissertation, I share this gift of fire with you so that you may come to understand how I made sense of this journey as I captured the stories of the knowledge-sharers. Throughout the journey, I came to understand intimately that each component is essential and that one does not work without the other. Without careful preparation, patience, and tending, I would not have truly experienced the fire for what it is—a beautiful, warm, and relational experience.

To my readers, I offer that the choice of how to experience this journey is yours. If you like to do things in a linear way, then follow the steps I took to build the fire. If you would like to jump right into feeling the warmth of the fire, I encourage you to begin with the flame (the stories) and then work your way around the rest of the steps. There is no right or wrong way to explore this learning - it is intended to be an experience that is unique to you.

Enjoy, and stay warm!

Navigating This Learning Journey





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The Pathway

My story and what led me to this particular place, this specific learning journey.

Biindigen—Welcome!

Aanii, Boozhoo, Giiwedin Noodin Kwe'dizhinikaaz. Flying Post miinwa N'swakamok n'doonjibaa. I have been taught that situating oneself is critical when beginning one's learning journey (Absolon, 2022; Kovach, 2010b). I respectfully start by acknowledging Akinoomaage (Borrows, 2014) from whom we all benefit and who has also been described as our first true leader (Kenny & Fraser, 2012). This Anishinaabe word, when translated, has two root words: aki and noomaage. "'Aki' means earth, including all aspects of Creation, "and 'noomaage' means to point towards and take direction from" (Borrows, 2014, p. 10). It has been said that the Land is our greatest teacher and shows us that "just as it is unthinkable within an Nishnaabeg worldview for a leader to impose their will on their people, it is unthinkable to impose an agenda onto another living thing" (Simpson, 2014, p. 10).

I acknowledge and thank my ancestors, grandparents, parents, family, friends, Elders, educators, coaches, colleagues, and mentors, as well as the plant and animal creatures who have shaped my worldview throughout my journey. I accept this as my journey and recognize that tremendous variation exists within Indigenous Knowledges or knowledge systems; each Indigenous person may have diverse teachings and learnings from the settlers who came to our lands (Turner & Simpson, 2008). When discussing comprehensive knowledge systems, I use the term Indigenous as it is currently understood in the broader Canadian society. Whenever

possible, I will use language that is preferred by the people sharing their stories (e.g., First Nation, Anishinaabemowin, Ojibwe) or the scholars whose words I honour.

I have chosen to refer to my research as a learning journey as I am an Anishinaabe learner striving for more profound knowledge. In my understanding of Indigenous worldviews, there is no end to the journey, and learning is lifelong (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). My learning is a process, and I remain open to the teachings and learnings that occur; I also accept these as a part of my ceremony (Wilson, 2008). I draw on the work of one of my committee members, Dr. Kathy Absolon (2011), to describe how I view myself in relation to this learning: "We (as Indigenous people) understand that knowledge is power and our search for knowledge constitutes a search for power. Indigenous searching is about being personal, political, and responsible for creating change" (p. 55). When learning and sharing knowledge, I find that the extraction of the elements that make up Indigenous paradigms are difficult to explain in isolation because they are so very interconnected (Peltier, 2015).

In my view, there are a number of paths we can take to locate our learning, many of which are interrelated and interdependent. Through this dissertation, you will come to see that my paradigm is not separate from who I am; it is grounded by my ways of being, knowing, and doing—my way of life (Absolon, 2010; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Peltier, 2015; Wilson, 2008). This is all captured by the metaphor of fire, which has a purpose and a spirit, and exists within Creation. Below, I will share a bit about my ancestors, who shaped who I am today, as well as a bit about myself and what brought me to this specific learning path.

Aanikoobijiganag: John and Sophie Ray

To understand how I see the world, it is necessary that you know my story (Absolon, 2011). I am shaped by my past experiences and those of my ancestors. I am a member of Flying

Post First Nation, and my ancestors travelled from the Groundhog and Nat Rivers in Northern Ontario (Absolon, 2011) and landed off the shores of Lake Superior in a place called Gurney Point. My great-grandfather, John Ray, was a skilled trapper and my great-grandmother, Sophie Ray, was the matriarch of their home. Both my great-grandparents spoke their traditional language of Ojibwe and proudly shared their knowledge with their thirteen children. In the stories I was told, Gurney was a place full of laughter, love, and prosperity. Their home was not far from the CN railway, which made it easy to make it to town for essentials; I was told that their home was essentially self-sustaining and the place to be. In the early 1930s in Northwestern Ontario, Indian agents[1] collected children to attend residential schools. There are many stories of how my great-grandparents, John and Sophie Ray, managed to keep their 13 kids protected from the Indian agents. They were always physically there when the Indian agent came; from what I understand, my great-grandfather was very intimidating—even more so, with a gun.

My great-grandparents spent a lot of time teaching their children and grandchildren their ways of knowing being and doing; everything served a purpose. My grandfather, Sylvester baa was groomed from a very young age by his father and spent several months a year working the trapline and ensuring food for the rest of the family.

My father shares fond memories of all the children and grandchildren gathering together at Gurney every Sunday—sharing food, laughter, and often dancing (one thing the Rays love to do). I will be forever grateful for my great-grandparents who proudly lived their Ojibwe way of life, speaking their language and raising their children to know who they were as strong Ojibwe people. The stories shared with me tell me that, in the early 1960s, the Ray family was one of the

[1] Indian agents were facilitators in implementing the Indian Act. Duties varied according to shifts in policy emphasis, geography, the degree of resistance on the part of Indians under their control, and a variety of other local ecological, political, and economic conditions (Satzewich, 1997).

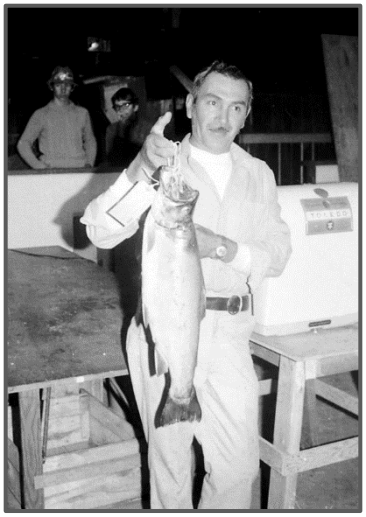
bigger families in Nipigon, but they did not live on the reserve. My great-aunts and great-uncles who did attend school shared with me that, at that time, it was more strategic to avoid sharing that they were Indian because when they did, they were faced with racism. My grandfather, Sylvester baa did, however, feel it was important for his children to have a formal education and strongly encouraged his children to attend school. My dad recalls that as the "only Indians" in class, he and his siblings were often mistreated. I empathize with my family and appreciate how very difficult it was for them to navigate the complexities of colonialism as it happened around and to them. I have a great deal of respect for my ancestors and family for making strategic decisions that shaped our family history and brought us to where we are today.

As will become evident in the stories below, the seeds of my moral compass, my values, and my appreciation for storytelling were sown by the matriarch and patriarch of my family.

Mishomis: Sylvester Ray

Figure 2

Sylvester Ray



Note: Image is used by permission from Ray family records

Born in a blueberry patch in September 1934, my grandfather (see Figure 2) lived his entire life in the bush, and there is nothing he loved more. He was an absolute legend in the bush and could read a trail or a lake and knew the routes of the fish and animals all over the 'north shore' (a term my father uses to describe the communities along the shores of Lake Superior from Red Rock to Marathon). On any given day, during any season, you could find him sharply dressed in his work pants with long johns underneath and a boiled egg or two in his pocket. For more than four generations, I have heard countless stories of my grandfather's ability to hunt and gather for our family; honestly, it seems that each time we are around the campfire, I hear a new story of my grandfather's legendary status in the bush. My favorite thing about my grandfather is that he could tell a great story. Growing up, I couldn't wait to return home to visit him and hear a new one. I often had to ask him to slow down because I never quite understood where "whatchamacallit" was or which "whosermacallit" he was actually talking about.

But there is one story, from 1977, that has always stood out: As he told it, my grandpa had been calling a particular moose for days. He had followed its tracks and called each morning and night. He had a plan for this moose.

From what I understand, as a "youngin," my dad was a little late to the hunting party in this story; he was barely eighteen at the time. To be fair, I would argue that he was set up: my Uncles Bino and Smiley could spot a moose with their eyes closed and Uncle Gawa was quicker on the trigger than either of them. My grandpa said that my Aunts Diane and Penny Ann teased my father so much that he knew he finally had to do something about it.

In the wee hours of the morning, my grandpa dragged my dad out of bed and brought him to a spot he had obviously been scouting for days. As the story goes, he looked straight into his

eyes and drew an X on the dirt road and told him, as he pointed, that the moose would be right there. He then picked up his gun and disappeared into the bush.

In what my dad describes to be an eternity later, he heard the ruffling of leaves and twigs breaking in the bush. All of a sudden, my grandpa yelled, "He's coming—get ready!" Just as he predicted, the moose ran out directly onto the road and stopped right on top of the X marked in the dirt. Now this part may be embellished, but . . . my dad claims that he calmly aimed at the moose, fired, and shot it right between the eyes. My grandpa always told me that regardless of how many clips it took, he was incredibly proud that my dad shot his first moose that day.

This story always resonated with me, as my grandpa was able not only to demonstrate his confidence, skill, and brilliance but also to show his son (and his other children) that if they were determined to do something, they could do it. This teaching, passed to and through my father, has shaped me since I was a little child (as has his other grandchildren), and I will forever be grateful to him for that.

The night my grandfather journeyed to the spirit world, I spent my night in my waffle long johns, re-reading the countless papers I've written about him, looking at old photos, boiling eggs, and sharing stories about him with my husband and daughter. The next morning, I surprisingly woke up before sunrise, went down to the water with my Semaa, and started chatting to him. As I sat there watching the tide wash in, I was not surprised at all to look over and see that there was a little X drawn in the sand. This symbol, which I knew came from him, was an assurance that he would always watch over me and a reminder to blindfold visiting family and friends—just to make sure they don't know how to find our secret fishing spots.

My grandfather spoke his traditional language of Ojibwe and learned English through conversation with settlers. He did not attend a formal school yet was one of the most strategic,

thoughtful, and intentional people I've ever met. It feels good to know that despite the fact that my grandfather was not literate in the English language, he had a very successful life filled with adventures, happiness, and love. In the years before he passed, he would often ask me, "Are you a doctor yet?" Sheepishly, I would always share, "Oh, no, not yet Grandpa." The year before he passed, he asked me about what I was learning. I shared with him a little bit about my thoughts. He responded with, "You know the saying 'we should dismantle the master's house with the master's tools,'" to which I replied, "Yes." Then he shared, "I have been thinking about that more thoughtfully, and it should be our tools (meaning our Indigenous ways of doing)." I will forever be grateful for that teaching on that day on the back of his pickup truck while cleaning pickerel. For many reasons, our family language of Anishinaabemowin stopped with him. But whenever I see an Eagle soar above, I know in my heart that he is happy and proud; our family is transitioning back to our ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Nookimis: Rosie Ray

Figure 3

Rosie Ray

Note: Image was taken by me during one of our last visits at her home in Nipigon, Ontario.

My grandmother, Rosie Ray (see Figure 3), was nothing short of a legend herself. Rosie had a remarkable way of always getting her point across without burning any bridges, and her warm smile always made people feel at home. Most of her life was spent in the bush or on the lake, and I loved hearing stories about the near shipwreck adventures she had on Lake Nipigon with my late papa, Frank, my grandmother's 'boyfriend' for over 25 years. During my early twenties, my grandma and I spent a lot of time together, and I was fortunate not only to learn from her wisdom during these formative years but also to develop a true friendship filled with love, laughter, and (almost always blunt) guidance. She had an admirable, humble, and brilliant approach to life.

Grandma Rosie loved to have people around. Her home was the spot where all her kids and their friends gathered and visited; this was probably because her cooking was renowned. Her moose meat, porridge, rabbit pie, and pickerel may have been the top dishes on the North Shore! Growing up, most kids were excited for Santa to come. For the Ray grandkids, Santa had nothing on Rosie! We always looked forward to a new pair of Grandma's wool socks or mitts, and a moose heart and plum pudding every Christmas.

Rosie continued to thrive for over four years after being diagnosed with terminal cancer. After the doctor told her to get her affairs in order, she had a "little cry" (her words) and then made her only request, which was that she hoped our family could get together in the fall for our annual hunt. Over the next four years, our family shared amazing memories as we hunted and fished with her at Frank's Landing. Rosie was living proof that with a positive outlook and a little

love, you can overcome just about anything with which you set your mind. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she even managed to figure out how to have one last virtual beer with my family.

I will never forget the sunrise on the morning that she passed; I'm sure it rose beautifully that morning just to see her smile. The lake was perfectly still, so I put on my grandma's old jacket and headed down to the water to pray for her; as I put my Semaa in the water, it was gratefully accepted and floated north (as I knew it would). One piece lingered close by and reminded me of our visits, when I would stop for a quick visit and end up staying the whole day. Rosie was loved beyond words, and the Rays will always be grateful for her unconditional love, positive outlook, and resilience. My grandma demonstrated many of the qualities often attributed to strong, resilient Indigenous women. Over four generations, we have gathered around the campfire, hearing new (and old) stories about the strength, courage, and intelligence of my family and ancestors.

Locating Myself on the Path

My paternal family is well known in the community of Nipigon; someone who mentions knowing a 'Ray' will often be caught up in a never-ending story. My mother, Michelle (née Langevin) is of mixed settler French and Ukrainian descent. She is the oldest of five; before she met my father, at age 16, she helped to raise two younger sets of twins in a Catholic-dominant home. My parents were married in the early 1980s. At that time, the Government of Canada issued status cards to non-Indigenous women who married a status Indian (McIvor, 1996). My mother was, therefore, given status and is a registered Indian. I was born in 1987 and registered as a status Indian, per the Indian Act, Chapter 27, Statutes of Canada (1985). I was raised in the small community of Red Rock, on the shores of Lake Superior, with my parents and my biological brother, Ryan. Our home was small but always full of people; everyone felt

comfortable, and my parents were very welcoming towards our friends. The town is surrounded by mountains, bush, and trees, and is nestled on the shores of Lake Superior. There is only one way in and out of town. I spent my childhood building forts, swimming in the big lake they call Gitche Gumee (Lake Superior), climbing mountains, and enjoying the wilderness. The community was an athlete's dream; we had a hockey arena, baseball diamond, swimming pool, beach-volleyball courts, a gym, a basketball court, a tennis court, fields to play soccer in, and a group of friends who were always up to do anything. Our community had no stoplights, no malls, and no commercial entertainment, but it had so much more than I could have asked for as a young Anishinaabe Kwe discovering who I was. The community feel of Red Rock is difficult to describe; my friend Stephanie Baker once eloquently stated that "Red Rock is thicker than blood," alluding to the bonds the small community's people shared by virtue of the relationships that the families had built over time. There is no doubt that growing up in Red Rock gave me the heart I needed to move forward in a good way; it also helped shelter me from the sometimes-unsettling world I would later begin to understand, analyze more thoughtfully, and strategically begin to decolonize. My friends are the family I have chosen, and they and their families are the reason I am where I am today. I will be forever grateful for their care, love, guidance, and support.

Growing up, my dad's family spent a lot of time on land near Gurney Point, which we have inhabited since the early 1930s. My dad always included me in our traditions of hunting and fishing; wherever he went, I went. I remember when I was a little girl, my dad would "spring me" from school, and I would spend a week hunting with my Ray family. To this day, my family gathers in early fall for the annual hunt in our territory to ensure we have enough moose and fish to feed our large extended family through the winter months. By the time I was 8 years old, I felt

a strong connection to the Land. I could hunt, fish, and build a fire on my own, and I had both the freedom and ability to navigate the bush and trails independently. I had a strong sense of direction and the confidence to communicate and share stories with all members of our community from a young age, and I feel a great deal of gratitude for that.

Although I always knew I was an Anishinaabe (when I was younger, we would be referred to as 'Indians' as per the Indian Act), and as you can tell my connection to the Land has always been strong, my connection to culture had never been nourished. Sport, which has always helped me to maintain my balance, is what led me to learning more about my Indigeneity. When I was thirteen, my cousin and I were recruited to play in the Little NHL[2] hockey tournament. Our tournament coaches taught us about the medicine wheel, as well as a little bit of Ojibwe culture, and for the first time, I felt a sense of pride at being connected with many of my own people in a positive way. I attribute sport to getting me through elementary and high school; the coaches I had made learning fun, and even when I struggled academically (which was often), sport was my motivator to show up.

In terms of my educational experience, I often describe myself as a pracademic (blend of practical and academic). Although I was accepted into multiple universities, I chose a college program at Cambrian College to ease my way into academics, because at the time I did not see myself within the university academy. The program I chose had an articulation agreement with Laurentian University; in retrospect, my intentional transition to post-secondary education was a good and strategic decision. During my first semester of university, I took my first Indigenous course, which was taught by my first ever First Nations professor, Ghislaine Goudreau. When I joined G's class, it was like a switch flipped on: I was no longer in the dark. I will never forget

[2] The Little NHL is a hockey tournament exclusive to First Nation youth and communities in Ontario.

the feeling I had when that spark was lit within me. I started to understand the reasons my family never talked about residential schools; the beauty of my Anishinaabe traditions; the real history of Canada; and the strength of my ancestors. Empowered, ignited, inspired, and (now) a bit more formally educated, I breezed through my undergraduate and master's degrees in less than four years. Unlearning and relearning sparked my strong desire to foster more thoughtful relationships with my grandparents, aunties, uncles, and extended family. For the first time in my life, I began to see academia as a space for me as an Anishinaabe Kwe. Having the opportunity to learn—in both a natural environment and Western institutions—about Indigenous interdependent and wholistic relationships with all of Creation was something I viewed as a privilege. I have been so humbled to have many teachers, coaches, friends, family, mentors, and colleagues in my life.

Over the past decade, I have assumed leadership roles with education and health organizations working to address systemic racism. As an Oshkaabewis (helper), I have supported First Nations organizations in educational initiatives, business development, and community enhancement. During my PhD studies, I reconnected with my (now) partner, met my beautiful daughter, moved homes (twice), was recruited to two exciting roles (both provincially and nationally), was married, travelled as part of a family, completed a triathlon, coached elite hockey and soccer, and survived a global pandemic. In 2019, my partner and I incorporated two consulting firms that support both First Nations communities and non-Indigenous businesses; our goal is to enhance and/or build capacity through strategies, projects, programs, education, and the use of research-based evidence. In 2021, we also founded Noojimo Health, an all-Indigenous led and operated virtual mental-health clinic that provides counselling support to Indigenous people.

As my family has evolved over the years, I could not be more grateful. Four amazing matriarchs surround me, three father figures, three brothers, four brothers-in-law, five sisters-in-law, countless nieces and nephews, and a framily of neighbours who shape the way I approach life in the best possible way each and every day.

The most unique connection to this learning is that for much of my life (the past twenty-six or so years), my father (who is my mentor and best friend) has been the Chief of my First Nation, Flying Post. From an early age, I watched him grow as a person and as a Chief, and I have had an inside view of how First Nations' politics operate at local, tribal council, provincial, and national levels. As I gained more understanding of history, ongoing colonialism, political systems, business development, and institutional and relational racism, he and I always found the time to work through (and live with) the implications of those ongoing processes. I have attempted several times to describe our relationship, but my words never do justice to the depth and intricacies of our bond. Being the daughter of the Chief often puts me in a difficult situation, as my passion to improve First Nations' politics can put me in conflict with my own family. As a community member, I have often asked difficult questions and shared my conflicting perspective, which has always been met with respect and dignity. Most importantly though, as a daughter, I have always been treated as a daughter. The strength of our relationship speaks to the amount of truth that can be told and to our deep respect for each other's truths.

In early 2019, I was contracted to support Wabun Tribal Council and build capacity through my consulting company. Many of the First Nations within Wabun Tribal Council do not have the capacity to meet the demand of the work because the Chief, Council, and administration often have multiple responsibilities and roles and, often, other jobs. Through my consulting work, I have gained insight into some of the challenges faced by all six of the First Nations

communities serviced by the Wabun Tribal Council. I acknowledge that the questions for this learning journey emerged in a collaborative and relational way—from the communities in which I serve and from myself as a learner. I recognize that in this process I am an inside knowledge seeker. As a member of the Wabun Tribal Council, I have responsibilities to the community beyond those of an outside researcher (Peltier, 2015). It is, therefore, my intention to present the information in this dissertation in a way that will be respectful to the people who have participated as well as community members and future leaders.

As an Anishinaabe Kwe, I depend on the strength of my ancestors, knowledge from Indigenous scholars, and traditional teachings to recognize the vitality of Indigenous worldviews, realities, and knowledge to do this proactive learning (Absolon; 2011; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). My way of being emerges from my understanding that Indigenous worldviews are dynamic, and that paradigms, like the wind, can shift (Absolon, 2011). I am guided by the words of my brilliant partner: “At any point in time, you can only give what you know, and it is important to use each day to learn and allow the knowledge to shape your tomorrow” (C. M. Mercer, personal communication, October 9, 2018).

It would take an entire dissertation to talk about how each person in my life has shaped my life in the most positive way. I truly believe that everything happens for a reason. Running on Indian time does not mean being late; rather, it refers to the concept that something will happen when it is meant to in a responsible and accountable way (Absolon, K. personal conversation July 7, 2022). As a result of my upbringing and circle of influencers, I have a strong sense of community and family, and my values are rooted in respect and reciprocity. I am blessed with many teachings that help to balance my mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health, and help me work toward my version of Bimaadiziwin: living a good life in balance with all of

Creation. This learning journey is significant because of where I come from and who I am. I know my ancestors would want our family to be proud of who we are and to honour them by living the Anishinaabe way of life.

Opportunity and Purpose for This Path

The nature of my reality is determined by my way of being and by the relationships I have formed in the past and present, which will, in turn, shape the future (Peltier, 2015; Wilson, 2008). I am aware that as I grow, the lenses through which I view the world will change, and this will impact my worldview (personal communication, M. Parr, July 17, 2018); I have experienced this change throughout my PhD journey. “Theory isn’t just for academics; it’s for everyone” (Simpson, 2014 p. 7). This learning journey is personal: I am searching for truth, freedom, and a way home (Absolon, 2011).

I hope it is clear to the reader that my upbringing and personal experiences drive my passion to support future First Nations Chiefs, leaders, and communities. This journey will be lifelong, as I intend to support First Nations communities throughout my personal and professional life. Part of my intent in seeking knowledge from Elders, administrators, and current First Nations Chiefs about their experiences with First Nations governance is to improve sustainability in leadership for our future First Nations leaders. It is my hope that these stories and this knowledge will help lead First Nations communities to promote Nishnaabeg intelligence which would lead to “self-motivated, self-directed, community-minded, inter-dependent, brilliant, loving citizens, who at their core uphold the ideals around family community and nationhood by valuing their intelligences, their diversity, their desires and gifts and their lived experiences” (Simpson, 2014 p. 23). It is my hope that through conversations, learning, and

training our communities will slowly begin to reclaim our sovereignty and plan for the next seven generations in a way that is meaningful.

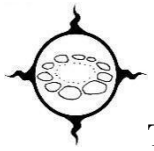
Over the past decade, I have had informal and formal conversations with Elders, former and current Chiefs, council members, and community members about current First Nations leadership, politics, and governance. The dialogue frequently gravitated to a need for clear community direction, education (and, commensurately, opportunity), and leadership development. To further test this perception, I met with the executive director from Wabun Tribal Council, Jason Batise (of Matachewan First Nation, Treaty 9), who expressed "a need for our leaders to develop a clear direction around leadership development for our communities" (personal communication, June 4, 2017). Although knowledge exists around First Nations governance, transfer of this knowledge between Chiefs has been limited (Dion-Arkinson, 2016; Fox 2017; Julien et al., 2010; Ottmann, 2010; Voyager et al., 2015). More importantly, community leaders, Chiefs, and the (now) Grand Chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Derek Fox, (who serves 49 First Nations in Treaty 9) have indicated that "there is a need for more information on developing leadership within the Nishnawbe Aski-Nation, and that this information will help to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of our communities (D. Fox, Treaty 9, personal communication, October 15, 2015). This work is, therefore, guided by the following research question: What are wise ways to support First Nations leaders during their time in elected office?

It is my hope that the learning and teachings shared on First Nations leadership development will inspire action and encourage aspiring First Nations leaders to participate in a lifelong-learning approach. It is also my hope that this learning will engage or re-engage existing First Nations leaders with the concept of ongoing learning. Further, I hope that First Nations

leaders will continue to be role models and continue to positively affect First Nations communities, especially with regards to the lives and education of First Nations children. As Senator Murray Sinclair so powerfully stated “Education got us into this mess and education is what will get us out” (quoted in Watters, 2015).

As a self-proclaimed lifelong learner, it is my fundamental belief that education is a powerful tool that all First Nations across Turtle Island[3] should have access to; with this, we will continue to build capacity within our Nations to generate the leaders for the next seven generations.

[3] For some Indigenous Peoples, Turtle Island refers to the continent of North America. The name comes from various Indigenous oral histories that tell stories of a turtle that holds the world on its back. For some Indigenous Peoples, the turtle is therefore considered an icon of life, and the story of Turtle Island consequently speaks to various spiritual and cultural beliefs (Canadian Encyclopedia, 2017).



The Stones

My ways of being an Anishinaabe learner. Values, ethics, and worldview that ground this learning and serve as foundation and protector.

One Anishinaabe Kwe's Worldview: My Paradigm for This Fire

Traditional knowledge and my family language of Anishinaabemowin have greatly been impacted by colonialism. As an Anishinaabe academic, it is my responsibility to shape, redefine, and explain my position and approach in a way that honours the knowledge I have been gifted (Wilson, 2008). In stating this, I am not alone; a similar sentiment was shared by Absolon (2022):

> The politics of decolonization and Indigenizing is a conscious and necessary part of the search journey. "You don't know what you don't know" is a phrase I find myself repeating over and over. The colonial erasure is evident in what is not present. What I mean is that colonization has attempted to eradicate every aspect of who we are. Evidence of the erasure in education, literature, media, organization and so many other spaces is obvious when you train your eyes to see what is missing. Often Indigenous peoples, Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous input, consultation, and presence are missing. This is the colonial erasure that deeds amnesia and unconscious exclusion. Indigenous everything was erased and replaced with euro-colonial knowledge, values, and beliefs. (p. 19, 20)

As an Indigenous scholar, I accept Absolon's invitation to

> take back control and change the way research is conducted within our communities, peoples, and cultures . . .We now must re-hyphen search: re-search in a manner that restores how we come to know. We are being given the task to re-write and re-right our own realities and truths. (p. 39)

The revitalization of individual Indigenous worldviews is dependent on the knowledge and understanding of the relational concepts and philosophies held by Indigenous Peoples (Brant, 2021). Battiste (2002) believes that languages are the place of instruction and guidance given to our ancestors and to us in visions, experiences, and dreams. My concept of fire came from a vision and was later reinforced through my fasting ceremony.

To situate myself and my theoretical framework, I explain my ontology and epistemology to help you understand where my own worldview comes from. It is important that I shape my worldview and paradigm as my own—"One Anishinaabe Kwe's Worldview"—just as it is important that Anishinaabe people not all be painted with the same brush (Peltier, 2015).

My paradigm comes from a place where knowledge is relational and is shared with all my relations (a term used to acknowledge Creation including the Spirits, the Land, and plant, animal, and human life) as I walk along this journey, we call life (Wilson, 2008 p. 74). In this Indigenous ontology, there are many realities; this bears a similarity to a constructivist paradigm, but the difference is that my reality is always connected through relationships (Wilson, 2008). As a concrete example, the Elders and Knowledge Keepers from Wabun Tribal Council shaped this learning journey long before I formally began; listening to their wisdom and their unique experiences has expanded and contributed to my overall worldview.

My wholistic approach is grounded by my axiology (The Stones: The ethics and morals that guide this learning), informed by epistemology (The Kindling and Brush: What I know and

how I have come to this knowledge), driven by my ontology (The Spark: How I relate to those around me in the physical and spiritual sense), and guided by my methods (The Logs: How I plan to do and share this work; Peltier, 2012, 2015). Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing represent more than just an added perspective; they are grounded and rooted in the understanding of the nature of our existence and how we come to know, which affects our searches for knowledge and reality (Absolon, 2011). The relationships that I have developed are woven through not only my academic journey but also my professional and personal life. Absolon (2010) describes Indigenous knowledge as a lived knowledge that reinforces the need to practice what you know and be what you do; as my mentor shares, "Indigenous knowledge is a way of life" (Absolon, 2010, p. 85). Belief systems are part of who I am and why I do what I do and are intertwined with my way of life; in essence, my ways of being, knowing, and doing (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003) work together to build, tend, nurture, and protect my inner fire as well as what I share in the world with all my relations.

My Debwewin (Truth)

One of my mentors, Conway Fraser, shared with me that the most important thing you can do as a writer and communicator is to share your Debwewin upfront. It is important for me to honour these truths as they provide a summary and overview to the approach of this learning journey:

- The conversation guide and overarching questions were discussed with elected and administrative leadership long before my academic journey with Nipissing University began and it is for this reason that I feel the voice of the people should be honoured first.
- My responsibilities, first, are connections to the knowledge-sharers. Personally, professionally, and academically, I have the privilege of being connected with the people

who shared knowledge in this learning journey. My relationships with both the First Nations and the knowledge-sharers will remain my top priority.

- The people who shared their knowledge were invited using Anishinaabe protocol because of their experience in leadership positions and their connection to their respective communities. Collaborating with Elders, Chiefs (Gimaa) and senior leaders is a great privilege. The people were intentionally approached and consented after being presented with Semaa.
- The approach to learning through meaningful conversations with the people sharing knowledge and approach making meaning was always culturally relevant and the information gathered was presented back to the people who shared their knowledge.
- The stories shared were written individually and as a collection of stories in order to honour both the individual and the collective in their perspectives and advice.
- The stories and knowledge that was shared in this learning journey is intended to transform policy and practice within Wabun Tribal Council First Nation communities.

Way of Being: Ontological Approach

My way of being comes from within; it is part of my spirit. Within an Anishinaabe paradigm, my ontology comes from a place where knowledge is relational (Absolon, 2011; Wilson, 2008); we are part of the world as much as it is a part of us, and this evolves as contexts change (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003).

I am an Anishinaabe Kwe raised with both Indigenous knowledge and Western ways of thinking; when tackling anything in my life, I innately take into consideration my mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. I will spend a lifetime continuing to learn and

understand the dynamics of being an Anishinaabe Kwe in a Western-dominated world, but it is a space where I am increasingly more comfortable and confident.

My ways of being, deeply rooted in relationality, are consistent with Absolon's (2010) Indigenous wholistic theory. As my past, present, and future intersect through this learning journey, I search my roots to restore some of the truth and dignity that was intended for us by the Creator (Absolon, 2011). I intentionally begin with a vision, knowing that this journey has been impacted by my past, and that the way I live my present will directly shape my future. Based on my deep-rooted passion for this learning, I am seeking knowledge and attempting to share stories to reclaim Indigenous knowledge and power (Absolon, 2011).

Way of Being: Axiological Approach

My intent was to create an environment that demonstrated passion, deep spirit, and commitment and that invited people not only to share their stories but also to build a desire to have them heard (Baydala et al., 2006). Wilson (2008) refers to this as *axiology*—the ethics or morals that guide the search for knowledge. The questions Wilson asked guided my interactions: "What part of this reality is worth finding out more about? . . . What is ethical to do to gain this knowledge and what will this knowledge be used for?" (p. 34). I tried to ensure that this learning would be done in a mutually beneficial partnership between myself and the knowledge-sharers. It was always my intent to honour my responsibilities to the communities and to clarify both academic responsibility and social expectations (Dei, 2013, p. 33). Identifying as a "researcher-in-relation" (Kovach, 2010b), I acknowledge that my interactions with each of the knowledge-sharers are ongoing, but I have endeavored to keep my learning journey separate from the professional work I do with and for each First Nation.

The Seven Teachings

The ethical stones that surround my fire reflect my values, which emerge from the Seven Grandfather Teachings as shared by Eddie Benton-Banai (1988).

Nbwaakaawin: To cherish knowledge is to know WISDOM. This entire dissertation is an example of the wisdom that is shared by the people who shared their knowledge. I looked for wisdom from my ancestors, Indigenous scholars and the knowledge keepers all that generated the knowledge in the 'Embers' section of this learning.

Zaagidwin: To know LOVE is to know peace. The love within this learning and within this framework is embedded in all that I do for the communities in which I serve. I speak of my love for this work in 'the pathway' section of this journey.

Mnaadendmowin: To honour all the creation is to have RESPECT. The approach that I have taken always respected first the communities and the people sharing knowledge, the Indigenous scholars who came before me, as well as the process of academia. The 'the kindling and the brush' and the 'logs' sections discuss the respect that I have for this process.

Aakdehewin: BRAVERY is to face the foe with integrity. As an Anishinaabe person, I did not see academia as a place for me. I have stepped into this with discomfort but knowing that this learning and the entire 'pathway' to get me to the place I am with the communities is the connection to this specific work.

Gwekwaadziwin: HONESTY in facing a situation is to be brave. I have shared my truth throughout this learning journey by stating that my priority will always be the communities and the people sharing knowledge. I share this honestly throughout the learning but specifically the 'stones' section.

> **Dbaadendiziwin**: HUMILITY is to know yourself as a sacred part of the creation. I have intentionally walked into this journey vulnerable and accepting of all the teachings that have come my way throughout the entire PhD learning. It has been a journey—and I do believe the process was learning and it is hard to summarize that into a written document. I was humble to share the teachings of the knowledge-sharers in 'the flame' and 'the smoke' sections.
>
> **Debwewin**: TRUTH is to know all of these things. (p. 64). I am grateful to speak my debwewin throughout this entire learning and it is represented throughout the entire learning journey.

I remember when I first learned about the Seven Teachings; I was selected to play for the Fort William First Nation U13 team for the little NHL. Our coach brought a large piece of paper into the dressing room, and it had the Seven Teachings on it. We sat in the room as a team, discussing, one by one, what each of the teachings meant to us as individuals but also as a team. From that point on, I saw the relationship between these teachings and my everyday life; they became the foundation for how I live and continue to guide me daily.

My Commitment as an Anishinaabe Researcher

As we began our journey together, I shared my commitment to these teachings with Elders, administrators, and current Chiefs through the following statement:

> I will respect the diversity in spirituality, beliefs, and values of each of the knowledge-sharers within each of their First Nations communities. I will be clear. I will make the time they are able to share with me a priority. I will respect everyone's individuality and respect their teachings. I will appreciate silence. I will stay aware of the wisdom of Elders. I will appreciate humour as a key teaching tool and continue to laugh. I will be

> honest in the relationship we share. I will ensure that everyone feels purposeful and part of this journey. I will stay humble and ensure it is a good time to meet; I will not be intrusive, and I will always be grateful for their help along my learning journey. I will be a role model for others by speaking the truth, being a part of the process, and respecting my teachings. I will do my best to ensure your truth will translate into action, without causing harm, and that is my truth to you. I will have kindness in my approach to this learning journey. I have a vision and will continue to think ahead for the next seven generations.

The commitment above was adapted from the Noojmowin Teg Health Centre's (2003) *Guidelines for Ethical Aboriginal Research* (pp. 9–11). As a way to remind myself and the knowledge-sharers of my approach to this learning, I felt that it was important to add the five Rs of Indigenous research: relevant, respectful, responsible, and reciprocal learning (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Restoule, 2008; 2019; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2008) to my approach to learning. My advisor, Dr. Cindy Peltier reminded me that, in addition to the 4 Rs, a fifth R was integral to my work: my relationships with the people who influenced this learning in a good way including both my academic circle and the people sharing knowledge (C. Peltier from Wikwemikong Unceded Territory, personal communication on, March 28, 2022).

Relevance

Prior to formalizing my research journey, I consulted with communities to ensure that this approach to learning and sharing aligned with their core priorities. Mindful of the political influences that may impact this learning, I ensured that the content and context would be relevant and useful both to knowledge-sharers and for future leadership. I spoke individually with each person to ensure a localized and community approach, but also endeavored to generalize the

results, making recommendations specific and relevant to the First Nations leadership context in northern Ontario.

Respect

A strong level of trust and mutual respect was built over years and decades through personal and professional relationships with the people who shared their knowledge. Without trust, the conversations would not have been as engaging and the stories would not be told in the same way. I am a member of Wabun Tribal Council and over the past twenty-five years, I have enjoyed the privilege of informal and formal relationships with most of the knowledge-sharers. I collaborate professionally with the communities within the Wabun Tribal Council and am invested in the community and the people, which speaks to my ongoing commitment and respect. Over the past fifteen years, I have been supported personally and professionally by the Executive Director of Wabun Tribal Council and Chiefs around the governance table. I have been encouraged to have further discussions with their Elders, council members, staff, and community members. Indigenous research works best when there is no separation of the researcher from the researched—this approach helps to create a community of learners with shared responsibilities about the goal, purpose, ethics, and values of social research (Dei, 2013, p. 36). Minkler and Wallerstein (2003) state that community-based research is strengthened when the researcher comes from the community. In addition, Indigenous scholars note that when Indigenous researchers are part of the community being researched, they may not require the same level of "relationship development" as there is a level of comfort and familiarity established already (Kovach, 2010b; Peltier, 2015). In addition to this, I do have a deeper relational accountability and my commitment to ethics will continue well beyond this specific learning journey.

Responsibility

Knowledge-sharers were assured that the information they provided would be kept confidential, and they were also offered the choice to be named or use pseudonyms (which they all chose) (Kovach, 2010a). Consent was respectfully negotiated in compliance with university protocols, and Semaa was offered as part of my Anishinaabe protocols. The knowledge gathered through story was shared with them throughout the process to honour my responsibility to the learning. I also highlighted essential parts of Chapter 9 of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (TCPS2): "Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans: Research Involving First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada" (Panel on Research Ethics, 2018). Initially, I used the information from Article 9.13, which outlines the importance of strengthening capacity, ensuring that research is relevant to community needs and priorities, benefits the participating community, and extends the boundaries of knowledge. After obtaining REB ethics approval through Nipissing University, at the beginning of the Indigenous community-engagement process, I ensured the privacy and confidentiality of participants and discussed this with the communities, Elders, administrators, and Chiefs, as outlined in Article 9.16. It is also important to note that the Indigenous Community-Engagement process at Nipissing University, developed by the late Dr. John Long, is a separate, intentional process intended to ensure that research done with Indigenous Peoples and communities is done in a way that aligns with my Anishinaabe ethics and values. As part of my collaborative learning approach, I discussed intellectual-property considerations with my advisors and the people sharing knowledge (Article 9.18). It was determined that I would keep the stories and knowledge safe at my home office for a minimum of five years. To ensure safety and confidentiality, the participants' information, along with my summary notes, transcriptions, and recordings were stored in password-protected files.

Reciprocity

The learning generated is intended to overturn some colonial ways of thinking and doing. I anticipate that this work will create more space for Indigenous Knowledges, and each of the knowledge-sharers has contributed to the space of new learning. Throughout the process, I was available and responded respectfully to any additional questions. I developed and maintained a relationship with each person, sharing their wisdom and honouring them. Our shared conversations were filled with honesty, laughter, integrity, compassion, and gratitude. I prepared a small gift for each of the knowledge-sharers to recognize the greatest honour one can give—one's time.

Relationships—My Academic Circle

Absolon (2011) states that academic support is essential for Indigenous searchers who are committed to their personal and professional projects and who focus on Indigenous methodologies within the academy. I am grateful that Dr. Absolon guided me wholistically throughout this journey as one of my committee members. I offered her Semaa at my home while blueberry picking—a methodology she uses in her own academic work. My academic circle is composed of three Anishinaabe academics (knowledge carriers) and two incredible allies who carry tremendous gifts and provide thoughtful insights. I presented each of my committee members with Semaa when I invited them to join me on this learning journey. Their compassion, understanding, and commitment have created space for me within the more formal constraints of academia.

During my comprehensive exams, I had been struggling with separating my theory and my methods because—as is evident throughout this dissertation—my ways of doing, being, and knowing are relational. I attempted to separate the two to fit the process and was requested by

my committee and external evaluators to resubmit (two weeks before my wedding—eek!). I sat down with my two co-supervisors and shared my struggle to separate my ways of being, knowing, and doing. Dr. Parr insightfully asked, "Why are you trying so hard to do it if it doesn't fit within your paradigm and worldview?" This was an important lesson for me; it was at this point that I began to weave my comprehensive questions together and generate a story that would be successfully received. My reality as an Anishinaabe student was that I was constantly struggling to separate my thoughts to fit within Euro western colonial approaches until I realized in the fourth year of my journey that I no longer had to. As an Anishinaabe student, it was important to me that, within academia, Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing were not only accepted but encouraged and supported.

Relationships: Knowledge-Sharers

The knowledge-sharers began guiding this learning journey long before it formally commenced with Nipissing University, and they are foundational to this learning. Over the past decade, I have continued to have conversations about this learning with knowledge-sharers, including Elders, senior administrators, and current First Nations Chiefs from the Wabun Tribal Council communities. Foundationally, the Elders have guided me on this path, offering stories that serve as powerful bridges that will connect the histories, senses, practices, values, and sustainability of our people for generations to come. By using an Indigenous approach throughout this learning journey, I was able to create respectful space for the Elders, senior administration, and current Chiefs as they shared knowledge. Without them, there would be no learning.

Elders. Five Elders from the Wabun communities were invited to share their stories and guide this process. Elder status was granted by the respective communities. Each of the Elders

had a minimum of 20 years' experience working for their communities, and all continue to be active through volunteer and committee work. Four of the five Elders identified themselves as former Chiefs. I was fortunate to connect with the Elders prior to March 2020 and was able to visit with each of them face-to-face.

During our preliminary conversations, the Elders expressed that the key to strong leadership and success within a community was the ability of the administration, Chief, and Council to work cohesively together. I, therefore, submitted an amendment to my Ethics application in March 2020 to include senior administrators.

Senior Administrators. As shared previously, I have worked professionally with the Wabun Tribal Council communities between 2 to 25 years and therefore had a working relationship with each of the senior administrators prior to beginning my research. I connected with five senior administrators to discuss the request to share knowledge. Out of respect for both the people sharing knowledge and the communities, and to ensure that the administrators settled into their new ways of doing, after the onset of the pandemic in 2020 I waited for six months before approaching the senior administrators about moving forward with our conversations. Each of them had a range of professional experience and a wealth of knowledge and context through experiences with their communities, and I wanted to honour their commitments to their communities in a good way.

Current First Nations Chiefs. The six Chiefs from the Wabun Tribal Council communities elected between 2020 and 2021 were invited to share their stories and experiences with First Nations politics. Of the six Chiefs, five were able to participate. I met with two Chiefs in-person; the remaining conversations took place virtually, due to COVID-19 restrictions. The Chiefs were already aware of my PhD research, given our years of discussions; all voiced their

support for moving this discussion forward, for which I was so grateful. Each of the Chiefs had been engaged with First Nations politics for multiple decades and each carried a wealth of knowledge.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I was working for the Wabun Tribal Council in a consulting capacity. My partner and I spent the first few months ensuring that the youth had access to the technology and supplies needed to continue their learning in their respective communities. We drove supplies to all six communities and spent countless hours navigating the challenges of the public-school system and internet connectivity. We also supported each of the Chiefs, Education and Health leads with daily strategy conversations, check-ins, and support. Through our collaboration with the leadership at the Wabun communities, we secured Starlink connectivity; COVID-19 homes for isolation purposes in communities in need; funding for teacher aides and new high-school space for Mattagami First Nation; a targeted kindergarten program for Brunswick House; and targeted mental-wellness support programs and counselling for the administration staff of Wabun and each of the First Nations communities. During this time, we also worked with a circle of mental wellness specialists to create 'Noojimo Health' which is a unique all-Indigenous owned and operated virtual mental wellness circle who provides culturally safe care to Indigenous people, organizations, and communities across Turtle Island. When the pandemic hit, I observed that the communities within Wabun Tribal Council (and across Ontario) lacked adequate resources to contend with the pandemic; for that reason, the 'gathering of stories' portion of my learning journey paused to ensure the communities were supported in ways that addressed their immediate need. My dedication from March 2020 to now has been to prioritize community needs by meeting the communities where they were at in terms

of next steps. My personal and professional life aimed towards creating solutions that would help the communities move forward in their new realities in ways that worked for them. The relationships developed during this time may not have been possible if not for the global pandemic. The COVID 19 pandemic was one that challenged each person in a way that was specific to them and fostered many feelings of uncertainty, stress, anxiety, and fear—lingering emotions that are still prevalent in people and communities. What I did not realize until later was that the learning I gained through these collaborations with the leaders within these communities would give me a rich perspective on how to help—especially during times of need. More importantly, what I developed over this time were genuine relationships with the people I was serving as well as deeper relationships that I continue to foster. So much more than a project or a process, this learning journey has truly transformed and shifted my entire being.

Laying the Stones

Each stone is placed strategically as a natural expression of my ways of being as they create and protect the fire's foundation. My ways of being were shaped before I chose my parents and came into this physical world. They are also fluid and I continue to evolve as I grow and learn through relationships with those who surround me. The relationships that I have formed throughout my life have created an opportunity to do meaningful work for my own community, Flying Post First Nation, as well as for the Wabun Tribal Council. Respect, reciprocity, relevance, responsibility, and relationships are values that were instilled in me—values that I now honour in my personal, professional, and academic lives. The stones are set; it is now time to place the kindling and brush. As I do so, I will share how my ways of knowing relate to my ways of being, shaped by my past experiences and learning.

Kindling and Brush (Ways of Knowing)

My ways of knowing. Indigenous Intelligence. Western influence.

My Ways of Knowing: Epistemology

Absolon (2011) uses an Anishinaabemowin word, Kaandossiwin, to describe how we come to know as scholars. Kaandossiwin is how we prepare, journey, search, converse, process, gather, do, create, transform, and make meaning alongside spirit on our learning journey. I acknowledge that knowledge is a process derived from Creation, which has a specific purpose (Battiste, 2017). It is a privilege to be part of a generation that can reconnect to Anishinaabe ways of knowing being and doing and use inclusive processes that will foster healing relationships and searches (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2010b; Simpson, 2008). My ways of knowing are reflected in how I view the world as well as how I process information through a lens shaped by my experiences.

My ways of knowing (epistemology) or Kaandossiwin (Absolon, 2011) include my experiences and how I come to know. I generate these ways of knowing through listening, viewing, reflecting, reading, watching, waiting, observing, exchanging, sharing, conceptualizing, engaging, and applying (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). I am also aware of how context—including political, social, historical, and individual elements—shapes knowledge and of the reciprocal relationship between our ways of knowing and our ways of being (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003).

Albert Marshall, a Mi'kmaq Elder, envisioned two-eyed seeing as a way to strengthen learning through both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing (Martin, 2012); his conception

blends key characteristics and perspectives (Bartlett et al., 2012) and serves as a tool to bridge Indigenous and Western methodologies (Peltier, 2018). I, therefore, acknowledge the Western literature and early experiences in academia that might have shaped my ways of knowing. For the purposes of this learning, however, I have chosen to honour Indigenous theorists and Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. As I visualize my fire, I invite Indigenous scholars who offer context and concepts to Indigenous holism, and to governance and leadership theories and approaches that relate to this current context.

Indigenous Wholistic Theory

Absolon's (2011) Indigenous wholistic theory is woven throughout my ways of knowing. This theory has resonated with me since I read it at the beginning of my doctoral work and is what first connected Dr. Absolon and I. This theory, deeply rooted in relationships, intermixes past, present, and future and honours the ecology of Creation (Absolon, 2011, p. 75). In the context of Indigenous leadership development, Indigenous wholistic theory considers all aspects of leadership, including the following:

- The spiritual teachings of the Waabnong (east) reflect on how history impacts individuals and the community and how colonization and oppression impact each First Nation differently.
- The emotional teachings of the Zhaawnong (south) exhibit a deep understanding of diverse relationships, Elders, protocols, community, the socio-political landscape, and the unique impact social problems have on each First Nation.
- The mental teachings of the Bngishmog (west) incorporate knowledge and application of critical analysis of political landscape, acknowledge the mental aspects of power and knowledge, and use an anti-colonial lens to counter ideologies.

- The physical teachings of Giiwedinong (north) demonstrates action and movement and recognizes that community-governance structures are diverse and that each community will vary in its priorities and goals. It is also important to note that in being and doing, there needs to be healing.
- These four doorways intersect at the self. This is where balance, interconnections, and holism are held in the spirit, heart, mind, and body.

This theory, with its roots in Anishinaabe teachings of the Medicine Wheel and its acknowledgement of the interconnected nature of aspects of leadership, grounds me. I acknowledge that my culture, context, and knowledge (Voyageur et al., 2015) intersect throughout this learning journey, and I am looking to find my roots and to restore some of the truth and dignity that the Creator intended for me (Absolon, 2011). Based on my deep-rooted passion for this learning, I search for knowledge and share these stories as a means of reclaiming Indigenous Knowledge systems and power (Absolon, 2011; Voyageur et al., 2015).

First Nations Leadership Development Theory

First Nations leadership development involves both Western and First Nations teachings, which positions First Nations leaders to experience two worlds (Ottmann, 2005). First Nations leaders require versions of leadership development that include reclamation and reconnection and ignite Indigenous Knowledges and traditional practices (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010). By its nature, Western leadership development focuses on many of the principles that are rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing, such as the building of trust, relationships, and reciprocity (McCallum & O'Connell, 2009). While the leadership styles of 21st-century First Nations leaders vary based on their learned patterns of beliefs, values, and behaviours as well as

their local communities, they typically draw on both Indigenous and Western approaches (Julien et al., 2010; Ottmann, 2005; Turner & Simpson, 2008). Ottmann (2005) suggests that,

> First Nations leadership development involves personal development alongside leadership skills, training, and education. It is a process that involves internal investigation of values and beliefs. Effective leaders have internal motivation because their values and goals align with those of the community. This will lead to authentic leadership and leaders who "walk the talk." (p. 232)

The reality for the First Nations leaders within Wabun Tribal Council is that they devote their whole being—including their emotional, mental, and physical self—to leadership responsibilities (Ottmann, 2005).

Liberating Indigenous Leadership Theory

Kenny and Fraser's (2012) liberating leadership theory is presented in a way that is "free from dominating theories, is grounded in experience, and shifts depending on the context, protocols, lands, values, and circumstances" (p. 2). This theory is not intended to be a general Indigenous theory of leadership, but it resonates with my way of being, doing, and knowing; when I began this learning journey, I anticipated that it would also resonate with the communities with whom I would be working.

Kenny and Fraser (2012) describe four essential concepts in leadership: land, ancestors, Elders, and story. They believe that to maintain coherence we, as academics and human beings, should look to accept Mother Earth as essential to leadership. As Borrows (2010) so eloquently explains "We are all citizens with and of one land because we depend on its total existence to survive" (p. 244).

Simply stated, without the Land, we would not be here; this is the grounding concept embedded in Kenny and Fraser's (2012) leadership theories and practices. Our ancestors guide us through what they left behind for us and communicate with us through our dreams, through our Elders, and through spirit. Elders are essential in this journey and can guide learning: Their stories are powerful bridges that will connect our histories, senses, practices, values, and the sustainability of our people for generations to come (Kenny & Fraser).

My role in this learning journey will be that of the story(re)teller. As explained by Kenny and Fraser (2012), the power of the story is often dependent on the story(re)teller, who must be able to immediately adjust the elements of the story based on context or relationality.

Research as Ceremony

My paradigm comes from a genuine place where knowledge is relational and it is shared with "all my relations" (Wilson, 2008). As I engaged with Elders from Wabun Tribal Council to discuss my intentions for the project and to seek advice on which former Chiefs to approach to guide this learning, I knew that this would become part of a bigger journey for the knowledge-sharers as well. Wilson (2008) described his Indigenous paradigm involving ontology and epistemology as a mutual relationship in which the reality, axiology, and methodology are completely interdependent and must maintain relational accountability. This meant that I needed to ensure that the relationships that I created remain mutual over time. Ontology considers both the spiritual and human beings and is rooted in the theme of interconnectedness or relationships (Peltier, 2015 p. 34). The relationships that I formed with the Elders, Chiefs, and senior administrators created a reciprocal and relational understanding of the learning and helped contribute to the overall journey.

Biskaabiyaang: Precontact Approaches to First Nations Leadership

Traditionally, we were contemporary people.

—Basil Johnston

The concept of Biskaabiyaang was first described to me by Ryan McMahon (Anishinaabe, Couchiching First Nation, personal communication, March 2021). I want to acknowledge that this concept was originally shared by Wendy Makoons Geniusz (2009) who explains that Biskaabiyang means "returning to ourselves" through our learning journeys (p. 9). In order to understand the current context and find a path forward, we must first understand where we have been. As I search to locate my fire, I remind myself that precontact, Indigenous people had sovereignty in their Nations (Borrows, 2002; Palmater, 2014), and I realize how important and essential that unlearning and re-learning process is to appreciate the history that has led to Indigenous Peoples' current context (Brant, 2021).

William Denevan (1992) concludes that fifty-four million people inhabited the Americas in 1492, including seven million in what Anishinaabe people refer to as Turtle Island. In the two hundred years following European settlers' arrival to the Americas, between 45 and 50 million Indigenous people died due to war, disease, and famine. As an Anishinaabe Kwe, it is difficult to acknowledge the contemporary term used for this devastation: genocide (Denevan, 1992).

In the 16th century, at the time of contact with Europeans explorers, Indigenous people in North America lived in self-governing communities that spanned from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean; these communities had their own languages, cultures, and socio-economic systems (Carr-Stewart, 2001). It was beautiful to learn that both our natural and spiritual laws governed in a way that created strong families, resources, trade, and communities (Nikolakis et al., 2019). In precolonial times, Elders and community members passed on knowledge from one generation to

the next as a part of a sustainability plan for Indigenous education (Carr-Stewart, 2001). It was no surprise to learn that, for generations, Indigenous Peoples had sustained themselves—physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually—through a collective effort (Borrows, 2002; Nikolakis et al., 2019). One teaching that I received about leadership that stuck with me (and one consistent with my academic learning) took place over coffee with Rob Spade (Obakamikang, personal communication, September 2018) who shared,

> When Settlers arrived, they wanted to sit down and meet with the leaders of the community and expected it to be men. What the men in the community decided to do was to invite them for food so that the women (who at the time made all the decisions for that community) could be there as well—showing their utmost respect and protection to the women from the community. The men would gather and talk in an open setting with the women close by to listen. It was shared with me that when it was time to make a deal, the men would then go to the back where the women were strategizing and ask them what they should do and the women would give their advice and the men would honour that advice and make the decision based on their perspective. As a society, Ojibwe are matriarchal people.

I have always loved this teaching because it reminds me of how important it is to value opinions and honour the role of balance in leadership and restores the place of Anishinaabe Kweok as leaders. According to The Ojibwe People's Dictionary (n.d.), precontact, the Anishinaabe people used the term Ogimaa, Gimaa, or Ogimaakaan which meant leader, king, Chief. Many First Nations have begun reclaiming language through titles—a trend which I expect will continue over time. The origin of the word Chief is European; colonists used it to refer to the leaders of Indigenous Nations during the era of contact. Chief is a title used to signify

status or leadership upon an individual in a group, clan, or family (Robinson, 2018). Traditional leaders were women or men, clan leaders, heads of villages, or groups of people who made protocols based on their own cultural traditions (Borrows, 2002). Traditional forms of Indigenous governance models were prevalent before settlers arrived, which included selection of hereditary Chiefs through a mutually agreed upon protocol, including the selection of hereditary Chiefs, predate colonization.

Dr. Alan Corbiere (2019) describes Anishinaabeg as an egalitarian society who made consensus-based decisions. Corbiere (2019) shares that the decisions were made on behalf of the entire community using the following two approaches:

1. The common or local council, which was made up of more positions than the Chief including intentional roles and responsibility for the following: aanike-ogimaa (sub-chief/ deputy chief), netaa-giigidod (orator), giigidowinini (speaker/ counsellor), noodaagan (messenger), oshkaabewis (ceremonial attendant), mizhinawe (chief's attendant/ steward), gichi-anishinabeg (elders), and kweok or kwewag (Women). The Chief in this format always included the opinions of the band and acknowledged the importance of clan systems. (p. 330)
2. The general council included many other bands of Chiefs if they were determining treaty, going to war, or settling a boundary. Often there was one Chief selected to speak on behalf of the group. The Ogimaa-giigido (Chief speaker) was often set for a specific purpose and not because it was hereditary but because of their specific gifts. It is important to note that the decisions were made intentionally through ceremonies. (p. 331)

Traditional ways of selecting leaders or Hereditary Chiefs continue to represent some First Nations in Canada. Selection of a Gimaa or Chief may be through lineage, ceremony, houses, or clan systems; their communities, which have their own laws and protocols, may or may not fall within First Nation-controlled reservation land enforced by the Supreme Court of Canada (Corntassel, 2021). Reinforcing and summarizing Indigenous traditional governance, Dr. Alan Corbiere (2019) shares that,

> Indigenous people of North America have always asserted ownership to the land, consistently asserting that it was given to them by the Creator. They organized themselves as autonomous nations with their own governance structures based on their culture, economy, governance and laws. (p. 326)

Today, the elected Chiefs within Wabun Tribal Council continue to use the term Chief to describe the elected leaders throughout the community. For the purposes of this learning journey, Chiefs will, therefore, refer to elected or hereditary leaders of councils who can lead, organize, and make decisions within their First Nation (Buchanan, 2008). The First Nations with whom I worked on my learning journey are Anishinaabe, come from Treaty 9 territory, and fall within Nishnawbe Aski Nation; I therefore offer context for this area and territory.

As an Anishinaabe sharing land with other treaty people, I have learned that our commitments and responsibilities are inherent and connected to spirit and creator.

Treaties in Relation to First Nations Leadership

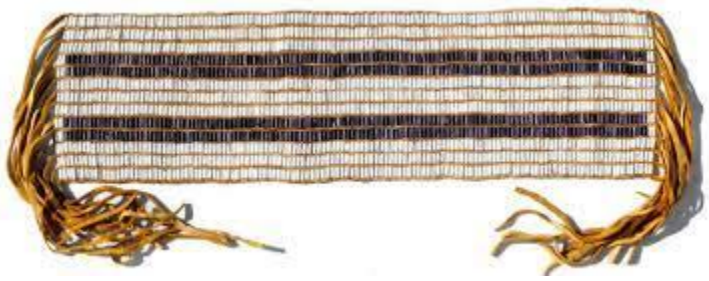
Indigenous people and the Crown have established treaties that are recognized by the constitution. The treaty agreements are meant to be a guide to respect Eurocentric and Indigenous approaches while sharing the land that was occupied by Indigenous peoples since time immemorial (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2017). Treaties form the foundation of the

relationship between the 634 First Nations and the Crown which represent a growing population of 600,000 First Nations Peoples in Canada.

Treaty making is a process that Indigenous people have used since time immemorial. For thousands of years, the Blackfoot, Cree, and Dakota people (among many others) used treaties to create alliances amongst themselves (Lightfoot & MacDonald, 2017). Treaties were agreed upon through ceremony, or in oral or written form. The Two Row Wampum Treaty—an agreement between Dutch settlers and the Haudenosaunee Peoples of the Eastern Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River valley—is one of the most profound North American treaties (see Figure 4); the putative date of this treaty is 1613.

Figure 4

Two Row Wampum Belt



Note: Image found at http://www.wampumchronicles.com/tworowwampumbelt.html

The wampum belt has two parallel blue lines on a white background, indicating that the two peoples would coexist like two parallel rivers, each independently navigating its own way, without disturbing or disrupting the other (Lightfoot & MacDonald, 2017). Discussing treaty making, Chief Irving Powless Jr. (2000) shared the intent of the wampum belt:

> It was an agreement between our two peoples. This agreement is still in effect because the grass is still green. This was the grandfather of all treaties; this was the first one that

> we made. A very important concept was expressed at this time, that concept being that we were equal. (p. 23)

Powless reinforced that

> We, as a people, walk around with our mandate that we shall take care of Mother Earth, not only for our sons, but for our coming generations. The land that we occupy is very small compared to the land that we were in control of. We cannot fulfil our mandate as we did many years ago. We now remind you that you are the other half of that treaty. (p. 32)

What makes Canada profoundly unique is that for many years, treaty making was a common practice for both settlers and Indigenous Nations (Leslie & Maguire, 1979). Between 1701 and 1923, historic treaties were negotiated with the First Nation people to determine lands for settlement, to honour the relationship, and to establish trade and develop resources (Doerfler, 2018). Treaty agreements were negotiated orally and recorded in writing by representatives of the Crown. Many of these treaties continue to be upheld today, some three hundred years later. It is important to note that not all Nations or territories agreed to treaties.

It is common to hear about Section 35 of the Constitution Act (1982), which both recognizes and affirms existing Indigenous and treaty rights under the Supreme Law of Canada (Mainville, 2001). There have been, and continue to be, disputes between First Nations, Inuit, and the Crown regarding the Crown's failure to honour treaty commitments. For several hundred years, treaty making has been solely understood as directed at, and through, states, but this colonial pattern is changing (Lightfoot & MacDonald, 2017). In recent years, Indigenous Peoples around the world have begun to reclaim their traditions of treaty making; these innovative,

Indigenous forms of political relations push the boundaries of "international relations" (Lightfoot & MacDonald, 2017).

One of the biggest challenges is that the treaties were re-interpreted by colonial governments and written from a perspective of Western superiority (Battiste, 2018). The fundamental policies of assimilation were based on dehumanizing and biased ideas about Indigenous Peoples that disregarded treaty rights in order to gain control over the land (Battiste, 2018). There was a belief that protecting Indigenous interests and well-being, and concepts of land and resource development, could be accomplished in a Western way (Erasmus & Dussault, 1996, vol. 1, p. 248). This systemic paternalistic approach, and ignored realization from the government of Canada, has led to feelings of betrayal from First Nations people and from many settler Canadians. Truth-telling, effort, and time are required to heal the social and economic conditions of First Nations communities—conditions that have been influenced and exacerbated by our shared history (Battiste, 2018). Many scholars argue that negative assumptions regarding Indigenous peoples persist, including perceptions of inherent inferiority and an inability to self-govern (Bowie, 2013; Brant, 2021; Fox, 2017; Ottmann, 2005).

Historians such as Corbiere (2019) argue that as a society we must "move closer to past understandings by using material culture and Anishinaabemowin to re-contextualize the foundational understandings of treaty before the Anishinaabe understanding had been actively denigrated and discarded by their colonial treaty partners" (p. 334). The conversation surrounding treaty rights and inequities is quite possibly the most pressing political issue facing our country today and one that all parties have a vested interest in sorting out.

Treaty 9: The James Bay Treaty

This inquiry takes place within the lands protected by Treaty 9: The James Bay Treaty.

Figure 5

Map of the James Bay Treaty: Treaty 9

Note: Image produced by the Government of Ontario and can be found at https://www.rcinet.ca/en/2016/03/31/more-confusion-controversy-over-aboriginal-land-claim/

As indicated in Figure 5 Treaty 9, also known as The James Bay Treaty, covers two-thirds of Ontario's landmass, an area that is referred to as Northern Ontario. The Treaty 9 area touches two Great Lakes and the watershed from the Hudson and James Bay drainage basins. The original intent and purpose of Treaty 9 was to purchase the lands and resources of the resident Cree and Ojibwe Peoples to make way for resource development and white settlers (Leslie, 2020).

In the 1880s, Cree and Ojibwe Peoples in the James Bay region became increasingly concerned about the presence of non-Indigenous trappers and prospectors on their traditional lands. At the time, First Nations leaders and communities had also become aware of treaty activity in neighbouring territories—activities that yielded the Robinson-Huron and Robinson-Superior treaties (1850) and the Northwest Angle Treaty (1873) also known as Treaty 3 (Leslie,

2020). During 1905 and 1906, the terms of Treaty 9 were finalized by the Crown and presented to the First Nations leaders as an offer (versus a negotiation) presented to Indigenous leaders as a done deal. At this time, many of the Ojibwe and Cree communities viewed the treaty as a protection relationship as well; the Gimaa (leader in the community) had always protected their people, and the communities anticipated that the Crown would do the same. The First Nations leaders did (and still do) believe their relationship with the Crown was intended to be sacred (Long, 2019).

Between 1905 and 1906, Duncan Campbell Scott and his fellow Crown commissioners sent their report to the government of Canada, along with the schedule of reserves for Abitibi, Matachewan, Mattagami, Flying Post, Chapleau (Ojibwe), Chapleau (Cree), New Brunswick House and Long Lake to finalize their treaties (Leslie, 2020). As early as 1915, the First Nations had already begun to recognize inequities regarding high costs, limitations of regulations, and land, and they documented these through complaints processes (Long, 2010). In addition, through informal conversations with the members of Wabun Tribal Council, I learned that some believe that, from its very inception, the treaty-making process created systemic barriers, including health and economic disparities, inadequate land distribution, and legal controversies that lead to socio-demographic disparities.

The Indian Act in Relation to First Nations Governance

The Indian Act of 1876 formalized Canadian policies of marginalization (Brant, 2021). It represents a historical and contemporary struggle in which Canada controlled Indians (as defined by the Indian Act) for over 140 years by enforcing policies regarding First Nations members, governance structure, and lands (Bartlett, 1977).

The Indian Act was amended substantially in 1951 to remove some of the more oppressive sections and, thus, allow Indians to practice their culture and traditions and gave elected councils more powers (Hanson, 2009). While important changes (including allowing women to be elected as Chiefs) have been made since then, in relation to health, education, policy, and practice, the Indian Act has not changed materially in over one hundred years; the need for more significant change remains (Carr-Stewart, 2001; Shipley, 2017; Voyageur, 2013). It was not until 1960, with the passage of the Canadian Bill of Rights, that Indians were recognized as Canadians, gained the ability to vote, and were permitted to attend post-secondary institutions without disfranchisement; prior to this, Indians were considered wards of the state and were controlled legislatively by the Indian Act (Joseph, 2018).

The Indian Act permitted the Federal Government to impose the elected Chiefs and Council structure on First Nations as their form of governance. Thus, a Western municipal model of governance, which included meeting regulations and two-year terms, was forced onto the First Nations communities: each First Nation was to have a Council consisting of one (and only one) elected Chief, as well as one elected Councillor for every one hundred members (up to a maximum of 12 Councillors), unless the Minister determined otherwise (Edmond, 2015). In addition, under the Indian Act, Indian agents (representatives of the Minister of Indian Affairs) had the power to promote or demote 'Indian Chiefs' and Councillors based on their adherence and level of correspondence with the Indian Act (Satzewich & Mahood, 1994). Essentially, Indian agents had the power to ensure that Chiefs and Councillors abided by the Indian Act. In April 2015, the First Nations Elections Act was approved; this opt-in legislation affords First Nations more scope over their governance, including land management, and allows four-year terms for Chiefs and Councillors (Indigenous Services Canada [ISC], 2020). Although these

changes have been made to support First Nations governance structures, they are still controlled by the federal government. Some First Nations have successfully made sectoral arrangements that allow for greater governance powers not provided under the Indian Act; the First Nations within Wabun currently follow the Indian Act legislation without sectoral arrangement.

I often wonder why the Indian Act continues to be in place. Erin Hanson (2009) discusses Harold Cardinal's (1969) position in the White Paper by sharing that:

> We do not want the Indian Act retained because it is a good piece of legislation. It isn't. It is discriminatory from start to finish. But it is a lever in our hands and an embarrassment to the government, as it should be. No just society and no society with even pretensions to being just can long tolerate such a piece of legislation, but we would rather continue to live in bondage under the inequitable Indian Act than surrender our sacred rights. Any time the government wants to honour its obligations to us, we are more than happy to help devise new Indian legislation. (para. 24)

Most importantly, the Indian Act *legally* distinguishes between First Nations and settler Canadians and concedes that the federal government has a distinctive relationship with, and obligation to, First Nations people in Canada. The Indian Act is often a point of contention, First Nation leaders have agreed that for too long decisions have been made without the consent of their voice and moving forward First Nations must be actively engaged at decision making tables (Hanson, 2009).

Colonization in Relation to First Nations Leadership

Colonization completely disrupted the Indigenous way of wholistically approaching life (Smylie, 2001). When the systems and worldviews of individuals, families, communities, and First Nations were encroached upon, deemed uncivilized, and forced to assimilate with the

colonizer's worldview, our people became unhealthy (Czyzewski, 2011; Wabie, 2017). As the colonized structures expanded their control over space, they gradually dismantled, violently suppressed, or simply ignored Indigenous governing structures, replacing many of them with Western-dominated ways of doing (Nikolakis et al., 2019). Understanding this history and its continued impact on First Nations and Indigenous Peoples is critical to contextualizing this learning journey. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) stated,

> To gain control of the land of Indigenous people, colonists negotiated Treaties, waged wars of extinction, eliminated traditional landholding practices, disrupted families, and imposed a political and spiritual order that came complete with new values and cultural practices. (p. 45)

From a governance perspective, First Nations communities are still recovering from the ramifications of colonization, including the impacts of the residential school system; the erasure of culture and its negative affect on identity and language (Brascoupé & Waters, 2009); historical and ongoing racism and structural violence (Farmer, 2009); and the impact of on-going colonial strategies of present-day practices, policies, and legislation (Czyzewski, 2011). The Eurocentric approaches and ideologies were inherently at a conflict as it was shared that during contact, Europeans considered the First Nations way of life to be savage and unworthy of respect (Neeganagwedgin, 2012). Intentional assimilation strategies over the past 150+ years have enabled the federal government to assume bureaucratic control over First Nations Peoples; this, in turn, gives power to settler-colonial Canada (Fast & Collin-Vézina, 2010). The most harmful strategy for assimilation was the prohibition of First Nations Peoples' right to participate in their traditional ways of life, including speaking our own languages, participating in ceremonies, hunting, fishing, and accessing sacred lands; this strategy effectively took away parts of our

identity (Christian, 2010). As a result of centuries of these racist policies, First Nations Peoples across Turtle Island have struggled to reclaim their power to make decisions, free from the Federal government's control, for the benefit of their own people, lands, and waters (Nikolakis et al., 2019). It is important to note that colonization fundamentally impacted First Nations Peoples' sense of self, relations to one another, and our relationships to the Land (McDowell, 2015). It is now known that the traditional governance structures of Indigenous Peoples demonstrate considerable strategic political thought, yet Canada has still not recognized the authority of Indigenous forms of governance over our traditional lands (Brant, 2021). Borrows (2010) speaks to the ongoing myth of Indigenous people as inferior to settlers, explaining that to this day, Canada holds tight to the Doctrine of Discovery (terra nullius); the doctrine grants Canada the ultimate title to the land, with little acknowledgement of Indigenous Peoples as the First Peoples of this land (McAdam, 2016). In March 2022, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis delegates spent a week at the Vatican, where they took part in private meetings to discuss the Roman Catholic Church's role in Canada's residential-school system. It was an important step in Canadian history, but as former Chief Phil Fontaine shared, now is when "the hard work starts" as this is just one of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 94 calls to action (Stefanovich, 2022).

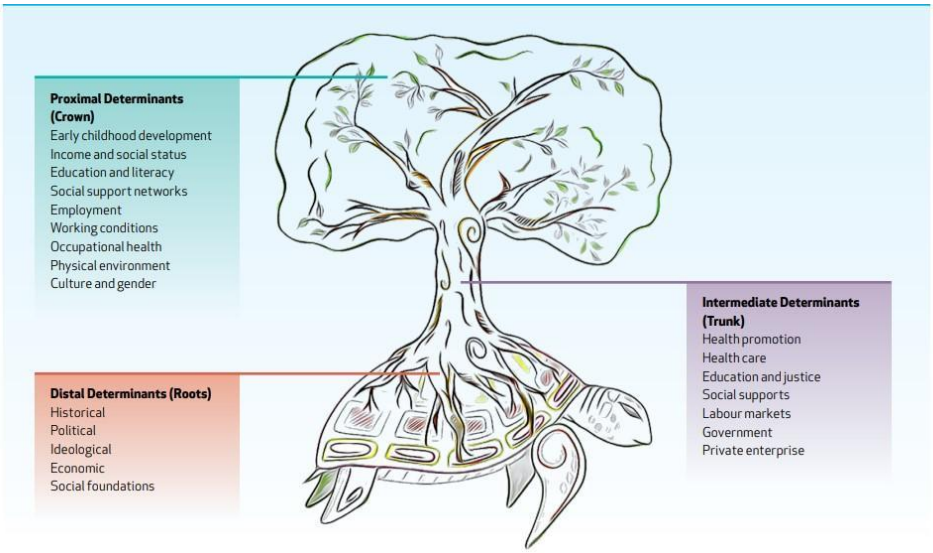
Impacts of Colonialism on Self-Determination for First Nations People

During the past decade, colonial structures and systems have continued to fail Indigenous Peoples, despite efforts to address inadequate housing, lack of clean drinking water, mistrust, income inequality, poverty, and poor health outcomes (Fox; 2017; Reading & Wein, 2009; Simpson, 2014; Voyageur et al., 2015). First Nations leaders have a powerful role in addressing determinants of health and well-being for Indigenous people. Addressing colonial policy, laws,

and systemic racism, federal and provincial governments have begun to respond to First Nations' demands for self-government and to explore initial processes for the redistribution of power (Voyageur, 2008). It is my hope that if we, as Nations in Canada, can come to a common understanding of what self-determination means for our own unique Nations, and for ourselves as individuals, then we can begin to eliminate the overall inequities and disparities. This could also be true as we decide what is needed for the self-determination of each Nation and for our relationships with other Nations. As Czyzewski (2011) argues, ongoing structural colonial practices and continued assimilation strategies of present-day practices, policies, and legislation are often at the foundation of social, economic, and health disparities. Colonization is widely recognized as the most detrimental social determinant of health; this systemic racism—that is, colonization—is the root cause of poor overall health for Indigenous people (Czyzewski, 2011; Reading & Wien, 2009; Warry, 2008).

Figure 6

Indigenous-Specific Determinants of Health



Note: Reading C. Structural determinants of Aboriginal peoples' health. In: Greenwood M, de Leeuw S, Lindsay NM, Reading C (editors). Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2015. p. 3–15. Illustration by Robyn Rowe. This figure is used with permission.

Figure 6 outlines Dr. Charlotte Reading's (2015) use of a tree metaphor to explain the structural determinants of health for Indigenous people; distal determinants of health are often unseen, systemic, and the foundation (or roots) of systems and environments that impact overall health, inclusive of political, historical, and ideologies. The Indian Act is an example of a distal determinant of health for First Nation people. Represented by the trunk, intermediate determinants include systems of care such as education, social justice, and physical environments that are impacted by the root system and Indigenous people's relationship to systems such as health, social services, education, business development or government. For example, many First Nations governance structures are dictated by the Indian Act such as the ability to own the land. The proximal determinants are represented in the crown of the tree and are often what we see in terms of outcomes for Indigenous people, which are what systems tend to focus on. Carrying the governance example, from a proximal perspective, we see limited or non-existent access to capital for First Nations people living on reserve who are unable to own their own land due to the systemic barriers in the Indian Act. Reading suggests that in order to create healthy people and environments (trees) and address inequities in an impactful way we need to target the distal determinants (roots). As a Nation, we have been scrambling to address the proximal determinants, when the most strategic thing that we can do is spend the time and effort needed to add nutrients to the soil by addressing and rectifying the distal determinants.

Consistent with the beliefs of Indigenous knowledge keepers, I, too, believe that this is an important time for Indigenous leadership and resurgence; we must continue to address these wholistic issues in order to improve outcomes for Indigenous people (Reading, 2015).

Post-Contact Approaches to First Nations Leadership

As a result of colonialism, Indigenous governance systems were completely disrupted (Borrows, 2014, Brant, 2021; Bowie, 2013; Smylie, 2001; Voyageur, 2011). Today, the situation for First Nations in Canada improves at a snail's pace, due the legal framework and ongoing impact of the legal system and Indian Act (Brant, 2021). There have always been First Nations warriors who assert and affirm their treaty and human rights while pushing back against legislation through formalized and grassroots organizations. Western worldviews revolve around domination and economic growth, whereas Indigenous worldviews are grounded in a relational outlook in which people are only a part of the cosmos (Brant, 2021). Nationhood is a commonly accepted approach by which to understand who others as Indigenous people are; as an example, some Indigenous Peoples share their Nation (Anishinaabe, Haudenodsaunee, Cree, Dakota, Blackfoot, Haida, Gitxsan, Dene, or one of the many other Nations of First Peoples occupying this land) when introducing themselves. Each distinct Nation has customs, a language, ceremonies, and territory that have prevailed since time immemorial. From a blend of Indigenous and Western governance perspective, the concept of nationhood was initiated through discussions between the National Indian Brotherhood and the Prairie Treaty Nations Alliance in 1980; as a result, these organizations formed the largest political body for First Nations in Canada, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) (Brant, 2021). Since the formation of the AFN political body, the assembly has worked diligently at relationship building between the Government of Canada and Indigenous Peoples. The AFN has focused such specific initiatives as pressuring governments with results of nationally commissioned research and inquiries such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women

and Girls (2019). Due to the efforts of many Indigenous people for generations and generations, in 2016 the Canadian Government finally removed their opposition to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and on June 21, 2021 received Royal Assent and became law, which establishes that the Government of Canada must take an active role in enabling Indigenous rights and affirms the rights of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination and to our own languages, cultures, and traditional lands (Imai & Gunn, 2018). It is fair to say that most First Nations Peoples and Canadians do not understand the adoption of UNDRIP but view it to be a step in the right direction, consistent with the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). UNDRIP is very complex, layered and has many implications for both First Nation people and newcomers and settlers to Canada. Arthur Manuel discusses the history of how this all came to be in his National Best-selling book, *Unsettling Canada: Canada's Wake up Call,* Manuel (2021) helped me to realize and recognize that First Nations must spend their time and efforts focusing on Article 3 of UNDRIP that states:

> Indigenous people have the right to self-determination. By virtue, or that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development (p. 175).

In relation implementing the principles of UNDRIP, Imai & Gunn (2018) also suggest the need to focus on the principles of duty to consult and free prior and informed consent (FPIC): For meaningful change to occur, Indigenous perspectives must be sought out and included at the beginning of any new initiative. Particularly, they note that for there to be meaningful reconciliation, Canada's government and corporations must understand and respect the values and laws and social, economic, and cultural rights of First Nations Peoples and Indigenous communities.

UNDRIP affirms Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination; indeed, a return to self-governance has been a topic of conversation for many First Nations in Canada during the past 150+ years. In theory, self-governance/determination is a way for First Nations to gain control over our futures; in practice, self-governance can provide First Nations an opportunity to determine the tools needed to build their approaches to governance and leadership according to their own ways of doing. Within this dynamic context, Nikolakis et al. (2019) describe the following strategies available to First Nations:

1. Continuing to follow the Indian Act and allowing control of the federal government over the lives of status Indians (this would be status quo for many First Nations)
2. Adopting self-government approaches through policies (e.g. land management, elections or taxation) and slowly moving away from the Indian Act
3. Leveraging Indigenous Knowledge systems as approaches to autonomy or self-governance. The intent would be to be out from underneath the Indian Act and to be able to create independent policies, approaches, and ways of doing. This concept could either include Canada or not.

Although self-governance may appear to be the only option for First Nations, McDowell (2015) suggests that self-governance could place First Nations leaders in a position of responsibility for the continued oppression and disadvantages of their communities, as they could be without the resources, power, and intentional, dedicated talent needed to bring about the change. I contend that with self-governance that there may be a shift of blame rather than a shift of power for independent First Nations. Over the past few decades, the federal government has attempted to create many of their own versions of Indigenous governance, but the underlying

issue is that the ideas and negotiations are founded on principles established through controlled policies set out by the federal government (Brant, 2021).

Despite the challenges, twenty-two of the 634 First Nations in Canada have signed self-governance agreements such as the First Nations Land Management Act and the First Nations Fiscal Management Act; some of these are partial agreements that replace certain sections of the Indian Act (Brant, 2021). Some First Nations exercise their sovereignty daily by reaffirming their rights as Unceded Territories[4] or by practicing traditional ways of governing (Bohaker, 2021) For example, some First Nations may employ the Anishinaabe clan system and alliance relationships to make decisions and to select Chief and Council (Bohaker, 2021). Ottmann (2005) describes the considerable dialogue and knowledge sharing that has taken place regarding the concepts of traditional Anishinaabek governance and leadership by sharing that since time immemorial, First Nations people understood that the universe is interconnected and that adaptability is essential to determining our place within the cosmos (p. 50)In addition, Ottman argues that leadership development should include culture, history and teachings that come from a First Nations lens in order to make it meaningful and sustainable. This approach is not necessarily new, as it was shared that as First Nation people, we have always grown, learned and adapted and that is something that is encouraged and essential for growth within people and organizations (Ottman, 2005).

Discussing ongoing Anishinaabe governance through reflection, connection, historical and traditional approaches, Bohaker (2020) shares that Anishinaabe leaders have been teaching our own laws and philosophy to European settlers in the Great Lakes region for more than four-hundred years.

[4] *Unceded* describes lands that First Nations Peoples never legally relinquished to the Crown.

There are many layers when it comes to First Nations politics and governance filled with complex policies and implications for First Nation people and settlers alike. I have often dreamed of a time in Turtle Island when First Nations would thoughtfully, meaningfully strategically move away from the Indian Act and govern our communities in a way that reflects our contemporary ways of doing and honours our traditional ways of governance and leadership. It is my hope that this learning will help the leadership take one step towards determining what sovereignty means for their own Nations.

Understanding Wabun Tribal Council Communities

Like most First Nations in Canada, the First Nations within the Wabun territory have grown into being within the colonial policies of the Indian Act; these governance and education policies systematically make it difficult to challenge the status quo. Due to assimilative strategies and the loss of education about the history of traditional Anishinaabe governance, leadership and community members within Wabun Tribal Council have varying levels of understanding of the complexities of colonialism, the Indian Act, UNDRIP (and how it can offer pathways within policy framework) and governance structures. Revitalizing our Nationhood will be challenging but essential to the survival of First Nations Peoples. Fox (2017) explains that Chiefs with a vision for change must navigate colonial policies and tread carefully with community members; if they do not, they face the real possibility of not being re-elected. Incoming leaders who are strong in their sense of identity, who embody traditional teachings, and who have the knowledge and skills needed to incorporate innovative ways of doing will be the ones who ensure our communities thrive (Alfred & Alfred, 2009).

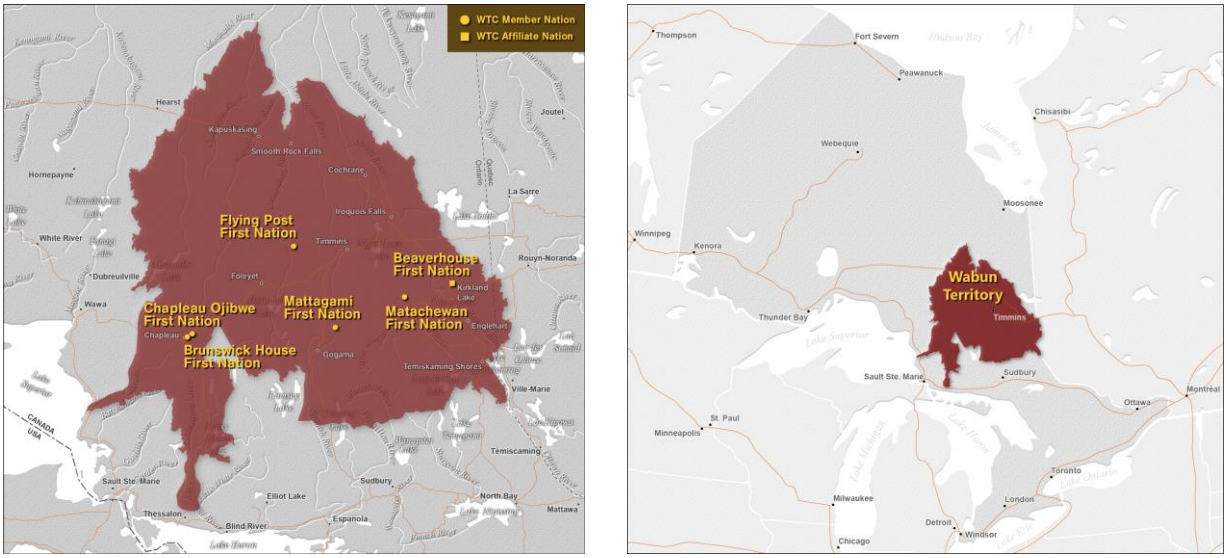
The current conversation about governance is critical not only for First Nations' individual and collective self-recognition of their own sovereignty, but also for the Western

world, which has much to learn from Indigenous Knowledges about relationship building with people and the land (Coulthard, 2008; Simpson, 2008). Through reclamation of our ways, and unlearning the processes of colonization, First Nations Chiefs will better understand how to implement meaningful decolonization practices (Corntassel, 2012). Western models are often rooted in individual approaches as opposed to community-wide, collective approaches that are favoured in Indigenous models (Warner & Grint, 2006). The need to develop Indigenous leaders who have a blend of cultural wisdom, knowledge of sustainable business practices, and a sense of environmental responsibility will be essential for sustainable communities is well-documented (Ahnee-Benham & Napier, 2002; Dion-Arkinson, 2016; Fox 2017; Julien, 2010; Ottmann, 2010; Voyageur, 2008; Voyageur et al., 2015).

Wabun Tribal Council

Figure 7

WTC First Nations Membership and Territory Maps



Note: Reprinted with the permission of Wabun Tribal Council, July 2018. Images can be found at: https://www.wabuntribalcouncil.ca/resource-development/forestry/

The Wabun Tribal Council (WTC) represents its five member First Nations in interactions with municipal, provincial, and federal government programs and initiatives, such as land-use planning, health, education, economic development, and other opportunities as directed by the Chiefs of the communities (Wabun Tribal Council, 2018). The five First Nations communities of the Wabun Tribal Council are as follows: Brunswick House First Nation, Chapleau Ojibwe First Nation, Flying Post First Nation, Matachewan First Nation, and Mattagami First Nation (see Figure 7, left inset). An affiliate First Nation, Beaverhouse is also included, which has been engaged in a 20+ year fight for recognition of First Nation status from the Federal Government who just gained status as of April 2022 (Wabun Tribal Council, 2018). These maps were shared with permission of by Wabun Tribal Council.

The Wabun Tribal Council communities exist within lands covered by Treaty 9: The James Bay Treaty. Treaty 9 covers most of present-day Ontario north of the height of land dividing the Great Lakes watershed from the Hudson and James Bay drainage basins (Leslie, 2018; see Figure 7, right inset). The purpose of Treaty No. 9 was to purchase for the interests of the resident Cree and Ojibwe Peoples' lands and resources to make way for settlement and resource development. Treaty 9 contained provisions for cash treaty payments, the creation of reserves, education, and hunting, fishing, and trapping rights (Leslie, 2018).

Many of the Wabun First Nations have very small populations. Chiefs and Councillors may, therefore, be volunteers or paid employees of the First Nation—a common arrangement in many other communities. A few of the Wabun communities have relatively large Councils because the Indian Act stipulates one Councillor per 100 members to a maximum of 12 Councillors. (Individually negotiated agreements may depart from this formula in either direction.) In most communities, there is no private-sector economy, which makes the Canadian

government one of the only employers. First Nations governments are not supported by local tax revenue but by federal transfer payments and First Nation-sourced business revenue.

The collective ownership of First Nations land, combined with municipal, provincial, and federal responsibilities, can complicate the job responsibilities of Chief and Council in each community. Responsibilities and duties for the Chiefs and Councillors are quite different from those of other local governments. Chiefs and Councils within Wabun Tribal Council often manage business enterprises; run social services within federal and provincial jurisdictions controlled by these separate authorities, such as schools (either federally or band operated) and health clinics (provincially operated); and negotiate land claims and other issues with provincial and federal governments.

The reality of the close-knit family structure of many of the Wabun First Nations communities means that the Chiefs and Councils may also fulfil roles such as a family member, mentor, friend, colleague, or facilitator of community events and funerals—roles that other jurisdictions do not consider to be part of governance. The role of the Chief or Councillor is often a full-time job even though it may not be acknowledged or compensated as one.

The following overviews of each First Nation offer a community context for this learning journey; they were adapted from the Wabun Tribal Council website and approved by each of the First Nations communities.

Brunswick House First Nation

Brunswick House First Nation follows an election code under the Indian Act that hosts elections every two years. Brunswick House First Nation has a growing population of over 930 members and over 230 living on reserve. Brunswick House First Nation is situated on Hwy 101 East, approximately 100 kilometres from the town of Chapleau, Ontario; this final move was

largely due to health reasons and designed to improve access to essential health and education services. Between 1905 and 1906, crown and First Nations leaders began to meet with the First Nation people who lived in the area on the north end of Missiniabi Lake and in July 1906, Brunswick House First Nation was established through Treaty 9.

In 1925, without consultation of the First Nation, Chapleau Game Preserve was established as a 7,000-square-kilometre area for the protection of wildlife within lands allocated. Brunswick House First Nations members were mainly hunters and trappers who followed a traditional lifestyle and when the preserve was created—therefore they were no longer to sustain their families and were forced to relocate the First Nation outside the preserve. The community has been displaced three times and that forced relocation has created systemic barriers for the community over time.

In terms of infrastructure, the community has a band office, community centre, outdoor hockey rink and are planning to build a school in the future. The current priorities of the community are to pursue opportunities for sovereignty over education, mining, renewable energy, and to ensure the health, employment, and training opportunities to members are sustainable for the next seven generations. The youth in the community are very active and engaged in culture and programming. Brunswick House First Nation hosted their first community pow wow in 2022 and are reclaiming their community through culture.

Flying Post First Nation

Flying Post First Nation follows a modified election code, hosting elections under the Indian Act every three years. Flying Post First Nation has 313 members with one member registered living on reserve. Chief Murray Ray explains that the original Treaty 9 settlements included many discrepancies that arose from miscommunication. During the summers of 1905

and 1906 during the signing of Treaty 9, Chief Black Ice (the first recognized Chief of Flying Post First Nation) was informed of the treaty-making process while his people were living near Kakatoosh Zeebing (the Groundhog River). At the time, there was no recognition from the government about the intentional hunting/gathering lifestyle of the members of Flying Post First Nation members; as a result, when the document was signed, lands were set aside according to where the people were located at that time. Soon after the signing, most of the First Nations people of Flying Post who signed Treaty 9 had been living in different areas and became part of other First Nations in northern Ontario. In the 1960s, Flying Post First Nations members began to organize themselves and elect Chief and Council to represent them during the formation of First Nations political organizations such as Nishnawbe-Aski Nation (NAN) and Wabun Tribal Council. Over the years, the members hunting and fishing territories continued from Horwood Lake, the Groundhog River, the Nat River, and all the way to Nipigon Lake. Despite the complexities there continue to be band members living in the original territories of Groundhog River. Priorities for the First Nation have always included encouraging its members to pursue educational and professional ambitions and developing a sustainable economy for the Nation that will create prosperity for future generations. Flying Post members are connected through community events and zoom meeting opportunities for members.

Chapleau Ojibwe First Nation

Chapleau Ojibwe currently follows a consensus approach to leadership and does not hold elections unless the community deems it necessary. Chapleau Ojibwe First Nation has 40 members with 15 living on-reserve. This style of leadership has been prominent in Chapleau Ojibwe First Nation for decades and was passed on from family ties and hereditary status. Currently the community, whose land base is outside Chapleau, has several buildings and homes

but most of the members are located in Sault Ste. Marie. Elder Therese Memegos shared that Chapleau Ojibwe FN moved three times before it now is in its permanent location. Originally, the community was based on the shores of the Chapleau River. It was shared that the original community had lots of members including infrastructure and the members had all followed a traditional lifestyle including language, hunting, trapping and gathering.

For decades, and still to this day, the members visited the community during the different seasons on their traditional trap lines and hunting grounds and some also choose to live with their families in the area.

In 1990, Chapleau Ojibwe was one of the founding First Nations of the newly created Wabun Tribal Council; this was accomplished through the efforts of past leaders including Chief Joanne Nakogee and Chief William Memegos. Community leadership is still passed down through family ties and the community is currently led by Chief Anita Stevens, who has prioritized education, health, and economic-development opportunities for over 20 years. The members of Chapleau Ojibwe are supported through programming and social events for their members.

Matachewan First Nation

Matachewan is under the Indian Act code, uses the election model and holds elections every two years within the First Nation. Matachewan First Nation has over 989 members with close to 50 living on-reserve. The community is located approximately 30 kilometers southeast of the town of Matachewan and about 60 kilometers west of Kirkland Lake off of Highway 66. According to the initial Treaty 9 documents that were created in 1905 and 1906, the treaty commissioners arrived in Matachewan FN on June 19, 1906, after having signed the treaty with the Abitibi First Nations People. On June 20, 1906, a conference was held with the First Nations

people of Matachewan and the treaty was signed to allocate sixteen square miles of land to Matachewan First Nation members and was supported by several community members as well as government officials. Matachewan First Nation has a rich history and is an historic northern First Nations community that has served as the traditional home for many First Nations families. Matachewan First Nation is a very progressive First Nation who is actively partnering with the resource-development industry to establish mutually beneficial agreements. The First Nation also prides itself in being able to work with industry, with a focus on protecting the environment and ecology on their traditional lands in northeastern Ontario. Matachewan hosts its annual powwow each year, fishing derbies, community events and community members often come home to hunt and fish in their traditional territories.

Mattagami First Nation

Mattagami translated into Anishinaabemowin means ‘meeting of the waters’. Mattagami First Nation follows an election code under the Indian Act and hosts elections every two years. Mattagami First Nation has over 700 members and has close to 200 members living on reserve. Mattagami First Nation is located about 20 kilometres north-east of Gogama and is accessible by road five kilometres from Highway 144.

On July 7, 2906, Mattagami First Nation members signed Treaty 9 making them part of the James Bay treaty. It was shared that the original community of Mattagami First Nation was on the shores of Mattagami Lake. Like the theme of the other communities, Mattagami First Nation was moved in the 1950s to be able to develop infrastructure such as homes, roads and buildings and has not looked back.

Mattagami First Nation is a prosperous community that is focused economic development and infrastructure growth. The community is proud to have a beautiful beach and

lake for recreational and gathering use, sacred ceremony spaces, community complex, First Nations administration offices, a health clinic, a fire department, the Mary Jane Memorial School, the KIHS internet-high school, and a hockey arena. Mattagami First Nation hosts ceremonies including their pow wow, fishing derbies and often programming weekly if not nightly for their members.

Beaverhouse First Nation

Beaverhouse First Nation hosts elections every two years. Beaverhouse is a settlement area on the Misema River system northeast of Kirkland Lake Ontario. The name of the community is derived from the Algonquin name of the river Maaseema Qweesh, where Qweesh refers to a 'beaver's nest or house'. The membership of Beaverhouse is currently around 240 with an additional 150 associated members (members belonging to other First Nations).

Beaverhouse was not included as a community in the Treaty 9 document that was initially established in 1906, with adhesions in 1929 and 1930. In 2022, Beaverhouse First Nation has demonstrated it is a Section 35 rights-bearing First Nation. For over three decades, Beaverhouse First Nation was not recognized through the federal government. In the early 1900s, Beaverhouse was a hunting and trapping community with a population of 300 or so. At the time of the Treaty signing, Beaverhouse First Nation never signed the treaty as they were fearful of what that would mean for their community.

For the past 30 years, Beaverhouse leaders have been fighting for their recognition and in 1990 due to the work of individuals such as Chief Isaac Mathias, Chief Roy Meaniss and current Chief, Wayne Wabie the community became an affiliate member of the newly formed Wabun Tribal Council. Beaverhouse First Nation will continue to spend the next few years determining

what their recognition means for their community but also continue to be guided by their membership to be self-sufficient and self-sustaining.

Since the time Beaverhouse has formed a community, they have always created many opportunities for their community and prioritizes their families, children, and Elders through intentional health, education, and support programming.

Contemporary First Nations Leadership

As described by Begay et al. (2007), leaders "Whether elected, community or spiritual, are people who introduce new knowledge, challenge assumptions, convince people that things can be different, propose change and mobilize the community to take action" (p. 335). The concept of Indigenous leadership varies greatly from First Nation to First Nation and is greatly influenced by the values of the community (Begay, 1997). The duties of the Chief, Councillors, and senior administrators, whether traditional or elected, are not easily defined and vary across Turtle Island due to the diversity in First Nations themselves. Modern-day First Nations responsibilities are highly complex because of the nuances at the community, tribal-council, provincial, and federal levels (Alcantara & Whitfield, 2010).

First Nations vary in terms of population size, resources, land, governance styles, businesses, and community engagement. It is up to each First Nation to determine the roles and responsibilities for the Chief, Council members, and the senior administrators; these roles and responsibilities help to guide the process for the term of the election. First Nations leaders are required to govern an overly complex set of laws (both provincially and federally) and to address community needs while balancing time constraints, staffing, and fiscal resources—often while wearing multiple hats (Kotowich-Laval, 2005). Ultimately, First Nations leadership attempts to balance cultural revitalization, language preservation, increased opportunities for health services,

business development, economic development, education, employment, and the general well-being of their on-and off-reserve members (Dion-Arkinson, 2016).

The challenge that many Indigenous leaders face today is to find a balance between Indigenous and Western approaches to leadership while navigating relationships from the individual to the federal level. First Nations Chiefs are expected to understand and excel in Western approaches to leadership while navigating individual community protocols and expectations (Turner & Simpson, 2008). Embedding Indigenous Knowledges and Western perspectives, and determining the style of leadership that is most strategic for the community, can be confusing for First Nations leaders (Turner & Simpson, 2008). Due to colonial processes, some First Nations people have been described as "culturally fractured" (Lee Maracle, quoted in Colonization Road Documentary by St John, 2016); as a result, many First Nations Elders and leaders have expressed a need to re-learn their cultural history and find a balance between Western and traditional ways of doing (Cherubini & Hodson, 2011). Colonial policies and practices have been incredibly destructive to the health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples, impacting education, housing, food security, employment, health care, and many other economic and social determinants of health and well-being, all while oppressing First Nations Peoples through child-welfare, criminal-justice, and other governmental systems (Allan & Smylie, 2015). First Nations leaders have the responsibility to respond to the needs of each First Nation and their members to address inequities and ensure that members thrive as individuals as well as a community. Within the Wabun communities, the leaders face many challenges including social issues, ongoing land and economic conversations, and business development, all while trying to serve both the on- and off-reserve populations in a way that meets the needs of all the community members.

Membership On and Off Reserve

> Belonging to an Indigenous community is more complex than our
>
> blood quantum or whether we live on or off-reserve.
>
> —Pitawanakwat, 2008.

For the communities within Wabun Tribal Council, there are many off-reserve members who participate in First Nations politics. Due to colonial policies, First Nations leaders are often put in difficult situations when prioritizing resources for on-reserve and off-reserve members. Also, there are competing priorities and expectations among the membership depending on their life circumstances. In Leanne Simpson's (2008) brilliant book, *Lighting the 8th Fire*, Dr. Brock Pitawanakwat talks about the traditional relationship that Anishinaabe people had, precontact:

> Nishnaabeg oral history describes a long western migration from the salt water to the Great Lakes and beyond. As our people moved, we renewed our relationship with the land to create a new bond between the people and their environment. The relationship between the people and their natural landscape is at the core of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. As urban Nishnaabeg, our ancestral legacy is to reconnect with the natural landscape and live honourably and sustainability—wherever we reside. (p.171)

Connection within First Nations communities is extremely important as most First Nations people are still trying to understand history, colonialism, and our relationships to one another. Recognizing the connection between the people and the ancestors who came before us helps First Nations people to understand their origins, their families, and their histories. In the years I have worked with each of the First Nations within Wabun, I have noticed a lack of connection between the members who live on reserve and those live off reserve. The leadership

circle in most of the communities has acknowledged this challenge and is working on strategies to help foster relationships.

Indigenous Leadership Development

Indigenous leadership, from my perspective, is ever-changing; as Maya Angelou explains, it is important that individuals "do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." That quote has stuck with me, as context shapes our reality and our ways to navigate leadership. According to the teachings I have received from my family, Anishinaabe people are always adapting and figuring out the most effective and purposeful ways to lead. Ottmann (2005) describes that leadership development as involving

> lifelong commitment to learning about one's internal and external environment. An understanding of one's collective history, of one's cultural values and beliefs systems, and the unveiling of tacit knowledge that inevitably influence perceptions and behaviour, will strengthen leadership as will an awareness of past, present, and future external or environmental circumstances. Because it involves self-knowledge and understanding of personal values, beliefs, and history, leadership is a "heart" issue and process—it comes from within. Deliberate, active, continuous leadership development, formal and informal, determines leadership growth, capacity, and effectiveness. (pp. 231–232)

Kenny and Fraser (2012) share that leadership "is not the purview of the elected or the educated, it is a time-honoured belief among Indigenous people that the person is born with innate strengths that can assist in the overall betterment of the community" (p. ix). Although leadership development has been around for centuries, Ottmann (2015) stresses the urgent need for such programs due to rapidly changing requirements of technology, business, and education;

these requirements put pressure on First Nations to strengthen their capacity in order meet current demand and effectively plan for the future.

Ottmann (2015) indicates that leadership-development programs should be tailored and unique to each First Nation and have sector-specific learning blocks (e.g., education, health, business) as they all are dependent on circumstances, people, and environments. It is clearly unrealistic to attempt to develop and implement one leadership-development program for all First Nations, as individual nations differ widely in terms of size, approach, and capacity.

In addition, Indigenous leaders are typically mentored from an early age by their peers or Elders; this is more of a lifestyle approach than a formalized institutional learning approach (Brant, 2021). Voyageur et al. (2015) suggest that many Indigenous traditional teachings remind us that we are interconnected and that a leader's ability to navigate the political, economic, and socio cultural landscapes are dependent on a leaders cultural wisdom, sustainable business practices, and environmental responsibility. Voyageur et al. (2015) also note that the stories share an understanding of how to work with the interrelationships between context, culture, and knowledge.

In the following section, I highlight opportunities for leadership development and the important work that is being done across Turtle Island, along with a discussion of barriers to leadership development and opportunities for generating new knowledge.

Educational Strategies for Leadership Development

I recognize that leaders carry their own unique gifts and that, in most communities, leaders carry the gifts needed and appropriate to lead effectively. The concept of life-long learning is one that has been embedded for as long as I can remember; it reflects the notion that learning begins before birth (Knight, 2001; Relland, 1998), continues through all stages of life,

and involves knowledge that is intergenerational that focuses on relationships and responsibilities (Bouvier et al., 2016). The concept of lifelong learning can be meaningful; when there are opportunities for Elders and knowledge holders of the land, the plant and animal life, language, and ceremony to be actively involved, the learning enables leaders to continue to build upon the knowledge(s) and teachings (Bouvier et al. 2016).

During the past five years, while deeply immersed in the literature, I discovered many strategies and values that First Nations leadership could consider when leading their communities. These include adopting the Seven Teachings as a model, applying Indigenous theories or frameworks to leadership styles, using land-based approaches, and incorporating Western-academic courses or formalized training through private businesses or consultancies. Leadership development initiatives such as the Banff Centre's Indigenous Leadership Program (located in Banff, AB), The Indigenous Leadership Development Institute (Winnipeg, MB), First Nations Governance Centre, and AOFAs Certified Indigenous Leadership designation (Ottawa, ON) offer programs that range from workshops to year-long formats. These leadership-development programs are developed and facilitated by experts in the field and appear to be pedagogically sound. It serves no purpose for me to offer a critique of these experts' work as I am not privy to the relationships and learning that went into their journeys toward Indigenous leadership (Wilson, 2008). Unlike these initiatives listed, there are limited leadership-development opportunities[5] that are timely and more affordable, reflect the current context of the First Nations, and foster the ability to effectively work with governments and organizations while promoting Indigenous culture and traditions (Tada, 2012).

[5] Please note that I did not include the multiple non-Indigenous organizations who are marketing themselves as "First Nations leadership experts" for the reasons discussed in my post-fire insights at the end of this dissertation.

Barriers for First Nations Leadership Development

As a result of domestication and intellectual annihilation strategies such as residential schools or Indian day-schools, First Nations people continue to feel the ongoing effects of colonialism, including loss of identity, culture, and language (Byrne, 2017; McDonald-Kerr, 2020; Mitchell, 2019; Simpson, 2014; Smylie, 2001). Many in present leadership positions have been impacted by these assimilative policies and have not had the opportunity to participate in meaningful programs that teach leaders how to guide their community toward cultural and financial well-being (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou, 2010). In addition, Sheila Carr-Stewart (2001) argues,

> The 1867 Constitution Act, section 91 (24), vested all legislative authority for Indians and Indian lands in the federal government. As a result, First Nations education was defined as a federal responsibility and separate from provincial responsibility for education (sec. 93). (p. 132)

Given that education as a treaty right, it is interesting to think that, historically, First Nations leaders have not had an opportunity to strengthen their capacity through intentional education programming that is freely accessible, culturally relevant, and timely. At present, professional development is often conducted outside the organization and facilitated by non-Indigenous organizations or trainers who lack the knowledge or resources to support First Nations leadership education and understand neither the context (Deer, 2013) nor how leadership is viewed in First Nations communities. Ottmann (2015) explains,

> leadership development consists of many people, elements, conditions, commitments converging, diverging, and re-converging over time. It is not an event, but a process, a journey. The terms “process” and “journey” have repeatedly—to the point of overuse—

> been used to describe long-term meaningful and lasting learning events. Despite overuse of the terms, the transition from theory into practice is less apparent. The "quick-fix," "in and out" workshop is no longer a viable avenue for effective leadership development programs. (p. 58)

A combination of systemic barriers and lack of intentional programming for First Nations leaders have created barriers to on-going learning opportunities. In order for learning to be successful, it must be sustainable over time and focused on addressing some of the root causes discussed in the structural determinants section above (Reading, 2015).

Opportunity for Generating Knowledge

Many Indigenous scholars have demonstrated the need and value of Indigenous leadership programs and knowledge developed by Indigenous peoples for Indigenous peoples in order to strengthen First Nations capacity and governance systems (Battiste 2009; Borrows & Coyle, 2017; Brant, 2021; Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015; Churchill, 2011; Fox, 2017; Hamilton et al. 2021; Harry, 2011; Huffman, 2011; Kenny, 2012; Simpson, 2018; Turnbull et al., 2011; Pitawanakwat, 2008; Whyte, 2019; Voyageur, 2021

Many Indigenous Scholars (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux 2015; Corntassel, 2020; Pitawanakwat 2018; Voyageur, 2021) scholars feel that training for First Nations leadership should be rooted in values and beliefs that are meaningful to them in terms of culture and history and factor in their definitions of what it means to be a healthy, safe community. The perspective of traditional Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing as a foundation to healthy communities has been foundational as a recommendation for the past decade (Bowie, 2013; Tada, 2012; Walle, 2010). For programming to be effective, it is essential that it be relevant to and respectful of aspects of Indigeneity that resonate with communities

(Dion-Arkinson, 2016); a life-stages approach (i.e., from early years to later in life training) may also be advantageous.

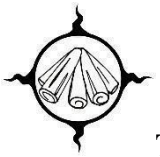
Fox (2017) notes that the design of the programs should be tailored to the First Nations leaders, with attention given to maintaining traditions and reinforcing cultural values; this indicates that capacity strengthening requires an understanding of how First Nations leadership operates within tribal institutions.

At present, there is one program in Ontario that is strategically designed to enhance leadership development with First Nations Chiefs; of these, only one—a one-year degree program at the Native Education and Training College of Business, Healthcare, Human Service and Technology in North Bay—is located in Northeastern Ontario. Barriers to the participation of First Nations leaders in these programs include price, travel requirements, availability of workshops, credentials of the trainers/educators within the programs, and time required often conflicts with leaders' other duties and the learning often does not incorporate local perspectives. This highlights a need to pursue the learning with Wabun Tribal Council leaders to determine the best leadership-development program for them—one that is grounded in their context and needs.

Summary and Moving Forward

Gathering the "Kindling and Brush" for my paradigm, I shared my ways of knowing from Indigenous intelligence in a way that reflects relationality, meaning that all things are related (Little Bear, 2009), and therefore, everything is interconnected (Wilson, 2008). In an attempt to decolonize academic practices (Absolon, 2022; Simpson, 2014; Tuhiwai Smith, 2013;), I have privileged and leveraged Indigenous Knowledges throughout my learning journey (Absolon, 2011; Battiste, 2017; Martin & Mirraboopa 2003; J. Pegahmagabow, personal communication, August 24, 2017; Wilson, 2001).

I am grateful for the Indigenous academics who have come before me and to their ancestors for the strength and resistance that give me voice. I am cognizant that the process of learning and re-learning will continually challenge my emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical levels of being, both during this dissertation process and long after it is complete.



The Logs

My ways of doing. The methods. Added to the fire as it grows. This approach was used to gather the stories. The way meaning is made.

My Ways of Doing: Methodology

One distinction between Western and Indigenous research methods lies in this purpose: Research done in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples cannot only reveal knowledge, but also decolonizes, rebalances power, and provides healing (Absolon, 2022; Brewer et al., 2014; Debassige, 2010; Ghys & Gray, 2012; Hall et al., 2015; Le & Gobert, 2015; Walker et al., 2013).

My ways of doing are informed by my ways of knowing and being they have been actualized in how I relate to the knowledge-sharers and how we collectively built this fire (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). This methodology is essential to the research paradigm as it is based on ensuring that there is accountability to the relationships throughout this learning (Wilson, 2008). My theory and methods have been intertwined; sharing stories is something we can do to ensure we articulate our ways of doing and share our experiences, realities, and understandings through teachings (Archibald, 2008; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Wilson et al., 2019). Indigenous methodologies are informed by Indigenous wholistic worldviews and set out to describe Indigenous theoretical approaches. The ways of doing, protocols, and truths that are employed in Indigenous research to work with Indigenous Peoples are done in a thoughtful, ethical way. According to many Indigenous scholars, any research project must be thoroughly considered, not merely as a single contribution to the body of academic knowledge but rather in respect to Indigenous Peoples' interests and needs (Absolon, 2022; Battiste, 2017; Kovach,

2010; Peltier, 2018; Wilson, 2008). The quest for an Indigenous paradigm has often been interpreted by the academic world as a political gesture on the part of Indigenous Peoples in their struggle for self-determination (Porsanger, 2004, p. 112). Describing the importance of using ethical Indigenous methodologies as a way to understand, Brant (2021) shares,

> Knowledge is the foundation for ethical beliefs and it is this axiological understanding or worldview held by Indigenous peoples that differs vastly from Western epistemic worldviews. The relational aspect of life, all life in our ecosystem, informs the philosophical tenets of the Indigenous worldview. This becomes a critical difference factor when analyzing the competing paradigms. Western rationale values short-term, economic aspiration and measured growth, whereas Indigenous thought values long-term notions, sustainability, and stability. (p. 80)

Many Indigenous scholars have leveraged Western terminology to fit within Western-academic institutions their paradigms including ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology in order to draw parallels (Peltier, 2015; Wilson, 2008). Leveraging the work of Indigenous scholars before me, I weave Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, methodologies, and axiologies into a wholistic approach that works for this particular learning journey (Absolon, 2011, 2022; Kovach, 2010b; Peltier, 2015; Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008).

Approach to Gathering Gikendamowin with First Nations Leaders

According to Drawson et al. (2017), Indigenous research methods are as diverse as the communities using them, making an encompassing definition of these methods difficult to obtain:

> Despite this definitional challenge, a researcher interested in pursuing an Indigenous approach should begin their process with reflection, both in terms of their place in the

> research and also the Indigenous Peoples with whom they are collaborating. This reflection should be combined with conversations with community members and collaborators to determine methods and frameworks that prioritize Indigenous ways of knowing throughout all stages of the project. One can utilize various narrative methods, such as storytelling and conversational methods. It is clear that a variety of methods and methodologies can be qualified as Indigenous, and this too is congruent with Indigenous ways of knowing; Indigenous research methods are what they need to be for the question they are trying to answer. (p. 15–16)

Before beginning this formal learning journey, I had many conversations with the Executive Director of Wabun Tribal Council, former Chiefs, current Chiefs, the Deputy Grand Chief of Nishnawbe Aski Nation, and many First Nations Councillors. The advice from those conversations helped to shape the methodological approach. My theoretical and methodological approach to gathering stories to this learning is rooted in relationship and falls within the domain of Indigenous inquiry (Kovach, 2010b) and Indigenous re-search (Absolon, 2022). My pre-existing relationships (as part of Wabun Tribal Council) with the Elders, former Chiefs, First Nations administrators and current Chiefs largely developed through work and have allowed me to build relationships and gain trust and credibility with the communities.

I accept that my role and responsibility in this learning journey is negotiated with the communities and that I am called upon to show how these teachings can help build and rebuild our communities (Simpson, 2008). Turner and Simpson (2008) support this way of doing, suggesting that protecting and implementing Indigenous approaches throughout consultation and collaboration with leaders (including Elders, Administration and Chiefs) will be essential to the survival of First Nation communities. Using conversational methods (Kovach, 2010a) combined

with an Anishinaabe lens to reflexive reflection as an approach to making meaning, I intentionally chose meaningful ways of doing (methods) to answer the questions.

An Anishinaabe Lens to Reflexive Reflection

Being reflexive is ultimately taking the time to look back. It is about situating myself in this learning and searching in ways that acknowledge and honour my personal stance and relationship to the people sharing their stories. As shared by Dr. Carrie LaVallie and JoLee Sasakamoose (2021),

> Reflexive Reflection starts by realizing that various sources of community-based experience and knowledge can influence research as it is conceptualized, planned, and conducted, and that collaborative research contemplation can prevent many of the abusive research methods that have had an impact on the past. (p. 220)

Throughout this journey, I have acknowledged my personal connection to each of the knowledge-sharers, thought about my power and privilege, and identified both the ideas I brought to the discussions and the ones that may have not emerged during my re-search (Absolon, 2022). This required really listening to what people were sharing and developing awareness of my ability to lead or guide discussions. I did my best to listen more than I shared, creating space for knowledge-sharers to have their voices heard.

I acknowledge that throughout this re-search, I was in a privileged position to collaborate with others and take time to think about the visits that we had together. I reflected while walking in the bush, listening to the conversations over and over, and really paying attention to what they were saying. Positionality allows the researcher to consider the interpersonal connections along the research journey and the ability to collaborate rather than lead or control something (LaVallie & Sasakamoose, 2021).

My interpersonal relationships with the knowledge-sharers are varied: some I've been connected to for a lifetime, and some I met for the first time for this work. Each of the knowledge-sharers are connected through Wabun Tribal Council and our home communities' affiliation with them. Historically, the communities within Wabun have been connected through opportunities such as gathering at Biscotasing, Ontario; socializing; and sharing goods. Reflections were generated by taking notes throughout the time spent together; I also connected with knowledge-sharers to ensure that what I was hearing was what they were sharing and to continue the relationship.

Lavallie and Saskamoose (2021) shared that when we are reflexive in our approach we can "find meaning in how things relate to each other and enable shared narratives for learning" (p. 213). Reflexive reflection is a respectful, relational, relevant, and reciprocal approach: I have personal, academic, and professional obligations to the knowledge-sharers and communities to ensure that this learning is done in a way that privileges their voice. Reflexive research is also grounded in the concept that people sharing knowledge are equally as valuable in the learning and are co-creators of knowledge. According to Chilisa (2021),

> Reflexivity is an intentional strategy that helps to ensure that the researcher is not a threat to the credibility of the study. Reflexivity in this context refers to the assessment of the influence of the researcher's background and ways of perceiving reality, perceptions, experiences, ideological biases, and interests during the research [since] the researcher is the main data collection instrument [and the one who] analyses, interprets and reports the findings. (p. 168)

Kwame (2017) indicates that the reflexive researcher makes use of narratives, life stories, histories, metaphor, and dreams as sources of knowledge and as methods of data generation in

research. I gravitate to reflexive research largely because it is rooted in the idea that "reality is multiple with multiple truths, the interconnectedness of all things in the cosmos; relational accountability; humility, spirituality, and reciprocity" (p. 7).

Lavallie and Saskamoose (2021) reinforce that learners engaged in reflexive reflection are "expected to consider why they chose a standpoint, recognizing their positionality" (p. 215). The process of reflecting on my privilege within this work has been imperative. I have always been up front about my intentions, how I situate myself, and how my experiences have shaped this work. I have also made known my intention to generate practical implications for the leadership within Wabun Tribal Council.

Where reflexive reflection was my stance and my overall way of being in the research, I now highlight two methods, conversation and story, as my ways of doing.

Conversation

Conversation that is informed by critical consciousness is typically viewed as a decolonizing methodology that speaks to truth. Conversation aligns well with First Nations peoples as it is oral, respectful, and reciprocal in nature. To be meaningful, there must be a level of trust and interest from both people participating in the conversation. Kovach (2010a) shares,

> As a way to generate story, conversation is the most natural form of mutual discussion: The conversational method is a means of gathering knowledge found within Indigenous research. The conversational method is of significance to Indigenous methodologies because it is a method of gathering knowledge based on oral storytelling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm. (p. 40)

In order to ensure that this learning was done in a valid way from an Indigenous paradigm perspective, I ensured that my work was rooted in Indigenous epistemology which is firmly

grounded by my ethical ‘stones’. I also focused on creating an approach to the learning that was relational, which speaks to my relationships with each of the knowledge-sharers as highlighted throughout the process, but more specifically in “The Pathway” section. It has always been my intention that this work be purposeful (most often involving a decolonizing aim), which speaks to ‘the spark’ and motivation for this search coming from community insight as well as coming from me. My approach involves protocols as determined by the epistemology and/or place, which are rooted in the process of building this fire—the ways of knowing, being and doing that I discuss in “The Kindling and Brush” section. Throughout the years, my journey has been reflexive, informal, and flexible as discussed in this section “The Logs,”, which is the core of who I am as an Anishinaabe searcher. This work has been collaborative and part of an on-going conversation as discussed throughout the dissertation, more specifically in this section and in the ‘kindling and brush’.

As an Anishinaabe researcher undertaking learning with First Nations leaders, the relational conversational process fits my learning journey (Brant, 2021). During my learning journey, conversation was my primary way of gathering information, and I used the questions found in Appendix A as a guide with each of the knowledge-sharers.

Given the nature of my search, not all the questions planned were used; conversations evolved and were guided by people sharing their knowledge as we navigated their stories and thoughts; all the information gathered was considered when making meaning and generating stories. The stories were generated intentionally and are meant to be shared around a campfire or a circle with leaders in a way that works for them.

Storytelling

Corntassel (2009) identifies storytelling as a necessary means by which Indigenous communities can reconnect with our traditions and reclaim Indigenous culture and political identity. Stories provide valuable context and allow people seeking knowledge to ground themselves in culture (Archibald, 2008; Chilisa, 2011; Kovach, 2010b). The collective nature of Indigenous knowledges is embedded in stories that stem from practical experience (Corntassel, 2009). The oral tradition of storytelling provides the foundation for local knowledge by helping people to connect their own experiences with those from the past (Corntassel; 2009, Kovach, 2010a, 2010b). Accepting the approach of storytelling is both an honour and privilege; in doing so, I am responsible for ensuring the voice and representation of the people sharing their stories (Kovach, 2010a). Storytelling has been proven to be a wise practice for leadership, as leaders use past stories before deciding on future actions (Chilisa, 2011; Voyageur et al., 2015). Young (2006) shares that storytellers' offer guidance on how to enact appropriate, cultural values that inform leadership practices.

My role in this learning journey is that of the storyteller (Corntassel, 2009; Kovach, 2010b; Tuhiwai Smith, 2013); as part of this learning process, I took notes, journalled, and reflected while out on the Land as a way to make meaning. I was always aware that the power of a story is often dependent on the storyteller, who must be able to immediately adjust the elements of the story based on context or relational needs. What is unique to Indigenous leadership is an awareness of how culture and context (highlighted in "The Kindling and Brush" section) have significantly shaped the conversational approach used in this learning journey (Kovach, 2010b; Voyageur et al., 2015).

Approach to Gathering Stories:

Because of the personal relationships I had with each of the knowledge-sharers, we often spent the first 15 or 20 minutes catching up on a personal level. The knowledge-sharers were chosen based on their current level of involvement with Wabun Tribal Council. My learning journey included Elders, senior administrators, and current Chiefs; I have the honour of having a professional or personal relationship with most of these people. There were many Indigenous searchers who amplify honouring the relationship and attending to the process of relationality support the way I attended to the relationships in my search (Absolon, 2022; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). More specifically, Wilson (2008) provides further support for this method:

> I am not just gaining in some abstract pursuit; I am gaining knowledge in order to fulfill my end of the relationship. This becomes my methodology, an Indigenous methodology, by looking at relational accountability or being accountable to all my relations. (p. 177)

In order to align with the cultural protocols of the knowledge-sharers, I collected information through conversation, which Kovach (2010a) describes as follows:

> Conversation as a method is unlike standard structured or semi-structured interviews that place external parameters on the research participant's narrative. An open-structured conversational method shows respect for the participant's story and allows research participants greater control over what they wish to share with the researcher. (p. 124)

Once I had decided who to approach to ask to share their knowledge, I prepared a tobacco tie for each of the people. This tie, made by me with cloth and traditional tobacco (Semaa) was made with intentions from me for the work. When I made the tobacco tie, I thought about the learning journey and put my intentions for the learning into the tie. Each conversation that I had was initiated by offering the co-learners—Elders, senior administrators, and current

Chiefs—the tobacco (Semaa) tie (Wilson & Restoule, 2010) to share their stories and experiences of leadership. I did this because of the teachings I had received from mentors of mine, including mentors of mine Ghislaine Goudreau, Gail Charbonneau, and the Waabishki Mkwaa singers who had embedded that teaching (and many others) into my daily life.

When we met for the first time, I shared fragments of my story, the history of my learning journey, and my intentions for the conversation. I also shared with them the information letter (see Appendix B) and offered an opportunity to ask questions and clarify the process. Once that was completed, I then offered the Semaa tie from my left hand and passed it to their left hands as I was taught by my drum group that our left hands have a straight vein connection to our hearts. Each of the people agreed to accept the Semaa, which in my teachings meant they were willing to accept the commitment to the conversation.

It is important to note that the knowledge-gathering and sharing phase of this learning journey was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic as I was no longer able to have the conversations with the people willing to share knowledge in an in-person environment.

After meeting with my advisor, Dr. Cindy Peltier, we agreed to wait for four to six months before connecting with the knowledge-sharers via phone or zoom to ensure that they were settled into their new reality of the ongoing pandemic. This was important to me as I wanted to ensure that people were adjusting to the ‘new normal’ of the COVID 19 pandemic. As noted above, the pandemic was difficult for the First Nations in Wabun communities; it is known that Indigenous Peoples experience exacerbated social and health inequities tied to noncommunicable and infectious diseases because of ongoing colonialism (Power et al., 2020).

To ensure I was respecting and honouring the communities with whom I was learning, I adjusted my ethics protocol in March 2020. The decision to move forward with the conversations

virtually was one that knowledge-sharers and I both felt comfortable with, largely a result of the strong rapport developed in prior years. With each of the knowledge-sharers, I had two to three personal check-ins before moving forward with asking about a conversation. To ensure that I was adhering to my Anishinaabe protocols, I offered virtual Semaa (see Figure 8) in an attempt to ensure that the approach was still being done in a way that honoured them as First Nations people. An example of the virtual Semaa tie is pictured below.

Figure 8

Virtual Semaa Tie

Note: Photo credit, Randi Ray March 2020.

Overall Approach to Making Meaning

Absolon (2011) describes making meaning as the process of interpreting and finding meaning in all the stories gathered. It is also known, in its Western form, as data analysis (p. 33).

The natural part of reflection and reflexive practices helped me to situate myself as a learner, acknowledge my approach, and be aware of the process and the outcomes (Buckner, 2005). Active listening allowed me to connect with the knowledge-sharers, and it was very

powerful. Below, I share the approach I took to ensure that the making-meaning process was done in a way that honoured each individual story but also gave space to create recommendations based on their knowledge in "The Smoke" section. The approach taken was guided by the work of my advisor, Dr. Peltier (2015), who shared that she "returned to the teachings to create [her] analysis framework" (p. 74). Similar to Peltier, I found it difficult to wrap my brain around "the Western notion of data validity" (p. 72). Absolon (2022) also summarized how I was feeling by sharing that:

> Indigenous scholars who are primarily schooled within Western positivist frameworks are taught to divide, categorize, standardize, reduce and remove human nature from the process. We are warned against having personal involvement/stake in our re-search. When courses on Indigenous re-search methodologies are not available, the starting point for many Indigenous researchers is to recognize the limitations of western research frameworks, critiquing them and then choosing to make adaptations or let them go. (p. 257)

I have chosen to let those Western frameworks go. To make meaning, I used a blended approach rooted in conversational method and reflexive reflection to re-story the individual stories of the knowledge-sharers. Wilson (2008) describes this way of thinking as more wholistic positioning me to listen and ensuring that I was taking all of the relationships into consideration when pulling together themes. Wilson (2008) describes this as an approach that uses "intuitive logic, where you are looking at the whole thing at once and coming up with your answers through analysis that way (p. 119)

For me, it will always be important to acknowledge and foreground that relationships are so important to the research. Wilson (2008) shares that "synthesis is about building relationships.

And these relationships need to be healthy strong ones. For me, one method through which authenticity or credibility may be ensured is through continuous feedback with all the research participants" (p. 121). Kovach (2010b) also shared that "Indigenous inquiry and story are grounded in a relationship-based approach to research" (p. 98). The following approach was shaped based on my learning from Dr. Peltier's 2015 doctoral work. The approach helped me to clearly outline and summarize the process that I followed to make meaning:

1) At an early point in the learning, I assigned each knowledge-sharer a pseudonym (a number in Anishinaabemowin) that corresponded to the sequence in which we had our discussions.
2) I listened to each of the conversations twice while walking in the bush, hiking, kayaking or sitting out on the Land (I felt it was important to reconnect with Mother Earth while processing the knowledge-sharers' stories).
3) Next, I had the digitally recorded in-depth conversations made into verbatim transcriptions. All transcriptions were outsourced and created using both "Rev Transcription" and "Otter AI"—two large reliable transcription companies.
4) I read through all transcripts eight to ten times to ensure that the transcriptions were accurate. During this process, as I continued to the end of the conversations, common codes began to emerge across transcripts; this indicated that redundancy was occurring amongst the knowledge-sharers.
5) In an attempt to dive into the knowledge initially, I used re-storying as a method and began to write individual stories based on the conversations, I had with each of the knowledge-sharers. Re-storying is a strength-based approach to Indigenous research that was presented by Voyageur, Brearley, and Calliou (2015). As a dynamic and evolving

process, re-storying ensures that Indigenous leadership practices will be restored and revitalized.

6) I used the re-storying approach to really understand what was shared. I paraphrased as a form of understanding what they were saying.
7) I wrote an individual story about each knowledge-sharer using the above approach in an attempt to honour their knowledge.
8) As a form of relational accountability, I provided a copy of the re-story to each of the knowledge-sharers and thanked them again for sharing their knowledge.
9) I received feedback from the knowledge-sharers and incorporated any comments or suggestions into the revised stories.
10) I then presented the stories in "The Flame" section of this dissertation.
11) I returned to the transcripts and looked more closely at the recommendations the knowledge-sharers offered and considered how these recommendations could support First Nations leaders.
12) While reviewing the responses to the specific question about the training of First Nations leaders, I began to code. The following four themes were generated:
    a) culture,
    b) self,
    c) community, and
    d) governance.
13) Once I began to visualize the stories, I began to see the learning billow together and I began to create "wise practice" recommendations, which leaders could consider implementing in their respective communities (see "The Smoke" section).

14) After I finished making the recommendations, I shared them with the leaders both to garner their feedback and to ensure the recommendations aligned with their ways of doing, being, and knowing.

Making Meaning for "The Flame"

In "The Flame" section, you will read the Elders', Chiefs', and senior administrators' unique stories. In making meaning, I explored Indigenous Knowledges using a re-storying approach. In my initial attempt to dive into the learning, I began to write the knowledge-sharers' individual stories, based on conversations that I had with each of them. I used this approach to really understand what they were sharing. Each of the stories included a glimpse of the person's story, rooted in their ways of being (culture); their overall ideas and thoughts about First Nations leadership (context); advice they offered for future leaders (knowledge); and my overarching reflections on our conversation.

My Indigenous search blended with reflexive reflection allowed me to make meaning from the storied data (Lavallie & Saskamoose, 2021). As I began to make meaning and thought through the recommendations, themes began to emerge (see framework examples in Figures 8 and 9), and it became very clear where I would place the information from each of the knowledge-sharers' stories. If a leader talked about teachings, I would add it to the culture section of their story; if another participant talked about what they wanted to recommend to future generations of leaders, I would add it to the context section. The relevant learning and teaching that I extracted from conversations with the knowledge-sharers during the making-meaning process was then re-storied into the individual stories you will read in "The Flame" section.

Figure 8

Example of the Initial Learning

Person sharing knowledge	**Culture**	**Context**	**Knowledge**
Bezhig (1)	We were encouraged to speak Ojibwe in the house . . .	Our community has lots of off-reserve members and that has an impact on our planning	Bringing our youth back to the Land is the way to our future.

Note: Image created by Randi Ray

It was important that I honoured both the stories and the themes generated through the discussions to ensure that I had truly listened to what the knowledge-sharers were saying and that the individual stories shared in "The Flame" section honoured them. It was equally important that I honoured the concrete recommendations for leadership-development opportunities and shaped these into something practical for the communities to use. Given the slight differences in the approaches to making meaning, I will now explain the process I used to make meaning for "The Smoke" section.

Making Meaning for "The Smoke"

As an Indigenous researcher, I have chosen to present the knowledge by sharing stories in accordance with Indigenous storytelling; I have also provided a practical approach for framing recommendations for leadership education for First Nations administration and elected Chief and Councils. Making meaning is a process of interpreting and finding meaning in the stories that I gathered (Marsden, 2005). Using this method has allowed me to align my Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing with a cyclical approach to analysis; in generating stories, I was able create meaning from the actual conversations that included reflexive reflection interpretations (Kovach, 2010b; LaVallie & Saskamoose, 2021).

While making meaning for "The Smoke" section, I noticed that each of the people initially shared a story about culture (including land, ancestors, family, teachings). This served as a powerful reminder that Indigenous Knowledges are as old as life and that culture is at the root of all we do (Absolon, 2008).

This learning was guided by the research question, *What are wise ways to support First Nations leaders during their time in elected office?* The knowledge-sharers' responses generated multiple stories, which were categorized as culture, context, or knowledge. Also, and importantly, these conversations yielded concrete recommendations for training leadership, suggestions to be implemented at the community level, and feedback on what works and what often does not when it comes to First Nations leadership circles.

Through reflexive reflection practice and by visualizing the smoke, I began to see distinct themes emerge regarding culture, self, community, and governance. Within each of the themes, knowledge-sharers offered specific recommendations to support leaders during their time in office.

Figure 9

Example of Sorted Learning for the Smoke

Person sharing knowledge	**Culture**	**Self**	**Community**	**Governance**
Bezhig (1)	We always need to remember the Seven Teachings; they keep us grounded.	You cannot take care of a Nation if you can't take care of yourself.	It is important for us to understand what strengths everyone brings.	There needs to be a clear understanding of roles.

Note: Image was created by Randi Ray

As the concepts began to emerge, I drew a conceptual model in the form of a tree stump. I envisioned the roots as the foundation and the rings of a tree at the top; whether cut or naturally burned, the rings share a lot about the tree (see "The Smoke" section).

- The **roots** symbolize culture. The conversations I had with the knowledge-sharers were fundamentally rooted in what I understand to be Anishinaabe culture—in language, teachings, family, and land. These form the foundation for any learning people will have as leaders.
- The rings of the tree represent the learning of the knowledge-sharers discussed at the individual, community, and governance levels. **Individual** learning includes an individual's skills or gifts. **Community** learning is collective learning and it is key to ensuring that the community runs smoothly. **Governance** learning was imparted when the knowledge-sharers specifically talked about the Chief and council, administrative, and Nation-to-Nation levels.

In addition, one Elder talked about a concept of gathering around a **kitchen table**, which spoke to the fabric of who we are as Anishinaabe people and how we share our culture and learning and therefore was included in my conceptualization.[6]

Summary and Next Steps

This phase reviewed and rationalized the methods that were chosen to collect and gather information in a good way. "The Logs" were prepared in a good way but did not come without challenges. As an Indigenous researcher, I struggled to select the right logs and ensure they were a good fit for the fire. I spent months picking up logs and putting them down, only to pick them

[6] I honour that this kitchen table approach and this was not intended to take away from other scholars (Butterwick & Sork, 2010; Lee & Tran, 2016; Johnson, 2008; Sarkissian at al., 2012) who similarly discuss more intentional Indigenous approaches to gathering and sharing knowledge around a kitchen table.

back up again. This entire process has been rooted in Indigenous methodology and has been grounded by conversational method, re-storying, and meaning making through reflexivity in every aspect of the journey. I collected and sorted through my logs using an Indigenous way of doing by visualizing, sorting, placing, and intentionally listening to the stories while I was on the Land.

This meaningful framework, created for my learning journey, will essentially double as a framework for First Nations elected leaders within Wabun Tribal Council. In “The Smoke” section, the themes and conceptual model will be broken down by topic area to provide recommendations for training that should be considered when designing a leadership program for First Nations Chiefs within Wabun Tribal Council.

The spark will be ignited now that the stones, the kindling and brush, and the logs are prepared in a good way.

The Spark

Ignited only when the stones, kindling and brush, and logs are prepared in a good way.

The question and motivators that drive this learning.

This learning journey for me is a personal one. Over a decade ago, I found myself sitting around a kitchen table with three of the most strategic minds I had ever met when it comes to First Nations politics. As a young, master's level student, I was in awe of the depth of the conversation. I mustered the confidence to ask, "Is there a plan to build capacity for leadership to ensure our communities are sustainable over time?" The room fell silent; then someone responded, "Good thinking. Someone should look at that." I knew right then there was a lot of work to do. Every time I pose the question to Elders, political leaders, and community members, I encounter the same response.

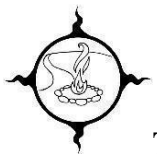
To reaffirm that I was on the right path, and as part of my personal learning journey, in May of 2019 I participated in my first fasting ceremony. At Agawa Rock near the pictograph on the shores of Lake Superior—the same Great Lake on which I and my ancestors were raised—I fasted under the guidance of Elder Rodney Elie. The pictographs at Agawa Rock, found within Lake Superior Provincial Park, are said to be the most famous on Turtle Island. The area is also one of the most visited Indigenous archeological sites in Canada. Most paintings from the Agawa site are said to date from the 17th and 18th centuries. Pictographs are surviving messages from the past. This is a sacred site where generations of Anishinaabe people have come to record dreams, visions, and events. Rodney's teachings explained that the traditional rock paintings are

helpers that support us during our fast. I was there to seek direction. I had just started my own businesses, was in the middle of this PhD journey, and was looking for direction.

The Sweat Lodge ceremony was the most powerful I had ever experienced. I crawled into the lodge (meant to be representative of a mother's womb) on my hands and knees, paying my respect to Akinoomage; I will never forget the smell of the cedar. I sat cross-legged and waited for the ceremony to begin. I have been taught to not share the teachings of the lodge (as they should be experienced by each person individually), but I will never forget the awakening I felt during the ceremony. During my fast, I asked the Creator to guide me along my life journey. The direction given to me in that ceremony was clear: I need to use Indigenous ways of doing, knowing, and being in the way I approach my life, including my studies. The fasting ceremony brought me understanding and allowed me to connect with my spirit. When I was on the Land, I realized there is more to life than the physical realm to which I am accustomed. The ancestors, the spirits, the ones who painted on those rocks, the ones who came to visit me, the ones who are connected with the wind, the fire, the water, the earth, and with all Creation helped me, and I will be forever grateful.

As Wilson (2008) describes, conducting research is about the preparation long before the event: "It is the voice from our ancestors telling us when it is right and when it is not" (p. 61). I am connected to who I am as an Anishinaabe person not only through my DNA and family upbringing but also through my personal and professional work alongside First Nations communities. My business supports First Nations in the areas of education, health, extraction, and business. My deep-rooted passion for community building and empowerment is part of my own motivation for this work.

I have been sparked and guided using conversational methodology (Kovach, 2010a) combined with an Anishinaabe lens to reflexivity as approaches to making meaning. Before the collective smoke billowed, each of the knowledge-sharers represented their own methodological logs and therefore created their own stories as "flame." It is my hope that the spark within me will illuminate the stories shared below, and that this learning will inform the next generation of community leaders and non-Indigenous organizations on how best to support First Nations leadership. *My learning journey is sparked my desire to learn how to support First Nations leaders within the Wabun Tribal Council.*



The Flame

The Flame. Individual stories shared by knowledge-sharers. Minwaajimo: s/he tells good news, tells a good story.

The stories shared that are presented below are meant to be reflective of the people who so graciously shared their knowledge in combination with their insights for leadership development. The stories are unique to each person and their experiences and reflections should be honoured based on their lifetime of dedication to their communities through First Nations leadership.

Wisdom from Five First Nations Elders

I acknowledge the impact that learning from each of the Elders has had on my overall perspective and life outlook. The wisdom gathered is sacred, and I could not be more grateful for the opportunity each of the participants offered through the time spent with me. Each one of the Elders began by introducing themselves in their mother tongue. The Elders with whom I worked referred to their mother tongue as Ojibwe. The Elders have a tremendous amount of knowledge and all have served their communities in elected capacities—including as Chiefs, Council, and Elders—for decades. The dedication that each of these Elders has for their communities is apparent, and their experience is comparable to none. Elders who shared their stories each had their own perspectives; to honour their wisdom and contributions, each Elder's knowledge is presented as a unique story.

Bezhig

Brilliant. Poised. Wise. Honest. Thoughtful.

Every single day, Bezhig gives thanks in a sunrise ceremony for the people of his community. Bezhig shared that guidance is given in a good way, often through ceremony and prayer. He learned this way of life from his family and spoke specifically about his great-grandfather:

> My great-grandfather was a medicine man. He knew how to communicate with the spirits through the shaking tent ceremonies. After the ceremony, he always knew right away what had to be done to help the community.

Bezhig has spent over 20 years connected to First Nations politics in various roles as Councillor, Chief, and he now has the honour of being an Elder; his many different roles, jobs, and experiences helped to shape his learning and his ability to apply this knowledge in his different positions. Bezhig has a long history of tackling issues head on; he always prioritizes the community and has never backed away from complex challenges. He shared his gratitude for the Elders who came before and explained how much learning came from watching, listening, and visiting with them. Bezhig explained that the important task he now needs to fulfil is to share his knowledge and experience with the next generations.

Language, communication, and traditional knowledge have always been priorities for him. Bezhig believes that the key to successful leadership is an intergenerational approach to learning and education that fosters new ideas and creates meaningful connections over time. From Bezhig's perspective, an ideal Chief is a good listener and communicator and a hard worker who is open to new ideas and people and is always kind to others. Bezhig emphasized the

importance of honouring the Land, ceremonies, and tradition when in leadership roles as he offered advice for future leaders:

> Everybody knows about your mistakes—just try to correct them. The main thing is to work together even to support each other, even our other First Nations, we have got to stick together. You have to support each other.

Niizh

Poised. Caring. Humble. Reflective. Intelligent.

Niizh has a lifetime of experience working with First Nations politics within administration and leadership; a humble approach is offered as a key teaching in their journey, much of which they credit to their parents and home-life. Always with a smile from ear-to-ear and ready to help, Niizh's approach is about strong communication and treating people with dignity and respect.

Niizh identifies the key to working for the community as a leader is actually the ability to make sure everyone else is working together in a respectful way. Understanding intergenerational learning is important; it helps Chiefs become more thoughtful leaders and may help to prepare and mentor future leaders. Niizh believes that gender balance is important to consider within leadership circles and fairness and equity should foreground all discussions regarding decision-making: "You are still the Chief whether or not people want you there or not; you have a responsibility to all of the people."

Niizh identified the prevalence of lateral violence within the community and expressed the need for a strategy to address how to heal as members, administration, and leadership. Promoting lateral kindness within the community starts at home, within families who have good values and good hearts—a teaching Niizh learned from their mother.

Niizh feels that there should be training available for leaders, including in history, financial management, governance, overall determinants of health, impacts of colonization on communities. They also note the importance of a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of leaders.

> Lifelong learning should be an ongoing priority: Sometimes we just don't know what we don't know, and times are changing. They're not like they used to be. There's so much advancement nowadays and technology, and so we have to move with the times, too. Even though we still want to practice our old traditions as well, it doesn't mean we can't be advanced like everybody else, too.

Future leaders are advised to return to our culture and teachers: "Never forget about the Seven Grandfather Teachings in the clan system. We can never leave that behind. It's always important. It's very powerful—and to always remember where you come from."

Nswi baa[7]

Humourous. Wise. Mindful. Caring. Respectful.

Nswi baa grew up on the Land and in the bush speaking Ojibwe freely, proudly, and intentionally. There was a sense of pride in his family and Nswi baa learned a lot about how to be a leader through family relationships, expectations, and roles. Nswi baa has been informally and formally part of First Nations politics for the entirety of his life; he took the Elder role very seriously and used his love for humour and storytelling to share knowledge with others. Nswi baa shared that his leadership style was influenced by the great deal of respect he had for his parents and grandparents. Nswi baa described an expectation set out by his mother, and

[7] I have been taught to use "baa" after we refer to someone who has transitioned into the spirit world.

proceeded to share a story about how she always encouraged her children to speak their Ojibwe language. Nswi baa laughingly shared,

> When my friends would come over to our place, my mother would speak to them like she was talking to me. She knew they didn't understand or expect them to understand but that's the way she was. My mother would say "If you want to know what I'm saying, you have to learn and understand my language."

Nswi baa smiled after sharing that story and I knew at that moment he remembered how proud his mother was to be who she was—a trait that I feel was passed onto him.

Nswi baa feels that in a leadership council, cohesion is very important; he described the experience of Chief and Council as being like a family. Nswi baa expressed that role modelling is the key to sustainable leadership; he feels that as Anishinaabe people we learn by watching what others do. Nswi baa shared that the most important thing our current generation can do for the next generation of leaders is to start taking our young ones back to the Land and sharing our traditions. Our people will learn our ways through connections on the Land, learning and observing how things are done. Nswi baa stated that "the campfire wasn't just there for warmth; it was there to gather and to talk and learn." He shared stories about the important learning that each of the seasons offers and noted that leaders can use these teachings to share knowledge. Nswi baa believes that you have to work to become a strong leader. He emphasized that the leaders who are humble and learn are often the ones who make a great difference.

Nswi baa talked about how, in the past, the community decided on who would be the Chief based on who was the best hunter and warrior, rather than through a vote. In terms of community expectations, he shared a very real concern regarding community members' awareness and understanding of what the Chief and Council can actually do to help support

them. In addition to supplying training for the Chief and Council, Nswi baa recommended offering information sessions for members of First Nations so they may better understand the nuances of the Indian Act, election processes, federal fiduciary responsibilities, and Nation relationships with Ontario. Nswi baa felt education may support members' understanding of First Nations politics; this, in turn, may help the Chief and Council to serve the community in a good way. Nswi baa also encouraged members to think when they are voting for a Chief and Council: "You can't have everyone the same. Everyone brings their own gifts and that's a good thing."

Nswi baa offered advice for current and future leaders:

> Chiefs have a lot to learn. If you can't take care of yourself, how can you take care of a community? You need to look after yourself; you should be in good mind and good spirits. Leaders should ask themselves, "How can the community ask you for help if you can't even help yourself? As leaders, you need to help yourself first so you can help others."

Niiwin

Wise. Kind-hearted. Strategic. Humble. Witty.

Niiwin is as sharp as they come. Having graced the political world for a lifetime, Niiwin has the knowledge and expertise to advise Chiefs and Councils across the country. If you are able to sit together with Niiwin, information is relayed in a thoughtful and strategic way that leaves you stimulated and thinking for hours after a visit. Within minutes of our discussion, I realized that I could have engaged this learning journey in a more thoughtful Anishinaabe way, with no preconceived questions, but Niiwin assured me that learning journey, as designed, was still a journey worth taking. Niiwin also shared the importance of using our language when we can: "There is magic in our language; it came from the Creator and it came to us. It came from a

good place." It is for this reason that Anishinaabe words are sprinkled throughout my work. Niiwin believes that research should be open-ended and that the best place to find answers is around a table—a place where people gather and learn. At home, people are more comfortable, and as extended family or others drop by, the conversation becomes richer and more meaningful.

This is where trust is built, and ideas spark off one another. "How can you work together if you don't know each other?" was Niiwin's provocative question.

Niiwin believes that leadership comes through an inherent way of knowing and reminded me that the knowledge we need to lead is already inside of each of us. They shared that our life experiences shape the way we lead as individuals, and gave the specific example of the significant disruption we suffered —both as families and as First Nations Peoples—at the hands of residential schools; as a result, Niiwin suggested that as First Nations Peoples, we may need to reconnect with the value of extended family, as leadership not only comes from within but also develops through positive family structures:

> If you have a healthy family, you have a healthy community, and if you have a healthy community, you have healthy citizens, and if you have healthy citizens you will have healthy leadership. It all starts at home. . .
>
> If you spend time with [family], their ways of working are going to rub off on you. And it goes back to our own teaching: You rub shoulders and all the rough edges come off.

Leaders need to "listen well" and ensure that they are "good in their own heart." Niiwin's kitchen-table approach to leadership focuses on welcoming spaces, honest and open dialogue, respect, reciprocity, Anishinaabe teachings, flexible agendas, acceptance of the roles and space of everyone, confidence to have the discussions needed, and family of all ages and stages,

including extended family. Access to capacity-development and youth programs should also be part of this approach as these will ensure that youth can grow into leadership both at home and in their community.

Naanan

Progressive. Thoughtful. Wise. Humorous. Optimistic.

Naanan embodies the definition of lifelong learning and expresses how important it is for us to ensure we continuously grow, whether we are an elected or an unofficial leader in our First Nations. An unapologetic learner, Naanan is very confident with the teachings that were gifted to him and is respectful and aware of the protocols and traditional knowledge that is internally carried. Naanan has been engaged with First Nations politics for a lifetime, having been a Council member, a Chief, and now an Elder—all of which built his understanding of people and the world: "Throughout my journey, I got to know the Native world and the non-Native world. That's how I grew to understand the whole world."

Naanan is passionate about education and feels that leadership will be sustainable if members are educated in both Western and traditional knowledge. Naanan feels that the future of First Nations economies is dependent on the relationship that First Nations have not just with Canada, but with the whole world.

Naanan expressed that part of the role of an Elder is to guide the youth in the community and to share stories, thus ensuring that the youth learn from the past and have the tools they need to make decisions that will impact the future. Naanan has a strong passion for education and feels that building knowledge will help not only the local community but also the collective of all First Nations communities. Naanan was vocal about the role of the Elder to protect the youth: "I

don't want our young people to always have to go backwards; I want them to move forward. I did the healing work for them so they could move forward." Naanan also expressed that,

> Chiefs that are coming up today should be more educated in the new way of thinking—they need to think outside the box. Today, and in the future, we are going to be working with technology—they need to be able to understand what is happening in the world, not just in our own communities.

Naanan suggested that good First Nations leadership is demonstrated in a diverse team that has strong skills in each portfolio and a Chief who can delegate tasks and trust the team. Naanan expressed that good leadership comes when you "maintain what you've learned from your Elders, your family, and your reserve life but use the outside world to expand in how you lead." Naanan also shared that when leadership trusts the administration and Council, then overall governance is good. The community will benefit from role modelling and productive leadership.

Naanan provided some practical suggestions for leadership development: having space/overlap for the former Chief to share some insights, offering interpersonal communications training, understanding political bodies and their relationships to the First Nation, extending the election code to terms of more than two years, and focusing on one thing at a time. Naanan also had clear advice for the membership: "Really take the time you need to understand who you are electing and what standards you are holding the people you are electing to."

Key Teachings from the Elders

Talking with Bezhig, I was reminded of the importance of connections, including our relationships with Creation and our ancestors. Our connections give us purpose, regardless of our

role(s). The knowledge he shared is essential for this work but, more importantly, it is a good approach to living the good life (mino-bimaadizwin).

Niizh reminded me that the leadership journey is fluid and ever-changing; it is important to not take anything too personally. Niizh's reflective and thoughtful approach to leadership is humbling; their contributions not only shaped this learning but will also shape my own approach to leadership for many years to come.

Nswi baa reminded me that there is a purpose for everything and illustrated this by noting that dogs were used for the purposes of hauling and protection, and if you ran your water from the lake, you had running water (Nswi baa always liked to joke!). From Nswi baa, I have gained ancestral knowledge and learned that our humour should be centred in all of the work that we do. Nswi baa's knowledge was incredibly thoughtful and wise, and I will be forever learning from teachings in this physical world and in the Spirit World.

Niiwin is a thoughtful gift from the Creator. They shared invaluable insight for this journey and for many, many others. Niiwin minwaadizi (is a good person, leads a good life, has a good character, and is honest). From Niiwin, I have adopted a kitchen-table approach to leadership.

Naanan reminds me of how important humour is to the Anishinaabe way of life. Naanan's experience and wisdom is shared in a way that makes it accessible to all walks of life; Naanan has a true gift. His advice is meaningful, and he prioritizes connecting with the youth in all Wabun communities in order to build strong leaders for the future.

These Elders felt that it is imperative for leaders to have the ability to take care of themselves, first and foremost, and that was a beautiful teaching. Elders also shared that in order to successfully lead, they must be able to communicate effectively with all people, in all stages

of life. They must connect with them in a way that inspires not only community members but also the entire leadership circle. The Elders' vision for the future is to focus on youth and strengthen families over the next few generations and thus ensure that sustainability and succession planning is part of First Nations leaders' community strategies. The Elders suggested that a community approach to learning would be helpful for the leadership over time, as the entire community would benefit from an understanding of the nuances of governance both within and outside First Nations.

Wisdom From Five Senior Administrators

Administrators have been described as the backbone of any Indigenous organization. The typical duties of a Chief executive officer are to oversee all operations that have to do with the community, from finances to external government relations. The five First Nations administrators with whom I met had varied backgrounds in terms of education and work experience; above all, they shared similar traits in terms of dedication, commitment, and a willingness to learn. All administrators have worked for or been connected deeply to their communities for 20+ years, and their ability to lead through experience was evident. Driving their decision to help the community was the hope that their contributions would help to improve their own First Nations. They shared a wealth of knowledge and valuable advice for their respective communities.

Ngodwaaswi

Wise. Open. Patient. Adaptable. Resilient.

Ngodwaaswi has over ten years' experience as an administrator working within the First Nation. Ngodwaaswi is a dedicated leader in the community who, having worked with many Chiefs and Councils, is able to furnish good context and advice to the leadership. The approach

taken by them was described as necessarily adaptable; each day, many scenarios and issues arise that need to be addressed by the administrators. Ngodwaaswi discussed the reality of everyday life, explaining, “Things change over so quickly, like you’re onto so many different things within a short period of time, you know, you need to be able to do that, right?”

Ngodwaaswi shared that, on any given day, administrators need to be prepared to speak to government officials, represent their community, and expeditiously collaborate with grassroots organizations. They work in a very strategic way and love to do meaningful behind-the-scenes work with the community and always prioritize community members by ensuring that wise practices are in place to ensure that the community moves forward. Ngodwaaswi’s patience is key to their role as a senior administrator responsible for staff, communication with community members, and accountability to the Chief and Council. According to them, the role they play in the community helps to support current and future leaders and is always approached with the community’s best interests in mind.

Ngodwaaswi suggested that anyone engaged in First Nations politics should be aware of the world around them, including government policies, and procedures that impact the community. Ngodwaaswi expressed a need for education for community members and potential elected leaders, as there is often misunderstanding about what First Nations elected leadership is and what it is not:

> They [people running for elected positions] need to know before they go to the polls. We’ve had Councillors, brand new, think they’re gonna come in here and change the world and resign in six months, because they didn’t know what they were getting into.

Ngodwaaswi noted that it is important for elected officials to understand that politics requires more than just working within the community; it is essential to have the skills needed to

work with external partners. As Ngodwaaswi powerfully and definitively stated: “The willingness to grow is key to being a good Chief.”

Ngodwaaswi expressed that it is important for potential leaders to reflect on their intentions for assuming a leadership role before deciding to run for an elected position. They also advised community members to take the time to reflect on who they elect to leadership positions, as this decision is critically important for the future of the community.

Ngodwaaswi also provided tangible recommendations for strengthening capacity in First Nations leaders: Information shared should be relevant and engaging so that the leadership is actively learning through the processes. Advice for future leaders included making a plan, setting goals and moving forward, and most importantly, trying our best not to take things personally and recognizing that some of our community members have a lot of healing to do.

Niizhwaaswi

Poised. Driven. Strategic. Respectful. Compassionate. Empathetic.

Niizhwaaswi’s approach to leadership is truly admirable. The extensive experience that Niizhwaaswi has gained through both informal and formal education has been transformative and inspiring for their community. Niizhwaaswi shared context regarding their decision, many years ago, to step into their leadership role: “I just wanted to see things get better in the community and for the office—we were in a really bad place financially and socially—I just wanted to help.”

Niizhwaaswi has the full trust of the current leadership and is often described as the glue of their community. As senior administrators, they have always embraced the concept of lifelong learning and have been a role model to the community. Niizhwaaswi is recognized to be a good leader. It is important to understand that many realities exist for people and leaders are therefore

expected to manage multiple complex scenarios that are often interconnected. Most importantly, Niizhwaaswi is a role model in their family and who lives their values every day.

In terms of Chief and Council leadership, Niizhwaaswi feels that life experience is just as valuable as formal education and that balance of relationships between and within communities is of great importance to the overall success of the community. Niizhwaaswi noted that leaders should have a well-rounded perspective that honours the role and gifts the leader brings. Niizhwaaswi shared that while the pandemic exacerbated some of the complex issues facing the community, it also provoked good conversations that required leaders and leadership approaches to grow and adapt.

The advice that Niizhwaaswi offered to newly elected Chiefs and Councils is to "decide on your goals and what you want to achieve during your time in office, make a plan, and implement it." Niizhwaaswialso wanted to remind leaders in communities to have a thick skin and to address issues in a timely, calm way so they do not escalate. Finally, Niizhwaaswiadvised the community to voice their concerns in a good way, recognizing that the leaders are also community members who deserve to live good lives.

Nshwaaswi

Experienced. Thoughtful. Wise. Welcoming. Strategic.

Nshwaaswi has been serving their community for over two decades and carries a wealth of experience and knowledge about First Nations governance and operations. Nshwaaswi possesses both formal and informal knowledge regarding how to effectively lead; they are a role model to family and community. Nshwaaswi has a notably high level of intrinsic motivation that is humbling to see; they exceed expectations in order to ensure that everything is done in a timely and efficient manner. A kind-hearted and extremely thoughtful leader who is a wholistic

thinker and “sees the forest for the trees,” Nishwaaswi leads by example and expresses a great deal of respect for leadership with First Nations; their hard work, effective communication style, and dedication to the community are valued by the community.

Nishwaaswi shared a meaningful story, from early in their career, about learning from a Chief who led with great confidence, wisdom, and empowerment; this leader, “knew what needed to be done, was effective at communicating that with the staff, and empowered the group around them to do their job with empowerment and confidence.”

Over the years, they have come to realize how a leader’s approach from the outset can shape their term in office and their relationship with the community. Nishwaaswi shared that each Chief they have worked with has helped the community to learn and grow and noted how the Chiefs’ differing perspectives have helped First Nations processes to evolve over time. Nishwaaswi emphasized the importance of a strong relationship between the Chief, Council, administration, and staff, as communication is essential to leading the community in a good way.

Nishwaaswi believes that Chiefs who are able to blend the past, present, and a vision for the future are in a better position to serve their communities in a wholistic way; they feel that the Chief has three main roles: to “protect and role model for the youth; protect the Land; and protect First Nations rights.” The advice given was that the best way to lead is return to the basics: Developing trust is the key to moving any agenda forward. Nishwaaswi strongly advised that a capacity-strengthening program should be implemented within the first three months of the newly elected term and that it be part of a policy the community adopts. Some concern was shared with regard to strengthening capacity within the community: “Succession planning is a huge gap in the communities. I often hear members say, ‘I want a job at the office’ but they do not have the training or education to fulfill the role.’”

Nshwaaswi counselled that if community leaders want their youth to grow to be wholistically strong leaders, they themselves have to be wholistically strong leaders who are willing to be honest, speak their truth, and admit their own struggles:

> We can't be expected to be experts in every job we do. Right? Often, we contract legal advice, we get consultants—but at our own tables we are sitting there struggling because we can't figure it out. We're too fearful to say we don't know, and I know this because I'm part of that table. We're too fearful, so we fake it till we make it. I look forward to the day when we can speak with honesty.

Zhaangaswi

Wise. Caring. Task-oriented. Adaptable. Empathetic.

Zhaangaswi is a thoughtful, experienced administrator who always has the best interest of the community and members at heart. Zhaangaswi is organized, dependable, and models positive behaviours at the office, in the community, and where it matters most—at home.

Zhaangaswi believes that it is important for a First Nations Chief to have passion for their community and culture, and a desire to do their best for their community. Zhaangaswi believes the key to healthy working relationships among the Chief, Council, and office staff is to keep an open mind, work cooperatively, and deal with any differences in a respectful manner. Zhaangaswi noted that leaders will face many situations where they cannot please everyone and will, therefore, be subject to criticism. The Chief is the face of the First Nation. As the leader of the community who is looked up to and respected, the Chief should be prepared to act professionally in all situations. Chiefs should also return that respect to others, encouraging community members to take an active part in promoting community growth "by attending meetings, taking part in community events, voicing their opinions, and offering suggestions. It's

good for the Chief to know the needs and ideas of the community in order to serve the community."

Zhaangaswi also discussed how important it is to be part of the solution and to have specific roles: "Councillors can support the Chief by taking on various roles and portfolios within the First Nation, and by working alongside them and supporting the efforts being done for the community." From Zhaangswi's perspective, council members can actively support the community by

> providing their assistance when needed and taking initiative to know what needs to be done. If the Chief is confident in his staff and doesn't have to worry about administrative tasks being done, then they can focus on their work as Chief.

Mdaaswi

Thoughtful. Kind. Deliberate. Driven. Humble.

While Mdaaswi has had relatively recent professional experiences working for the First Nation, their history of service has extended throughout their life. Like many First Nations, the community Mdaaswi serves is small and very tight knit, "almost like a family." When describing contemporary leadership, Mdaaswi stated that there is a lot of unlearning and learning to do as First Nations people. We are just now being reawakened and empowered with knowledge from our past that will help to shape our future. Mdaaswi optimistically shared, "If you rewind 20 or 30 years, it was so bad and even though it seems like everything's going downhill, everything seems really bad, it's the best it's ever been for us."

What has really helped Mdaaswi in this role is that they always think two steps ahead and ensure that whatever is planned is done in a good way for the community. As an administrator, Mdaaswi ensures that the community, Chief, and Council are aware of the expectations, roles,

and responsibilities documented in their management action plan and governance handbook. Clear expectations enable trust and transparency. This, in turn, ensures that people don't take things personally when there is a conflict. Mdaaswi also shared that they feel valued in their role, which gives them confidence to do what is right for the community.

Mdaaswi discussed their role in planning for the future of their community: "There is a big group of young, young kids coming up, so our goal is to really find a way to inspire them in some type of way, whether that's doing land-based training or workshops. They are our future."

Key Teachings from Administrators

The senior administrators have extensive experience with First Nations leadership; all either alluded to or directly stated that the First Nations with whom they worked did not have a concrete internal plan for succession. They feel this lack of continuity is a barrier as there is a great deal of learning required to facilitate the success of elected leaders or new staff. Administrators noted challenges faced in their roles, including politics with family members, lateral violence, expectations, and credibility issues, as well as the need to manage perceived (or real) power imbalances. There is also a very high level of vulnerability in career security, as senior administrators report directly to the Chief and Council. In some cases, their positions could be eliminated following an election. Despite the challenges and vulnerabilities, the administrators generated meaningful insights, some of which were unexpected. The short story below captures how I envision a day in the life of a senior administrator and was compiled by myself based on the formal and information discussions with the knowledge-sharers:

> The calmest part of my day is often my walk or short drive to the office; I am often the first one in. Before I have a chance to check my inbox flooded with emails, there is a tap on my door or a text on my phone reading, "Aanii. Do you have a quick minute?" Most

days, I am able to remember the acronyms shared by both Federal and provincial governments, not to mention within our internal communications, with the First Nations territorial and political bodies, or whatever slang our beloved youth have created this week. I deal with people, places, programs, and personalities all with a smile. Usually, by lunch, I have been scolded by a family/community member and my integrity has been questioned. I might have been bothered but I have no time to think because there is too much to do. The afternoon goes by faster than the morning: answering emails, joining double-booked meetings. By the end of the day, the family/community member has apologized, I have received an encouraging note from a colleague, and I closed my computer and email; it will all still be there tomorrow. Before my short walk home/drive, I smudge or take a deep breath to decompress from all the chaos. I remind myself that my community is my family, and I am here to help. The moment of reflection is interrupted as I begin to rush when I realize that I am going to be late for the community event. Baa maa pii.

Knowledge From Five First Nations Chiefs

Once the stories and knowledge were compiled from the conversations with Elders and administrators, I took some time to make meaning of the stories and to summarize the themes in preparation for my conversations with the Chiefs. My discussions with the five Chiefs began with a short overview of what had been shared by the Elders and senior administrators to shape conversations in a way that was more practical and efficient.

Mdaaswi shi-bezhig

Experienced. Charismatic. Strong-willed. Kind. Protective.

Chief Mdaaswi shi-bezhig has extensive experience as a leader and has been Chief since the late 90s. In the early 1960s, their First Nation began organizing itself since many of the members had been displaced. When they were a child, their grandfather pushed for recognition, demonstrating the presence of strong role models from an early age. A first taste of activism was experienced in their early 20s when they fought for their rights to hunt and fish on the territory they now occupy. While the political climate has changed many times over the past two decades, the priorities for their council have always remained the same: education and economic development. Mdaaswi shi-bezhig shared how important it is for leaders to have a good circle around them. Their community's success was credited to knowing which people, companies, or organizations with whom to partner:

> My legacy for the community is that I recognized where to get in [in terms of] business development. I am smart enough to have people around me who give good advice and help to guide a good way to move forward for our community.

In order to connect with the history of the First Nations, Mdaaswi shi-bezhig shared how valuable Elders are to Chief and Council and suggested that each leadership team include a former Chief or Elder to advise and guide the community. At election time, it is important for community members to look critically at the competencies of the people who are running for leadership positions. Mdaaswi shi-bezhig noted there are several key competencies that are essential to wholistic community growth, including business development, financial management, planning, and culture. During their time in elected office, when they did not have

the expertise to do something, they were vulnerable and partnered with external experts to ensure that the community was supported in a good way. Mdaaswi shi-bezhig shared,

> Leaders need to have good moral values and to always do the best they can with what they have; they also need to consider how situations are approached. I am a people person; I also feel that if you are nicer to people, they will be nicer to you. And it doesn't matter what people think but if you demand things from others, you are not going to get what you want; that is not our [Anishinaabe] way.

Mdaaswi shi-bezhig also noted that education and economic development are essential to the future of the community and the next generations. The priority for their First Nation has always been to support the aspirations of each individual member: "If we invest in ourselves, we can do it ourselves." Chiefs should have strong negotiation skills, the ability to work with many people, an understanding of political context, an ability to not take things too personally, humility, and a supportive community. After an election, a leadership retreat should be facilitated so leaders may get to know one another's strengths and begin planning; this will ensure that everyone is aware of the priorities and understands their role and responsibilities.

Mdaaswi shi-niizh

Charismatic. Thoughtful. Experienced. Spiritual. Wise.

Like many Chiefs in office, Mdaaswi shi-niizh has decades of experience as an elected official; they willingly shared stories about the changes they have observed in their time as Chief. Policies, practices, and ways of doing have evolved over time to keep up with changes in legislation, political, and community expectations. Being a Chief is a full-time position, it was shared,

> You always have to be on; one of the best things that leaders can do is to find their balance each day through a supportive family and positive outlets. In terms of character traits, the ability to work with many people from many walks of life is important in a leadership position. More important than the specific competencies is the ability to bring together the collective group's strengths and to keep the council and staff engaged.

Mdaaswi shi-niizh advised that the Seven Grandfather Teachings should be used in everyday life, and that time-management, history, current context, counselling support, and lateral violence/kindness should all be part of training for the First Nations leadership. In order to support a sustainable community, leadership must empower the administration and staff to be happy, supported, and mentored.

In addition, Mdaaswi shi-niizh retold a powerful story about an Eagle that exemplifies the strength, wisdom, and experience that is needed to be a strong leader:

> The community was gifted an Eagle (Migizi) that had passed away. The Chief and Council, administration, and membership could not agree what to do with the Migizi as they all had different opinions. The Chief spent a week reflecting and thinking on what should be done with the Migizi, praying and visiting with their Elder. In the end, the Chief decided not to accept it, as it was clear to the Chief that the community was not ready to receive the Migizi as a gift. The Chief shared that everyone in the community understood the decision and that it was a humbling teaching for the community.

While the job of a Chief is to guide the community, it is ultimately up to the community to determine where they want to go and how they want to grow. Elected leaders are reminded, "It is important to remember that you are not going to be Chief forever."

Mdaaswi shi-niizh observed that the younger generation is well-educated and has begun to take more interest in First Nations politics and challenging the status quo. Mentorship was identified as essential to ensuring sustainable leadership growth within the community.

Mdaaswi shi-niizh agreed that concrete guidelines and recommendations for upcoming Chiefs to follow when working in office would be useful to Wabun communities. Mdaaswi shi-niizh observed that this knowledge should have been documented long ago, because learning from the past and history is so important. Since time is the most valuable resource, learning should be relevant, timely and simply not a "waste of time."

Mdaaswi shi-nswi

Experienced. Poised. Wise. Strategic. Humble. Honest.

Mdaaswi shi-nswi is a Chief with a broad perspective of both traditional Anishinaabe views and Western ideologies and thoughts and can blend community aspirations with local, provincial, and federal priorities. Charismatic and strong communication skills were evident in the examples shared. A significant priority on the family as a model for community relationships was discussed:

> I was raised in the generation of "to be seen not heard" philosophy, from not only my grandparents, but my parents themselves. So how do you grow and grow up in that environment and then become comfortable and confident with being a leader? That comes with time and experience.

Mdaaswi ashi-nswi is conscious of the Chief's power when working with staff, community members, and other elected officials. Mdaaswi shi-nswi noted that educating members on the complexities of funding, policies, and political agendas, as well as on the nuances within the First Nations should be a priority and acknowledged that there is limited

awareness regarding how specific First Nations are currently governed. Senior administration, Chief, and Council would benefit from training that is specific to the First Nation; specific recommendations provided by Mdaaswi shi-nswi included a conducting a strategic-planning session within three months of being elected and module-style leadership training within six months. Topics should include history, governance (including self-governance), strategic planning, social media, effective communication with community members, and strategies for avoiding taking things personally.

Future Chiefs are encouraged "to be genuine; it is important to be true to who you are to the community" and are advised that "if you are running for a Chief position for ego or personal gain, this is not the position for you." The importance of communicating a plan to move the community forward in a good way was highlighted. Mdaaswi shi-nswi was clear that if future Chiefs surround themselves with kind people with intentional strategic direction it will help to move the community forward in a good way.

Mdaaswi shi-niiwin

Loyal. Strategic. Thoughtful. Intentional. Loving.

Mdaaswi ashi-niiwin has a great deal of experience being a First Nations leader; there were many times when they considered stepping aside, but the community members were adamant that the Chief continue in the role. Mdaaswi shi-niiwin carries many gifts, clearly prioritizes the best interests of the community, and models strong family values and work ethic. Education and economic development have also been prioritized for the community over the past few decades, as these will help to shape the future generations.

Mdaaswi shi-niiwin identified barriers in the election cycles and how they negatively impact partnerships with other First Nations. As part of training, the Chief and Council need to

understand the partnerships and history of Impact Benefit Agreements within their own communities, as well as those at the Tribal Council, provincial, or federal level.

Chiefs work around the clock. There are no breaks and no vacations; they are always expected to be on call to ensure the community members are safe. Referring to communication, Mdaaswi hi-niiwin said,

> I think it's just because of the way that I present myself, I like to make sure that I really explain myself. It's always something I preach to my kids all the time as there's always two sides to every story. You know, and so, I think that's just made it a little bit easier sitting in this position that, you know, I can't just accept a one-sided story. I need to hear both sides.

Mdaaswi shi-niiwin truly values reciprocal relationships for the present as well as for the future. Relationships are so deeply rooted and Mdaaswi shi-niiwin shared that these relationships should be honoured now and for the future with not just Chief and Council but, more importantly, with families: "It's important to know the history but more important to know where you are going as a First Nation."

Education, both formal and informal, was shared to be critical for both the community and for Chief and Council members. Although challenging, dedication to education, to the youth, and to the future of their First Nation was evident in Mdaaswi shi-niiwin's stories about navigating the public-school system on behalf of the students.

Concrete recommendations for training included understanding history and effective communication; further, Mdaaswi shi-niiwin stressed the importance of context and of understanding relationships with other First Nations. It can be tough when leadership changes within a First Nation. Mdaaswi shi-niiwin shared,

> I've been sitting in this position for a long time, I find that whenever there's new ventures that come along, that requires a group of First Nations to be coming to the table, right? . . . Some [First Nations have] only two-year terms, which is really, really hard to do. And then the other ones could be three or four. But what I find is that when you try and bring that group back together, when there's a new Chief and Council . . . you basically start back at square one again, because they're not up to speed, what you've been doing for the last four years. And it's so hard. I find, you know, you're sitting there and you're just you're going through the same thing over again. And then you're at the point of just before signing off on an agreement. Yeah. And then a new Chief comes in and says, "no, I'm not for that." And I'm like, "Oh, my goodness, you know, how long have we been working at that?" Ah, you know, it just delays a lot of the progress from a territorial perspective.

Mdaaswi shi-naanan

Knowledgeable. Wise. Strategic. Caring. Driven.

Mdaaswi shi-naanan possesses a deep wisdom, leadership, and strength, having grown up in the community, before moving away to be formally educated and then returning to the community to be educated in traditional ways of knowing, being, and doing. Mdaaswi shi-naanan's experience and knowledge working within their First Nation spanned decades and included experiences at the business and community levels. Expectations of Mdaaswi shi-naanan's role were known from the outset, they viewed the position with fresh eyes and provided strategies to challenge the way things were done in the past. Because of the nature of engagement in the community, and the many incumbent responsibilities, they expressed some doubt about running for Chief:

> One of the reasons I wasn't going to run either, is because I'm like, "Who is going to hold down the administration office? I think the community needs me here more." But then I was leaning this way. I would have been happy either way. But I'm glad I made this decision.

For years, Mdaaswi shi-naanan was encouraged by their Elders to run for Chief. The Chief described their election experience as fast; they heard from many community members that they were elected because the community needed a change, a new voice, and a Chief who would listen. Their approach to leadership is strategic, thoughtful, and planned and is rooted in open communication, transparency, accountability, and wise practices.

Mdaaswi shi-naanan feels that, within a month of first taking office, training should be provided to First Nations Chiefs, Councils, and administration in order to ensure that everyone is working towards the same vision; this is a time of high motivation. Further, implementing succession plans in each community would ensure that the youth know the opportunities available to them and for the future of our communities:

> I'm the first one and you know what, if I don't do as well as I do, I don't want to set any other young person out for the same kind of boat. You know, I want them to be able to do better than me.

Mdaaswi shi-naanan believes that a strong leader always wants the best for their youth and for all members and believes that one way to ensure this is to discourage lateral violence:

> For me, as a leader, I don't want that kind of talk at the table and just reminding, you know, our Council members that you know, we're all family like we need to stick together and offer that help. And not talk bad about one another, but rather, look at better options of how we can move forward."

Mdaaswi shi-naanan indicated that our history and our teachings are foundational in our self-learning journeys and that they can be used to connect as a leadership group and community. Future leaders were advised to be relatable role models, be open to learning, be transparent about their plans for the term, and know what to expect from the Chief, Council, and administration.

Key Teachings from First Nation Chiefs

Collectively, the Chiefs shared how their experiences shape the present reality and how the work they do will ensure sustainability for future leaders. It was clear from their stories that being a Chief is an around-the-clock role; the responsibilities are great and expectations are high and both can vary across sectors. Each day brings new challenges and scenarios, but also the potential to impact community members in both every day and strategic ways. As Chief Mdaaswi shi-bezhig shared, “One day you are rubbing elbows with the Prime Minister and the next you are shoveling snow off your Nookomis’s roof—that’s the job.”

The Chiefs believed that because Council members often volunteer or are funded at a minimum wage, it is difficult for them to ask for help if they experience time constraints or additional priorities. Senior administration often deals with competing priorities and with the expectation that every situation will be handled calmly, effectively, and efficiently. Chiefs are expected to know all, see all, and fix all; this unrealistic expectation is embedded into the perception of leaders in many communities across Turtle Island—I would argue this is also true of settler political leaders. The reality—that it can be difficult for Chiefs to admit that they may not know something, was emphasized by Elder Naanan when they shared that “when you admit you may not know something, you then lose control—and power is control”.

Chiefs are often scrutinized and put in a position that requires them to defend their role. They are put in a position where they fear losing power, and this may sway them to engage in

self-serving behaviour, particularly in environments characterized by competition and rivalry, as these foster opportunistic self-interested behaviour (Wisse et al, 2019).

In Anishinaabe culture, we are taught from a young age that there is space for everyone in the circle; when our systems are set up in a way that instils fear in our leaders, Anishinaabe styles of leadership are interrupted. While there are many systemic challenges faced as a Chief, all agreed that the most rewarding aspect of the role is the ability to serve the community in a good way.

The Smoke

A billowing, collective recommendation formed of all the knowledge that was gifted.

Throughout this learning—formal and informal—the knowledge-sharers and I were guided by one main question: What are wise ways to support First Nations leaders during their time in elected office? The responses to this question are threaded through multiple stories and teachings offered to me by Elders (many of whom are former Chiefs), senior administrators, and Chiefs. Meaningful conversation about leadership at the individual, leadership, administration, community, and Nation-to-Nation levels has resulted in concrete recommendations regarding how to support a leadership program within Wabun Tribal Council.

After many years of listening and re-listening to the stories and making meaning the advice presented below is firmly embedded in my ways of knowing, being, and doing. From the outset of this learning journey, making meaning has been about understanding:

> the power, impact and meaning of the stories and their significance to others. Making meaning begins as soon as the gathering begins and necessarily so. As soon as gathering commences there is meaning emerging and conversations about these meanings emerge collaboratively. (Absolon, 2020, p. 12)

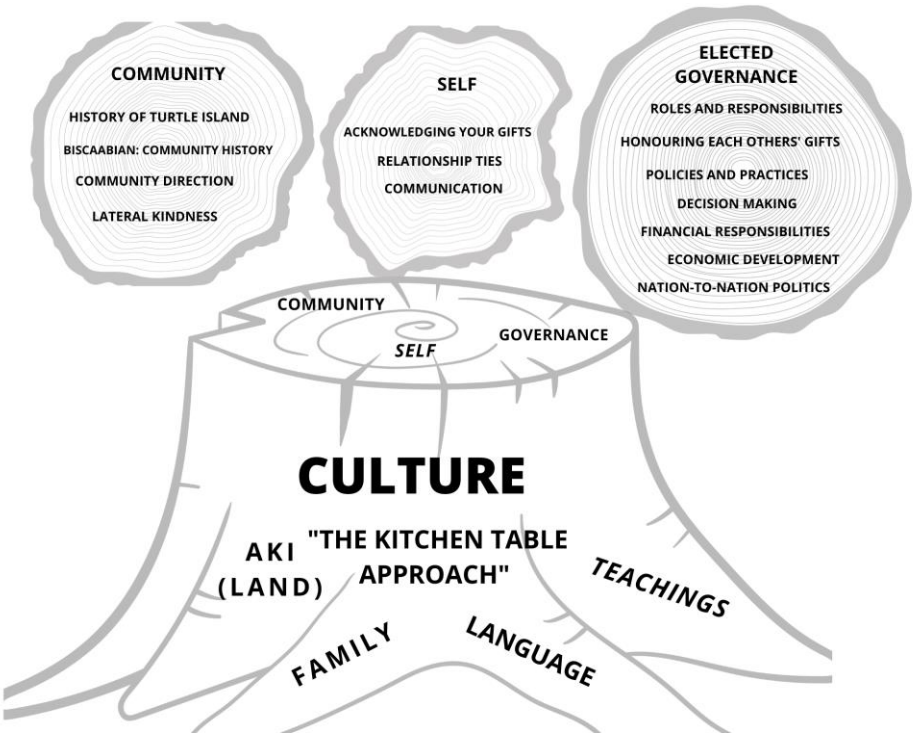
As I made sense of the stories and teachings, I began to conceptualize leadership in Wabun Council as a tree stump, its rings exposed either through cutting or natural burning (see Figure 10). Culture is at the root of all the learning, which is made up of history, family, and teachings. The first ring in the tree is meant to represent the learning that can happen at the individual level, which includes understanding yourself as a leader and understanding how you

form relationships with others. The community ring is intended to be shared as a collective giving the community the opportunity to learn alongside leadership in a way that strengthens capacity, trust, and respect amongst each other. Finally, the governance circle suggests a group approach to learning that ensures elected leaders all receive information at the same time.

The Elders, senior administrators, and Chiefs generated very specific training advice for First Nations leaders. These constitute the suggested core learning blocks that should be considered when designing a leadership program for First Nations Chiefs within Wabun Tribal Council. It was also recommended that the learning occur in a timely way and that it be facilitated by First Nations people with understanding of First Nations political context.

Figure 10

Model for Wabun Leadership Development



Note: Model was created by Randi Ray

The Roots: Anishinaabe Culture

Throughout this inquiry, the Elders predominantly shared stories that directly related to culture. Niiwin observed that "our language, our culture, our teachings, and our families really shape who we are as people, and if we pay attention to that, it will help our communities."

> Recently, my friend Dr. Dan Brant (2021), through his own doctoral work, revealed that, the cultural foundations of Indigenous Peoples are so deeply rooted, it is difficult to imagine a paradigm in which Indigenous leaders do not fall back onto their traditional values. In many cases, Indigenous leaders—past and present—had many of their cultural traits taken away from them; this included language and ceremony, leaving generations of First Nations people in a cultural no-man's land. (p. 195)

Brant (2021) also stated that while the roots of culture are incredibly deep, it takes generations for regrowth to occur. As I listened and relistened to the stories of the knowledge-sharers, I learned how each of their cultural perspectives were grounded in Dumont's (2002) concept of Indigenous Intelligence,[8] which posits that we cannot be intelligent or act intelligently unless we are able to attach our ways of knowing, being, and doing to our relationship to everything else. Throughout the conversations, the knowledge-sharers highlighted connections to land, family stories, teachings, and language. I have learned that culture is all encompassing. It is integral to one's ways of knowing, being, and doing and is at the core of who you are as an Indigenous person; whether you are traditional or not, culture is relational. The culture of a person is a way of life, and for Indigenous people, it is connected to our Land, language, teachings, and families.

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[8] Indigenous intelligence is the wise and conscientious embodiment of exemplary knowledge and the use of this knowledge in a good, beneficial, and meaningful way. Regardless of the worldview one operates within, this intelligence has to do than the acquisition of knowledge, the mental manipulation of thoughts and ideas, and the activation of knowledge into something usable within a system charged with meaning.

Knowledge-sharers believe that everyone in a First Nation should understand their community as it relates to leadership. This view is consistent with Simpson's (2014) observation that the

> resurgence of Indigenous political cultures, governances and nation building requires generations of Indigenous peoples to grow up intimately and strongly connected to our homelands, immersed in our languages and spiritualities, and embodying our traditions of agency, leadership, decision-making and diplomacy. (p. 1)

The intention for this learning is to ensure that Wabun Tribal Council develops leaders who are not only knowledgeable but also grounded in their cultural knowledge and wisdom, as this will help them to form wholistically healthy, thriving, and economically sustainable communities (Simpson, 2014).

Aki (Land)

You gotta take [them] back to the facts and the Land. You got to get back to the beginning—back to the Land. Because they can teach you at school, but it's not the same.

—Nswi

Simply stated, without the Land, we would not be here; that is the formative concept embedded into Indigenous leadership theories and practices (Kenny & Fraser, 2012). I acknowledge the Land and location of each of the Elders, administrators, and Chiefs. I recognize that each fire will burn in a different way and that this is dependent on each First Nation's relationship with the Land in Treaty 9 territory. Land directly impacts leadership and community work. Leanne Simpson (2014) explains:

> By far the largest attack on Indigenous knowledge systems right now is land dispossession, and the people that are actively protecting Nishnaabewin are not those at academic conferences advocating for its use in research and coursework but those that are

> currently putting their bodies on the Land. In many ways, the fight for Nishnaabewin is not taking place in Parliament, on social media or on the streets in urban centres; rather, it lies with communities and those on the ground who are active practitioners of Nishnaabewin or who are actively protecting their lands from destruction. (p. 21)

One of the priorities of Wabun Tribal Council is to honour our traditional lands and territories and protect them for our next generations. Senior administrator Nshwaaswi shared that the relationship between land protocols, including harvesting and hunting, are directly related to respect at the leadership level:

> Once a Chief starts cheating in regards to harvesting, because they think it's their Aboriginal right—they lose that sense of credibility when it comes to administration, because [the community members feel] like, I've seen you cheat in the bush. I don't think they realize how important that is—it's huge.

The knowledge-sharers agreed that some of the learning should be done on the Land since the Land is often the place that we seek direction (Borrows, 2014). Niizh went on to explain that,

> some of our own people are city slickers, a lot of them are like that, but I think most of them would love it. I think once you get them there, they love it. There is so much more than just being there and seeing the plant life, and listening to the animals, and listening to the river run, the water; it just livens everything up. It makes you appreciate all that much more. Because why would you want to fall asleep, or be on your phone, when you're on the Land.

In terms of a context for learning, Nswi recommended that some of the learning be done in an environment where people can share and learn together. Good places to teach include on a shore or around a campfire circle:

> The campfire wasn't there just for warmth, it was there to gather and talk. And then when the eldest member of that group spoke, everybody else got quiet, you listened—and that's just the way it was.

Bezhik also shared something similar that confirmed Nswi's thoughts:

> A lot of the stories that are told are not always by the fire but there's a body of water nearby . . . they will be near that water. There's something about water for Ojibwe people that means something.

Within the Wabun Tribal Council, there are often Elders, Chiefs, or Council members who live off-reserve, as do the majority of the First Nations members. Regardless of location, the knowledge-sharers believe that community voice (on- and off-reserve) is essential to moving the community and conversation forward. This is not unlike Simpson's (2014) argument:

> While it is critical that we grow and nurture a generation of people that can think within the land and have tremendous knowledge and connection to Aki, this doesn't have to take away from the contributions of urban Indigenous communities to our collective resurgence. Cities have become sites of tremendous activism and resistance, and artistic, cultural and linguistic revival and regeneration, and this too comes from the land. Whether urban or rural, city or reserve, the shift that Indigenous systems of intelligence compel us to make is one from capitalistic consumer to cultural producer. (p. 23)

Ultimately, it is up to the communities within Wabun Tribal Council to determine what "on the Land" means for each of their respective First Nations. Learning opportunities could be

offered on their homelands, in their traditional territories, or at another gathering place where their leadership circle or community feel comfortable to connect not only with one another but also with the Land.

Family

In many Indigenous cultures, family units extend beyond the traditional nuclear family living together in one house. Families are extensive networks of strong, connective kinship; they are often entire communities (Talaga, 2019). Given that definition, most of the people from our First Nations communities are well connected. Nswi reiterated this belief: "My family is enough people to form our entire First Nation; we are like one big family."

According to Elder Hopoketun, "all people have the capacity for leadership based on their genealogies and gifts they have as individuals, in their families, within their communities and as Nation representatives" (as cited in Young, 2006, p. 45).

Knowledge-sharers talked about the importance of family: understanding who your family is, where they came from, their stories, their strength and their pain. Ancestral and intergenerational trauma is connected through our family and community histories, meaning that our resilience and love are also connected in the same way. Family values connect to leadership and leadership development and thus set a strong foundation for future leaders. Niiwin talked a lot about how family supports the sustainability of our communities:

> When you look at future leaders, it's the same thing. I think personally it's like family. So, I'm doing my work for my family, and all my children are successful. Now, how did I do that? Did I go and learn finances? Did I go and do this, that, and the other? No, none of that. It was just family stuff. We enjoyed it. We went out on the Land, we went hunting, fishing, trapping—not trapping so much, but hunting and fishing and gathering

> and all of that. All those things that the family needs to do. And that's where we gained our experience. We didn't do business planning or policy; we didn't do any of that stuff. It was family.

Referring to the impact of the Residential-School system, knowledge-sharers discussed the importance of education in protecting future generations from the racism or discrimination that they had experienced. Mdaaswi shi-niiwin shared,

> I am the child of a Residential-School Survivor; because of that, I became a huge advocate for my children when it counts. Because I always said, you know what, I think back to my mom being in Residential School: Who fought for her, right? No one, right. So I said, so I was not going to let that happen to my children.

In many First Nations communities, leadership is hereditary, often discussed and developed through Elders and family conversations. Five of the six Elders engaged in these discussions were former Chiefs who had spent a lifetime in First Nations politics; all knowledge-sharers had parents or family members who were heavily involved in First Nations politics. The majority of the leaders credited their families—often, their grandparents—for their passion, strength, and commitment. Leaders must be willing to break the intergenerational cycles in order to take care of themselves (a theme generated below) in order to heal and move forward. Families can be defined by the strengths of an individual person, but it was evident from the knowledge-sharers that connectedness in familial relationships is key.

Teachings

Cultural values have sustained Indigenous people and communities for thousands of years in a land that holds many challenges (Brant, 2021). While the concept of culture may often

be taken for granted, the roots of culture define the very essence of who we are as human beings (Brant, 2021). Elder Bezhig reiterated the importance of this everyday by sharing,

> I've learned all my knowledge really from the Elders that were here before my time. How I support our leadership starts every morning at home; I do a sunrise ceremony to help us out—for leadership, too, and the people that work in the community. I do a ceremony for the Elders, kids and youth, and the people who are sick. It happens every day.

Chiefs, Elders, and administrators indicated that it was important for them to have access to traditional knowledge, including ancestral and contemporary storytelling, hunting and gathering, traditional crafts, ceremonies (e.g., Pipe, Sweat Lodge, Full Moon, Fasting, Shaking Tent, Sundance), traditional medicines, and clan-system learning. Anything that could help the leaders feel more connected to who they are as Anishinaabek should be supported as professional development. Niiwin suggested that it is as simple as putting newly elected leaders into a greeting circle, which is "a way of just pulling people together in a heartfelt way. It is a little ceremony, and although we know each other, never really meet each other on a heart-to-heart basis."

Naanan similarly suggested that leaders should reflect and check back in with themselves in order to "maintain what you've learned from your Elders, your family and your reserve life, but use the outside world to expand in how you lead."

Leaders, if interested, should have access to cultural teachings through the community or one-on-one support. Stressing the importance of embedding cultural teachings into everything we do from a leadership perspective, Niizh shared,

> [We] can never forget about the Seven Grandfather Teachings in the clan system. We can never leave that behind. It's always important. It's very powerful. Never leave that

> behind even though you might be on your computer and you're just whipping through everything. Always remember where you come from.

Knowledge-sharers acknowledged that it is important to note for the readers that cultural practices vary from community to community. Mdaaswi shi-niizh shared, "We have, we have our own spiritual connections. And there's not a degree or a book out there that tells us you got to do this one way."

Young (2006) acknowledges teachings as an essential part of a learning strategy for First Nations leaders as they ensure that leaders have intentional access to learning that feeds their spirit. Cultural practices and processes have also been found to give leaders a significant ability to implement Indigenous Knowledges both on the Land and in the boardroom (Young, 2006).

Language

"There is magic in our language: It came from the Creator, it was given to us, and it came from a good place," Niiwin shared. Nswi explained that, largely because of colonialism and the Residential-School system, knowledge-sharers may not have had the opportunity to speak their language as: "[I] had friends that were told not to speak (Ojibwe). There were kids who were punished for speaking their native tongue, but we were encouraged to speak it at home."

Each of the Elders used the Ojibwe language throughout our conversations. Niiwin shared a story about the importance of language and governance during the early meetings regarding the development of the territorial organization, Nishnawbe Aski Nation. Niiwin explained:

> Early on there were no translation devices as well, until later it came, but that's the way they did business—in the language—and that's our foundation [the language]. The current Chiefs need to learn that foundation.

Niiwin expanded,

> And I think depending on what part of the territory you come from, I think it's almost a requirement that you have the language, because how are you going to speak to your people if you do not have it. I think to be a Chief, you would have to have acquired these skills and knowledge and these ways of working. Otherwise, it will be difficult for you in a negative way.

It was suggested by the knowledge-sharers that if leaders choose, they should have the option of taking a virtual or in-person course in Anishinaabemowin during their time in elected office. In support of this concept, many other Indigenous academics highlight the importance of language revitalization for First Nations leaders, explaining that

> language helps to define a people, how it is essential to sovereignty and how it can restore health. Learning the language helps Ojibwe people know who they are, it helps them connect, and it encourages them to help keep the language alive and to make a contribution. (Gresczyk, 2011, p. 112)

Niizhwaaswi strongly believes that "Elders should be the ones to teach [the language] because I find when an Elder teaches, and rightly so, then there's more people that pay attention."

As Pitawanakwat (2008) shares, language revitalization through Anishinaabemowin can help to support self-determination by generating effective community-based leadership.

Culture

It was clear from the knowledge-sharers' comments that culture is foundational to learning for First Nations leaders. Stories of Land, family, teachings, and language all demonstrate the significance of Indigenous intelligence and knowledge(s) in the leadership

journey; this will be reflected in the recommendations offered for the leadership-development model. This learning is consistent to that found in *Re-storying Indigenous Leadership*, in which Voyageur et al. (2015) state that

> culture lived as a dynamic and evolving process will ensure that its practice is restoried, restored, and revitalized. Many of the Indigenous traditional teachings remind us that as human beings from diverse cultures, we drink from the same well, while at the same time we work within and between diverse economic, political, and socio-cultural contexts (p. 340).

Brant (2021) further confirms:

> More education is needed to learn about the history and contributions of Indigenous cultural values. Our ancestors agreed to share the bounty of this country hundreds of years ago, since the concept of sharing was integral to survival. Sharing was and is a cultural trait that is inherent in most Indigenous cultures, until recently where concepts of materialism have crept in. Many of us have forgotten how to share in the traditional sense, there should be a more concerted effort to provide educational material on the values of sharing. (p. 209)

Offering Indigenous Peoples the opportunity to connect with their culture is the bare minimum required for us to begin our journey to reconcile what culture means to us. We need, first and foremost, an opportunity to do that for ourselves. For Wabun First Nations communities, reconnecting with culture will be both an individual and collective journey (DePree, 1987). Many community members within the First Nations of Wabun Tribal Council experienced loss of language and loss of culture due to ongoing colonialism. Despite these barriers, concerted efforts have been—through community-specific and Wabun-led initiatives

such as Elder and youth gatherings, language classes, hunting and gathering weeks, workshops, drumming circles, and many other events—to bring the teachings and knowledge back to specific communities in order to heal.

Young (2006) asserted,

> "Cultural education" including history, genealogy (family), language and ceremonial practices are a transformative approach to leadership development and play an essential role in developing relevant leadership skills that will develop positive families, communities and Nations (p. 50).

To summarize, culture has been expressed as a foundational piece that is missing for the Wabun First Nation communities. It will be up to the communities themselves to determine what cultural supports will be needed, how they will do their learning and how they choose to embed culture into their respective communities.

Promoting the Kitchen-Table Approach

A kitchen-table approach to leadership and communication was proposed by respected Elder, Niiwin who has a rich history of knowledge and expertise in First Nations governance: "The concept is simple. A kitchen table—a place where people gather and visit and where you can learn." Questions do not have to be prescriptive and much will come from the trust built and from the ideas sparking off each other, when people feel comfortable and can talk. Around the kitchen table is where we build relationships with our families and friends, most often when extended family shows up and adds to the discussion:

> If you want to have a healthy community—we need to start with healthy families. Our families are what teach us strong values and a respectful way to be leaders. Leadership

comes through an inherent way of knowing—all of the knowledge we need to lead is inside us. Through our experiences in life, it helps to shape the way we are able to lead.

The kitchen-table approach reflects many teachings that other Elders discussed. As a Chief, the ability to participate effectively at many tables is critical to the success of the community. The openness to share with community members from diverse backgrounds, ages, and walks of life will only help a Chief to grow both as a person and in their ability to shape community perspectives and make decisions more openly. Significantly, Elders expressed the importance of Chiefs listening to the youth and Elders when making decisions. The kitchen-table approach allows for real conversations about real issues while aligning with Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being.

The above learnings were meant to be the foundation of the leadership development program that is rooted in "Culture' that included learning that could be specific to Aki (Land), Family ties and relationships, Language and Teachings. The approach taken was not prescriptive but was suggested that by using a 'kitchen table' style approach may be one that First Nations leaders could connect with, in a way that works for them, with a nice cup of tea.

Individual Level

Shared below are the specific learnings that the people sharing knowledge recommended for First Nation leaders to do for themselves. The spirit and intent for the learning was generated by the concept shared by Nswi shared "If you can't take care of yourself how can you take care of a community?". The suggested foundational learnings of acknowledging gifts, recognizing how impactful relationship ties may or may not be and how to communicate in a way that is helpful to both governance and community members will be explored below.

Acknowledging Your Gifts and the Gifts of Others

If you want to be a Chief, you want to be a leader, you have to have it, it's got to be there.
—Niiwin

Just like trees, leaders grow from the inside out and are nurtured by our roots; when we allow our inner self to grow, this can expand to outer circles. It is a conscious choice to enter into First Nations politics, whether the motivation comes intrinsically or extrinsically from the community (or some combination of both). Leadership is a difficult role that is often mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually demanding. It is for this reason that knowledge-sharers talked about the importance of taking care of oneself before taking care of others. Nswi emphasized, "First of all, you gotta look after yourself. Make sure you're here in good mind and good spirits. Because how can I ask [a leader] for help when they don't help themselves?"

It was shared from the knowledge-sharers that Chiefs need to be reminded: The community elects a Chief whom they feel has the knowledge necessary to help their community; otherwise the community would elect someone else. Niiwin emphasized: "The Chief is going to know from the community who has the best experience to do this job, and it will not be a learned experience; it will be an acquired experience."

Some type of reflective learning was suggested (through ceremony or through connection to the Land) as a means of fully understanding the individual gifts of the leader. Chief Mdaaswi shi-nswi stated,

> You have to be genuine for this role—to yourself and to the community. You have to be invested in moving the community forward in a good way and then stay true to that. It has to stay focused at the community level, and what's in the best interest of the community. Not ego—not your own personal agenda.

Chief Mdaaswi shi-nswi also shared that having conversations about governance was the first step in thinking more critically about leadership styles and noted that it was useful to reflect and ask, “What are the gifts I carry, and what can I offer to my community?”

Leaders carry strengths inside themselves that can be called forward depending on the context. It is important to recognize these gifts and to learn how to use them in a good way. This learning can help leaders to understand their personal strengths and motivations and to determine where they may need support. Knowledge-sharers emphasized that people need to learn to “listen well,” “be respectful,” and be dedicated to learning.

Elder Niizh reminded leaders: “You have to always act respectful. Don’t take it personal because it’s not always a personal thing. It’s just that’s just the way it is. I think a lot of other politicians probably face the same thing, as well.” There are certain expectations of leaders; whether they are perceived or not, they are realities within First Nations politics. In order to ensure that everyone is always on the same page, Elder Niiwin suggests that leaders must

> …listen well; that’s a skill that they would need and they’ll learn it through family. That’s the way I think it will probably work best. What the Chiefs they need to learn is to go back into the community, to sit down with the family members, and just talk and listen.

While the suggestion seems simple, it is significant; listening is a critical skill that will ensure that the community also feels validated. This is an example of how themes are often linked; it is often through family and the kitchen-table approach that these conversations unfold in a good way. In terms of the leaders themselves, all of the knowledge-sharers stressed the importance of self-care for First Nations leaders. Elder Nswi explained,

> Chiefs have a lot to learn. If you can’t take care of yourself how can you take care of a

> community? You need to look after yourself; you should be in good mind and good spirits. Leaders should ask themselves, how can the community ask you for help if you can't even help yourself? As leaders, you need to help yourself first so you can help others.

The current Chiefs felt that formal and informal experiences help to prepare Chiefs for their roles. Sometimes a gentle reminder is needed to remind them of who they are and of the experiences that have brought them to their current situation. Chief Mdaaswi shi-nswi shared, "All of those experiences and teachings and knowledge that I gained in so many different areas—not only from a cultural perspective but also trying to understand the government processes. It's been beneficial as a Chief."

Chief Mdaaswi shi-bezhig shared that, fundamentally, leadership is all about being connected to the people, understanding what is best for the community at a given time, and adapting a strategy, decision, or approach based on that. "I would say it is good to be a people person. I always think that you get more if you're nice to people. I am also smart enough to know that if I surround myself with good people, good things will happen."

Chiefs also imparted knowledge about how personality and experiences can shape how a Chief lead and engages with the community over time. Ottmann (2005) supports this learning:

> Leadership development is a lifelong process of learning. It begins in childhood with numerous informal and formal lessons and continues for the rest of one's life. With this understanding, it is important to embrace and nurture First Nations children and provide them with experiences and knowledge that will cultivate their innate abilities and talents, improve self-confidence, and expand the boundaries of their world. In this context, child, family, and community development is as important as adult-positional related leadership

> development. The views of the participants in the study suggested that leadership does not happen in isolation. (p. 208)

Given this understanding, the Elders, administrators, and Chiefs acknowledged that potential leaders should engage in self-reflection before running for office, during the initial stages, and throughout their leadership journey.

Relationship Ties

First Nations leaders often wear many hats and are called upon to do many things for their respective communities, including governing a Nation while also fulfilling roles such as auntie, nephew, brother, cousin, or Nookomis. First Nations governments also administer an impressive array of programs ranging from education, health, and social assistance to public works, land and natural-resource management, economic development, and policing (Graham, 2006). As with any Eurocentric politician, First Nations political leaders are subject to scrutiny and criticism for decisions made, be they personal or professional. The reality in most First Nations communities is that the leadership is never truly dismissed of their duties; it is a full-time, around-the-clock position. Graham (2006) summarizes these nuances, explaining,

> Tensions that exist around political and staff decision making in First Nations communities often stem from close familial and community relationships, and the high degree of familiarity between First Nations leaders, staff and clients. Following and enforcing rules and policies is difficult in small governments and may be especially so in First Nations contexts where members, leaders and staff are frequently on a first name basis or are directly related. (p. 7)

Knowledge-sharers talked about the challenging nature of personal and professional relationships. Elder Nswi baa shared their experience of people constantly wanting to talk to those in governance, explaining,

> I find I am having supper and then people want to call me during that time. All that value on certain things you want to talk about during dinner. I tell them, "Talk to me tomorrow or phone the office, and I think the Chief will be there, too." But they want their answers now.

Graham (2006) explains that First Nations governance often relies on reciprocal, interdependent, and balanced relationships:

> As a result, there may be hesitancy on the part of leaders or staff to act in a way that may upset or detract from such relationships. This introduces greater tension into decisions especially when they are about allocating limited resources or conferring benefits. There is less room for conflict and dissension, and greater potential for this, when it emerges, to be highly disruptive, both socially and politically. As a result, decisions are sometimes made outside established policy, or appear to have been unfairly or even improperly made. (p. 8)

There are many other factors that can further complicate political decision-making within First Nations communities, such as kinship roles, the Indian Act, and membership codes. Innes (2007) discusses kinship in relation to pre-Indian Act Indigenous societies:

> In the pre-reserve period, membership was fluid, flexible, and inclusive. There were a variety of ways that individuals or groups of people could become members of a First Nation, but what was of particular importance was that these new members assumed some sort of kinship role with its associated responsibilities. (p. 10)

The communities within Wabun are small in terms of population and land base but a few large families are at the core of each community. For some First Nations governments, historical culture may play a factor, and there may be an emphasis on responsibility and obligations to clan, family, and extended family (Graham, 2006). I have observed this in the Wabun communities, as certain families are held to greater account. Scholars have noted that conflict often occurs within communities between "old" members and "newly recognized" Indians as a result of the colonial processes surrounding status Indians, non-status Indians, Bill C-31, and Métis identities. These identities, based on artificial and imposed boundaries by the Federal government, cause financial and social tensions (Innes, 2007). Often, tensions are constructed without awareness, are often misunderstood, and can cause harm within a community. In contrast, the strengths of the community are often tied to culture, relationships, and resilience. Any perceived challenges faced by the community can be addressed with the wise practices generated by the knowledge-sharers. The intention for this learning is to help leadership understand the additional factors they must contend with as First Nations governance and administration leaders.

Gaganoonidiwag (They Who Talk to Each Other)

Gaganoonidiwag, translated from Ojibwe, means they who talk to each other. Since time immemorial, First Nations leaders have prioritized developing relationships with individual community members and the community as a whole. Knowing who you are and knowing your community both require "intentional reflection, interaction, time, and risk" (Young, 2006, p. 194); this messaging is consistent with the advice generated with the knowledge-sharers in this learning. The knowledge-sharers often identified communication as a significant barrier, but they also noted that community awareness of what was happening at the community, administration,

and governance levels would be beneficial for everyone. Nshwaaswi observed that over their 25 years as Chief many First Nations have struggled because of a lack of mutual respect and understanding between membership and other First Nations: “Trust is key. We have to go back to the basics, way back to the basics.”

Knowledge-sharers discussed priorities that the whole community could work on together, including learning and sharing the history of Turtle Island and of the First Nation, developing a vision, promoting lateral kindness, and considerations to keep in mind when electing people, such as compensation. To ensure that the leadership circle is in the best position to support the community, the knowledge-sharers suggested that the governance and administration could offer the workshops internally or hire external people to provide community workshops. These learning opportunities could be provided either in-person or virtually for the entire community. This would help to break down communication barriers that were embedded as a result of colonialism and imposed structures such as the Indian Act.

Communication

> *The absolute worst thing in a partnership or working relationship is bad communication.*
>
> —Nshwaaswi

It came as no surprise that communication was highlighted throughout the conversations. Many of the informal conversations that I have had over the years with leaders and community members emerged from limited awareness and understanding of what First Nations governance and administration actually do on both a long-term and a day-to-day basis. Niizhwaaswi wisely stated,

> Over the last few years, I’ve realized that in this role, you really need to understand each and every personality to make things work more smoothly, you know? Because if you just try and prescribe one thing to everybody, it’s just it usually blows up.

It has been documented that in order to successfully lead, effective communication—both verbal (e.g., transparent, clear language) and non-verbal (e.g., body language, actions, gestures)—is essential, as it ensures that the people with whom the leadership communicates can understand and trust what is said (Charteris-Black, 2006).

The knowledge-sharers strongly recommended that the Chief and Council have additional training on effective internal community and external government relations. This training will put the leadership circle in the best position to have conversations that may be difficult or possibly infringe on inherent territorial or treaty rights. This learning should include how to engage in conflict resolution and how to handle criticism.

Using Technology as a Way of Communicating

Throughout the conversations, the ability to navigate technology was cited as an essential skill for the Chief, Council, and more specifically, the administration. The Chief, Council, and administrators' ability to effectively communicate with members in a variety of ways (e.g., email, text, calls, face-to-face, Zoom, WhatsApp, social-media platforms) is critical. Niizh reminded me that sometimes technology is valuable:

> The technology piece is needed, so I guess blending the traditional ways in values with some of the current contexts. Like really making sure they understand what's kind of happening, but also knowing the community in combination with being able to have the confidence, and to be able to articulate that, too.

An essential component of this learning is ensuring that those in the leadership circle gain the confidence and skills needed to effectively communicate in clear and meaningful ways.

Summary of Individual Learning

At the Individual (or self) level, it was shared that it is important for the leaders to take the time to learn a little bit more about themselves and others when stepping into their roles. In addition, it was shared that each time a leadership circle changes (e.g., new Councillor, Chief or administrator) the dynamic of the circle changes. In addition, each person brings their lens to the circle whether it be family or relationship ties that they respectfully carry into the circle that can often cause emotional strain on the individual that should be acknowledged and validated as a reality. A summary of the above really speaks to the importance of communication and really understanding who leaders are as individuals but also how they present themselves with others. The ability to effectively communicate is a powerful skill for leaders to gain. Oftentimes as people, we do not look introspectively to acknowledge our own approaches and ways of being and how that may impact our relationships with others. Learning about ourselves and others is essential and foundational to moving forward at the community level. First Nation governance has been shared to be one of serving one's community and ensuring that each person is looking in before looking out has been shared to be important for First Nations leaders within Wabun Tribal Council.

Community Level

What may be the most interesting part of the learning was that the people sharing knowledge discussed how important it was for the entire community to also be engaged in the learning journey. The recommendation to engage with the entire community in a way that strengthens their capacity speaks to the importance of community leadership. Below, I will discuss the recommendations for learning including History of Turtle Island, the Community

specific history, some learning and advice on what the direction should be for the community as well as a facilitated workshop on lateral kindness.

History of Turtle Island

Niizhwaaswi explained, “First of all, I feel that everyone should understand the history of what happened here on Turtle Island.” Knowledge-sharers feel that learning about our history, from precontact to the present day, is essential for First Nations leaders. This would include learning about the purpose of, and Indigenous experiences with, residential schools (including ongoing impacts), the Indian Act and its impact on First Nations, and ongoing colonization. Chief Mdaaswi shi-niiwin stated,

> We need more about our history and where we come from and why we are the way we are. I think that’s really important, especially in a political office because when you’re speaking you really have to know where we came from and where we are going.

Elders’ beliefs are consistent with Young’s (2006) work which states that it is

> crucial to understanding the present context and providing the foundations for respectful relationships. Stories of internalized racism and shared colonial histories are seen as education opportunities providing a decolonizing approach to leadership education (p. 51).

It is important for people to acknowledge that this history was not shared with settler Canadians nor was it shared with First Nations Peoples. In understanding communities today, it is necessary for members to have the opportunity to understand what happened here on Turtle Island and how it impacted their respective communities. Young (2006) states that learning about this real history its connections to family history and to communities are appropriate themes for leadership-development opportunities. Niizh echoed this sentiment:

> The real history is not taught enough. That's what I think. And that's why I like your education; whatever you're doing there is a good thing. That should be taught to all our kids. And even if they're not Indigenous kids, they need to learn our history and cultures in school so that they can understand, so that maybe it would help break down the barriers and there wouldn't be so much hate.

Within the global context in Canada, racism is a social determinant of First Nations health; many of the knowledge-sharers noted that racism is a factor in the work that they do outside the First Nations community. Many Canadians have little knowledge of First Nations communities and even less of Elders, Chiefs, Council members, or of how First Nations operate. Chief Mdaaswi shi-nswi profoundly stated, "We need to ensure we are conducting ourselves well, because in this environment, we are raising our children. Not yours, not mine. Our entire community."

There is a common stereotype or myth amongst settlers and First Nation people that Chiefs can be corrupt, that they steal money, or otherwise profit, while their communities suffer. This harmful stereotype is widely circulated in mainstream media and is often influenced by a lack of understanding regarding how reserves are funded, and what the Chief and Council's roles and responsibilities are (âpihtawikosisân, 2016). The government of Canada has perpetuated harmful stereotypes over time, has yet to acknowledge the sovereignty of First Nations before colonization, and continues to uphold settler colonialism, all of which has created the systemic racism and violence experienced by Indigenous people (Allan & Smylie, 2015). The purpose of this learning is to help the community learn about systemic racism and about strategies to address it at the individual and institutional levels; this will ensure that First Nations have the

information they need to protect themselves when working within provincial and federal systems.

Biskaabiyaang: Community History

The concept of Biskaabiyaang (returning to ourselves) is profound and foundational; it helps us to understand both our communities' past and their current contexts, which is an essential step in moving forward. Naanan shares that in order to move forward, we must "maintain what we have each learned from our Elders, our families, and our reserve lives, but we can use the outside world if we choose to, as well, to give us context to how the world works."

Niizhwaaswi discussed the importance of understanding history and understanding ourselves, as Anishinaabe people, within that history. They went on to explain that it also helps people to "see the bigger picture, not just of the community and things that are internal, but external as well." Niizhwaaswi noted that Elders should be the ones to discuss history with the group because "when an Elder is speaking, people seem to pay more attention, as they have a lot of wisdom to share." Bezhig similarly shared, "As an Elder, most of my knowledge that I have, I try to pass on to the younger generation."

As the First Nations within Wabun Tribal Council change and evolve, it is important that people understand what, over time, has happened specifically to each First Nation. Knowledge-sharers recommended providing the following learning to the community: the community's history, Elders' stories, overview of current programming, economic and land-development opportunities (past and present), partnerships (e.g., Impact Benefit Agreement relationships, joint-venture partnerships), and community-specific demographics. They suggested that this knowledge come from former Chiefs, Elders, historians, or Indigenous people who are gifted in the topic areas. The purpose of this suggested learning is to ensure that the leadership as well as

the entire membership of the community has access to, and is aware of, the full context of the community; this will enable leadership to guide the community in a way that respects the past but moves toward the future.

Determining Community Direction

During our visit, Chief Mdaaswi shi-niiwin reflected on their upbringing and shared some advice that they have heard since childhood, "I remember, as a child, my grandfather told my mother, and my mother told me, you always have to be two steps ahead."

Knowledge-sharers spoke at great lengths about the importance of community members being on the same page regarding community priorities. Niizh shared,

> Things are changing. They're not like they used to be. There's so much advancement nowadays and technology, and so we have to move with the times, too. Even though we still want to practice our old traditions as well, it doesn't mean we can't be advanced like everybody else, too.

It was suggested that the Chief, council members, senior administration, and community take time to understand community priorities. Chief Mdaaswi shi-naanan stated the importance of community engagement:

> I don't think people realize how important some of this, this groundwork in these policies are for communities. And, you know, when we're talking about a comprehensive community plan, that all comes from the community. That's their voice; that needs to be our guide, not only this term, but something that's going to carry on for ten years, you know?

Ideally, the direction and planning process would be led by leadership and would happen before or immediately after an election. There has been extensive research done on community

planning for First Nations. Prusak et al. (2016) describes how, in the past, community planning was imposed on First Nations (by Canada) through a process that was often driven by government consultants, approaches, and short timelines. Some feel that this approach was intentional because it was advantageous for the Canadian government to have control over First Nations planning for regional, provincial, and federal relationships (Prusak et al., 2016).

Walker et al. (2013) advise that communities looking to do some intentional work should include in their planning a

> series of environmental, social, economic, cultural and political outcomes aimed at improving the present(s) and futures of Indigenous communities and their environments. Indigenous planning is a process that needs to strive for balance across these dimensions. (p. 22)

The knowledge-sharers did not offer a prescriptive how-to guide, but instead suggested that direction-seeking and planning be done in ceremony, through Indigenous-led planning exercises, or using a combination of both. The intent for engaging in this learning program would be for the newly elected Chief, Council members, and senior administrators to take time to think about what the community is saying and how to bring that direction to life in a good way. Nshwaaswi offered some advice, sharing that communities could "take the first few months to develop a plan. It takes time to understand what happened before and where you want to go. Take the time to think before you make decisions that could impact the next generation."

Knowledge-sharers agreed that understanding, planning, and direction were essential components of First Nations leadership, both now and in the future. Chief Mdaaswi ashi-niiwin reflected on their first term as Chief:

> I always remind myself, you know, I don't want to wake up in two years and be like, "What did I do?" I always feel like I'm holding myself to a high standard and I'm going to try and create as much meaningful change as I can. Mostly for our kids because it's important.

Elders, administrators, and Chiefs suggested that in the absence of direction and identified priorities, the leadership circle and the community will not have a clear idea of what to expect or of their role in the community. The purpose of this learning is to take the time to develop an approach for engaging with the community and determining community direction for the leadership circle, including governance and administration.

Promoting Lateral Kindness

A friend, Dr. Robyn Rowe, shared a teaching from Dr. Taima Moeke-Pickering: lateral violence is occurring in our communities because our grandmothers are getting older, and they are tired. According to Dr. Moeke-Pickering, it is time for the aunties to start healing our communities through education, unlearning, and relearning. It has been suggested that residential schools are the primary cause of the harmful behaviour, known as lateral violence, that is prevalent within First Nations communities (Bombay et al., 2014). Oppressed societies often experience bullying, gossiping, shaming, and blaming within the same social group, which can cause a lack of trust in one another to develop (Chansonneuve, 2005; Middleton-Moz, 1999). This intergenerational trauma, seen as the legacy of residential schools, has been perpetuated in communities for decades. The compounded effects of the violence and lateral violence have harmed all First Nations Peoples who have not yet healed from the traumatic experiences and unhealthy behaviours that are a result of residential schools (Bombay et al., 2014). Every one of the people sharing stories identified lateral violence as something that runs rampant in their own

First Nations communities. Niizh described the violence as continuous and recommended that it is essential to stop to ensure community growth. Niizh shared some family values,

> My mother used to always tell us when we were kids, there's a lot of bullying stuff now, she used to always tell us, "You don't make fun of people." That's somebody's mother or somebody's brother, somebody's sister. Somebody loves that person and you don't do bad things to them. That's not right. You just don't do that kind of stuff. And she was always good to people. I like to think I got that from her. That value, it's in my heart. That's just the way I am and I try to reflect that off on my own children and my grandchildren, and teach them these values.

As this learning journey intentionally takes a strengths-based approach, I feel that I would not be doing knowledge-sharers' stories justice if I did not acknowledge the hard truths. In the interests of confidentiality, I will not share specifics about their experiences, but these truths are real and incredibly harmful. Every single person that shared knowledge talked about the realities of lateral violence from community members, who were often family members.

The First Nations Health Authority (n.d.) suggests that healing in the community can be achieved through "lateral kindness"—an approach based on Indigenous values that promotes social harmony and healthy relationships. Lateral kindness uses First Nations teachings about respect, fairness, and the importance of relationships to create an environment built on a foundation of kindness. Experts recommend that First Nations talk about lateral violence as it can destroy relationships and communities all together.

The hope for this learning is that these discussions begin a conversation about how ongoing colonialism has impacted First Nation communities from a human perspective. It is the goal that this learning about lateral violence will help each person come to conversations with

kindness in a way that is productive, and strength based. It was noted that there is a lot of healing to be done between First Nations governance and community members. The goal is to ensure that the entire community understands what lateral violence is, how to spot it, and ways to mitigate using lateral-kindness strategies. By using approaches that are rooted in kindness, the community and the leadership may find innovative ways to work together and support each other in the important work for the overall First Nation.

Summary of Community Learning

The suggestions for learning above speak to the importance of how essential the overall strength-building of the people in the community is to the people who shared knowledge. The knowledge and wisdom were rooted in truth and reality for the communities in which they serve. Ensuring that the community members have not only the foundational knowledge but also the power to influence the community direction through their voice is essential to progressive First Nation communities for the future. Done in a kind way, I do believe there will be nothing that can stop the progression of the First Nation communities who choose this approach.

Governance Level

First Nations elected leadership is continually reminded that they are there to serve the people. Their role is to reflect on what the community needs are and, when those needs are met, to start strategizing on the community's wants. Each of the knowledge-sharers spent a great deal of time discussing how important it was for First Nations elected leaders to have time to learn about each other, about their specific roles, about ways to implement policies and procedures, and about their rights and responsibilities as sovereign Nations. Below I will discuss these recommendations in much more detail.

Roles and Responsibilities of Chief and Council

Typically, when people are elected to First Nations politics, many changes occur at personal and professional levels. Those entering office for the first time may need to build new relationships at the administrative or leadership level or may need to mend past relationships. The leaders often experienced personal and professional changes when transitioning into elected office. Many of the knowledge-sharers found the transition period challenging and felt that it was rushed, there was no continuity with emails or information and not thoughtfully planned out from an administrative approach. Chief Mdaaswi shi-niiwin shared a story about their first experience in office; ten days after being elected, they were sworn into office. The next day when they reported for duty, they were not debriefed by the outgoing Chief, Council, or Elders, but were greeted by the senior administrator. They learned,

> As Chief, I don't even have access to anything; there was no filing system. I don't have access to emails, like I literally started blind. And just, yeah, like, I have a board meeting tomorrow, and I have no idea like, what it even is, you know, like, I had to send emails, Hey, can you send me the original agreement? That should be all taken care of before we step into our roles.

While this presents a clear challenge for contemporary leadership, most of the knowledge-sharers indicated that such issues are nonetheless ongoing. Further, they noted a need to find solutions to ease the transition. Nshwaaswi shared a story about their Elder:

> When we were going through election struggles, she sat with me a lot. And she said. Where we make our mistakes is that, if there's something wrong, we always have to blame. Number two, we transition our leadership too quickly." Years ago, she

> recommended that the Chief and Council should stagger their transition for 30 days between the outgoing and incoming Chief and Council.

Niizh added,

> I worked there for a number of years before I ran for Chief. And you're not there just to do a job. You have to talk to the people. You have to treat them with respect. You're working for them. So anything you can do to help them, you have to do that.

Knowledge-sharers expressed the importance of a strong rapport between the elected Chief and Council and the administration; this was described as the backbone of First Nations operations. Elder Niizh indicated,

> As Chief and Council, at the beginning, we need to have a chat with our staff, our administrators, and tell them nothing's really changing here just because we are new. We need to share with them that you still carry on with your job and if you need anything, any help or guidance or whatever, we're here. We're not here to just start bossing people around and stuff like that. We're all working for our community. All of us, whether you're on council or not, you, as a staff member, are working for your community as well. So we need to do the best we can to make sure our membership gets the services that they deserve. People believe that you can actually help, so we need to do something.

Knowledge-sharers recommended that the leadership circle review their roles and responsibilities regarding governance at the beginning of the term to ensure that their roles align with their ways of knowing, being, and doing and fit within their vision. Mdaaswi shared,

> We need to break down the different administration roles and what's expected with each of these roles. In terms of governance, it kind of opened my eyes, and we don't really have a clear governance handbook. We need a clear path forward.

Knowledge-sharers acknowledged that plans for working together may or may not have been implemented in the past and recommended finding innovative ways to move forward. For example, one Chief discussed the importance of transparency to gain trust in the community by

> having meeting minutes available and upon request to community members and promoting that as much as I can. Sharing "You want to know who made the decision on a certain motion that was passed? Sure. Let's, let's pull it up, you know, yeah." I don't want anyone to hide. I feel like the First Nations leadership has been hiding for years. Maybe not intentionally, maybe just because they didn't know how to communicate or whatever that reason was.

Knowledge-sharers also spent a great deal of time discussing the importance of distinguishing the roles between governance and administration. Not all of the communities within Wabun Tribal Council follow traditional Anishinaabe forms of governance and leadership. Ottmann (2005) observes that the leaders often have to become proficient at working within two worlds. The purpose of this learning is to ensure that there are clear expectations for leadership and mechanisms in place for mutual accountability. This includes ensuring that they remain flexible working with the community, they are politically cognizant of First Nations' culture, needs, and issues, and they are aware of current and innovative leadership practices.

Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships With Administration

Knowledge-sharers talked about the importance of strong relationships between governance and administration. Chief Mdaaswi shi-niizh shared that

> it all starts from the senior administration. If you don't have good management in place, it all falls apart because the Chief and Councils change but if the administration stays the same and is good, you are in good shape.

Niiwin agreed with this sentiment:

> You need to know what you can change and what you can't, and it's a whole other experience. And the other parts, when I look at the Indian Act, you look at things that govern governance models and that, you need to understand some of that. You need to know what you're doing, how to work your way around that. So again, I go back, if you have a very astute partner sitting beside you, you do the politics, and this person can do the business. They can give you the proper guidance to make your way through because that's their work.

Administrators discussed having no control over who wins or loses elections, which often makes elections nerve-wracking for everyone who works in the administrative offices. Administrator Nshwaaswi shared their experience explaining,

> We can't control who gets elected, that's for sure. But we can control the support that they get when they get in the door, and as administration we can help support when they get elected. In all honesty, you want every Chief and Council to be successful, because that means, you know, a happy wife, a happy life.

Administrators also observed that each Chief, Council member, and Elder starts their transition into political office hoping to make a positive step towards the future. Change is often incremental and is done in a way that is strategic and moves forward for the next generations. In order to ensure the recruitment and retention of talented staff, the administration, Chief, and Council need to work cooperatively and meet each other's expectations. Administrator Zhaangaswi directly shared that,

> Office staff can support the Chief by providing their assistance when needed, and also taking initiative to know what needs to be done. If the Chief is confident in their staff and

> doesn't have to worry about administrative tasks being done, then they can focus on their work as Chief. I believe it is important for the Chief, Council, and office staff to work cooperatively together for the betterment of the First Nation. There will most definitely be personality differences and differences of options but keeping an open mind and dealing with any differences in a respectful manner is key to a healthy working relationship.

Each of the knowledge-sharers stated that it is important for governance to trust the senior leadership fully when they are making decisions that are within their scope. Chief Mdaaswi shi-niizh shared that,

> Over my decade of experience, I have seen positive change, there are more policies in place that weren't there [in the past]. There is no more micromanaging stuff from my point of view. As a Chief, I don't have any control over—and nor do I want any control over—our administration; it's all managed by educated individuals who are competent to do their job.

The intention is to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the daily expectations of administration and staff, as well as an awareness of the overall direction for the community. One of the things that the knowledge-sharers emphasized is the importance of communication. Mdaaswi shi-niizh recommended,

> having a little chat with everyone saying, like, you know, there's going to be some stuff that happens, but also recognizing that, we need to tell the First Nations members right up front, like, we will absolutely have any conversation you want to have, we will, you know, be there to support you and be there through but we will not tolerate yelling.

The roles and responsibilities of, and relationships with, First Nations leaders are essential; they provide community members with an overview of the direction the community will take, function as role models for the community members and youth and ensure that the First Nation is held in high regard. A good relationship between the administration and governance is essential; communities thrive when they work together in unity.

Honouring the Gifts Within the Leadership Circle

I learned a long time ago. If you surround yourself with smart people good things will happen.
—Chief Mdaaswi ashi-bezhig

One thing was made clear in the lessons shared by Chief Mdaaswi shi-niizh: "There is no college or university program to be a Chief." Knowledge-sharers discussed the importance of honouring one another's gifts, as each member has gifts that contribute positively to the leadership circle. Learning and knowing each other's gifts makes it easier to understand how to use them for the benefit of the leadership circle and community. Nswi shared that the reality is that "sometimes, somebody will feel better by talking to the Chief, sometimes it will be to meet with the Council members. And I think that's the way it should be; it should be with all of us."

Celebrating one another's gifts is not a common practice for a culture that values humility. People are rarely put in a position where we have to share our personal skills or attributes. Knowledge-sharers indicated that it would be helpful to know each other's strengths as they could "come in handy" when various scenarios arise. Chief Mdaaswi shi-naanan shared about their experience when initially elected,

> The first thing that I jotted down was a toolkit of some sort that had some kind of mandatory training, Welcome Week celebration, you know, because it's supposed to be a good time, governance training, getting familiar with portfolios, and some kind of continuing or honouring what people did from the past term.

Zhaangaswi shared a story about a Chief with whom they worked, highlighting that,

> through their dealings with governments and mining and resources companies, the Chief has developed a good sense for business and negotiating skills, which I think is an invaluable asset to our First Nation and has helped them to become a successful and respected Chief.

Many knowledge-sharers talked about the importance of embracing change and recognizing youth's knowledge and innovative ideas, as both help to challenge the status quo. Chief Mdaaswi shi-niizh shared,

> You still have some old school Councillors, and some real new ones that are very, very excited about their position and add to their role. It's nice to see that type of diversity when you have good, experienced people, and then you have some people that aren't, don't have the experience, but they want to learn in—it's great. The [younger generations] are being nominated; more young people are challenging the older people. I think the younger leadership that's going to come up are going to be experienced and educated because just for the ones that we have, you know, what they do, they are very well educated.

Knowledge-sharers also indicated that learning about each other's gifts as a circle can help to shape how portfolios and work are distributed. It is helpful to understand what experience and knowledge people bring to the table to have them support the priorities of the First Nation. This is not meant to limit the Councillors to their specific portfolios but to avoid someone being asked to support financial decisions who may or may not have the expertise in that area. For example, Elder Naanan provided this successful strategy:

> If you have a Chief and you have four or five Councillors, you delegate those roles as Councillors. You delegate them. You set up a portfolio for each counselor so that they can take on different tasks and different meetings.

Knowledge-sharers underscored the importance of compensating Councillors for the work they do, particularly if they carry a full portfolio. As noted above, elected positions are compensated in some of the First Nations, but not in others. It is difficult to ask people to do work when they are not adequately compensated.

Understanding Policies and Practices

Increasingly, First Nations are demonstrating their interest in establishing well-documented policies in response to the growth and complexities of First Nations administration (Centre for First Nations Governance, 2005). Most First Nations within Wabun Tribal Council manage both multi-million-dollar administrative operations and economic development corporations; as a result, there is a need to build capacity in the area of policy development and implementation.

The administration and Chiefs discussed the challenges associated with policies and procedures within the First Nations. Chief Mdaaswi shi-niizh shared their thoughts on one very specific challenge that each First Nation faces when rewriting or reshaping internal policies or practices over time:

> That's one of the biggest issues and I know we've been talking about that is, that every new election there are policies and procedures to be changed and it's a big process to get that done—and you have to go through Indian Affairs for some of it—it's a huge process.

When speaking about the logistics of their time in office, Elder Naanan observed that there is often not enough time for the leaders to get anything done during their election cycle and noted a factor that exacerbates this situation:

> There is so much turnover in leadership. That's the problem. They should have three- or four-years terms in being a Chief. So, that first year you're just learning the ropes. The second year you start to understand what the community really needs and then you start growing from there.

Many stories suggested that, from an administration perspective, when a problem arises, it is not necessarily a leadership issue but rather a system issue. Nshwaaswi shared,

> It's usually around their second year of the term in office when everyone starts identifying all these issues. They start getting panicky, because they realize it's taken them this long to get to the point that they're at. They're frustrated because they don't think they're going to accomplish the goals that they set out to accomplish. The roles and responsibilities discussion still hasn't happened yet. It feels that there is always time being wasted on answering all the questions and trying to train people on the fly. Once you find where they're lacking, it really slows us down as communities. Within the next six months, they're going to start to panic, because now they have to get ready for the next election.

The overarching intent for this learning is to help the leadership circle establish clarity as they consider the policies and practices of the organization and what may need to be adapted to move forward. The policies should be reviewed (and rewritten if necessary) to ensure that they meet the needs of the governance and administration and that they prioritize the needs of the

community. This review can highlight what may or may not be working in terms of community needs.

Effective Decision-Making

Knowledge-sharers noted that it is essential that the leadership has a clear understanding of the decision-making processes within the leadership circle. Knowing how to make effective decisions was highlighted as a useful approach to understanding effective policies and determining a process early on. According to the Centre for First Nations Governance (2022),

> It is important that a nation's decision-making processes are legitimate, open, inclusive and appropriate for the community. New practices of participation need to be introduced so that everyone has the opportunity to understand, contribute and make important decisions. From this comes a clear mandate and strategic direction from the people. (para. 3)

Most of the knowledge-sharers observed that not establishing the decision-making process at the beginning could lead to such issues as mistrust, frustration, and lack of cohesion. Naanan reminded governance teams that, regardless of the decision-making process chosen, each First Nation's decision will be uniquely theirs: "We're not controlled by the Indian Affairs. We're self-sufficient. We can do our own thing." The advice given by the knowledge-sharers was not about how to make decisions, but rather about empowering leaders to determine for themselves how to best make decisions for their specific communities.

Financial Management

Knowledge-sharers indicated that having some understanding of financial processes is essential. Specifically, understanding how the internal, economic-development corporation, territorial, provincial, and federal financial processes work for each First Nation is essential to

moving forward. Administrators reported confusion regarding where the funding is generated, where it is to be allocated, and how to report it, as there are many funding programs and allocations within various governments as well as own-source revenue streams. Nshwaaswi provided a concrete example,

> We are often sitting there struggling because we can't figure it out. But yet we are all too fearful to say we don't understand, myself included, because I am part of that table so we fake it 'til we make it. I always wonder, when are we going to say we don't understand how to read a financial statement? It comes out when often community members end up fighting over stuff that they think they know, because there is a lack of communication from the administration, Chief, and Council in terms of where the money comes from and where it has to be allocated—because sometimes we do not know.

The Centre for First Nations Governance (2022) states that effective financial management allows for multi-year planning and proactive decision-making, which permits a Nation to plan, beyond the current fiscal year or federal-funding cycle, for generations to come; this approach is much more efficient and purposeful for the entire community. A few of the knowledge-sharers also recommended training about wealth management for future generations, as they felt it would be essential to economic growth, prosperity, and future of the First Nation.

The intent of this learning is not that leaders become experts in financial management/planning but that they learn about the importance of fiduciary responsibilities, financial literacy, and investment portfolios.

Economic Development

Knowledge-sharers emphasized the future of their communities and the need to build understanding of their rights as Indigenous Peoples. This learning includes, but is not limited to,

the following: treaties; traditional land use in their respective territories; the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); and Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). The goal of economic development for First Nations is to ensure that a community can increase their members' quality of life through opportunities aligned with their needs and wholistic values.

Elected leadership face competing priorities during their time in office. Elected officials need to ensure the work they do is not only aligned with the community but also strategic from business and economic perspectives. Chief Mdaaswi ashi-nswi explained,

> On the program delivery and the administration end of things, the First Nation has to run that as an organization, but our political piece is where we engage as a Nation. There will be times where we've got separate corporations that will hopefully build up our economic-development and community-development capacity.

Canada's recent endorsement of UNDRIP (which affirms the right of Indigenous Peoples to have self-determination over their own land) should afford First Nations the freedom they need to develop, use, own, and control our own current and future contexts (Hamilton et al., 2021). In addition, Smith & Chapman (2020) argue that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms acts to free some First Nations people from ongoing systemic oppression in Canada by giving space for self-government and gender equality (also in the Indian Act); this ensures a more equitable space in the discussions. Although there is progress, there have been many debates over the provisions of FPIC, as First Nations interests may conflict with the interests of Canada; there is still too little information to determine whether Canada is committed to allowing First Nations a veto in the event of a conflict (Jewell & Mosby, 2019). The knowledge-sharers observed that

leaders need to be prepared for these types of discussions, as they are essential to the growth of the community. Elder Naanan stressed the importance of this:

> Everything depends on what's going on outside the community. It will affect us also in the community because it's all about zhooniyaa. It's all about money. So, we have to get educated and get ourselves more involved in those kinds of ways of thinking. So, I believe the Chiefs today and tomorrow in the future need to know more about new technology so that they can understand what's going on in the world, not only in the community, but the Chiefs have to start thinking outside of the box, not just in the community.

Nation-to-Nation Political Knowledge

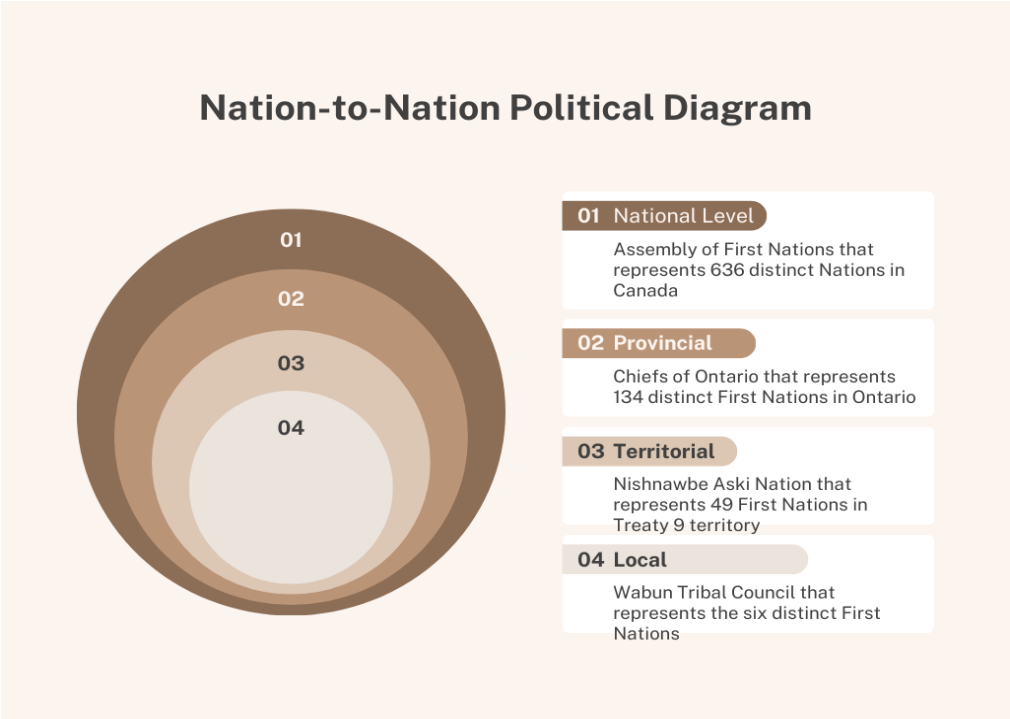
One of the key themes that the Elders, administration, and Chiefs all discussed is the need for all parties to understand their political relationships at the local, territorial, provincial, and federal levels. Figure 11 offers a context for this discussion and helps to visualize these relationships.

Senior administrator Zhaangaswi discussed how important it is that leadership be prepared for any conversation on any given day:

> The Chief is the face of the First Nation and should be prepared to handle themselves professionally in all situations. They will be meeting and dealing with people from all levels of governments, other First Nations, community members, and the public, as well as members of Council and office staff; that is part of their role.

Figure 11

Nation-to-Nation Political Diagram



Note: Diagram was created by Randi Ray

To further reinforce the importance of flexibility and readiness, senior administrator Ngodwaaswi shared,

> Over the course of an hour, I could have dealt with Indigenous Services Canada, I could have dealt with the federal government, I could have dealt with a community member who has a complaint that could have dealt with, you know, dogs running loose and complaints about that, you know, right from there, so broad, all of the issues that need to be dealt with.

It was strongly suggested that the governance and administration develop a clear understanding between differences and opportunities at the local, territorial, provincial, and federal levels. Chief Mdaaswi shi-bezhig stated,

> I would say the first thing you need to understand is where your money comes from and how you generate it, then your community's needs, and then next I would say you need to understand the ins and outs of how Wabun, NAN, COO and AFN work; those are your political affiliations.

Local First Nation

Each of the First Nations within Wabun Tribal Council has its own relationships with the surrounding communities it partners with, its own joint-venture or impact-benefit agreements, and its own economic corporations. The infrastructure, education, health, economic, and social programming of each First Nation is unique. It is important for each of the people holding an elected position and administration to understand the nuances of these responsibilities. Mdaaswi shi-bezhig shared,

> At the local level, it's important to know about the current context, what the IBA agreements are, background, partnerships, and where our community members' priorities have been and are. The context could come from someone who has been on council but should be done for any new member or staff member.

Knowledge-sharers discussed how important it is that everyone around the table understand the community's capacity and understand who their membership. This understanding will enable leadership to do more comprehensive community planning in the areas of programming; building capacity, knowledge, and expertise; and generating opportunities. Knowledge-sharers also felt it important that governance and administrators strategically think

about how to create or maintain relationships with local businesses in order to generate opportunities for economic growth within their community.

As Elder Niiwin shared, it all starts at home; it's all about understanding at the local level—the families:

> I think if you have a healthy family, it just goes back so far. You have a healthy family, you have a healthy community, and you have a healthy community, you have healthy citizens, you have healthy citizens, you have healthy leaders, and so on and on it goes. Build on all of that. So there's nothing like building on success.

Niiwin also shared a powerful teaching; saying that if you spend time around healthy families, "their ways of working are going to rub off on you. And it goes back to our own teaching, you rub shoulders and all the rough edges come off." Niiwin also discussed the important role families play in shaping how our communities grow and prosper together. The overall goal of this learning is to ensure that leaders have a good understanding of their local First Nation and the context within it.

The people sharing knowledge stressed the importance of the community really getting to know one another. The importance and significance are essential to understanding the members for who they are, what their gifts are and the reality of their situations and experiences. Having the community members themselves understand how the First Nation is governed was expressed to be essential to ensure that there is a level of trust and transparency with the members at large. In addition, having the governance and administration understand the members of the community will help them to lead in a way that can action the priorities of the community.

Tribal Council Level—Wabun Tribal Council

Knowledge-sharers suggested that leaders have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the Tribal Council. Most of the Chiefs discussed how beneficial Tribal Councils can be for individual First Nations, especially for small First Nations. The Tribal Council can provide the opportunity to advocate, assist in social and economic planning, and develop policies. Ngodwaaswi shared,

> Chiefs should be aware of the politics, not just on reserve, but off reserve as well. They should be informed on the different encounters, government, arms of the government, things like that. All of the stuff that the First Nation needs to do to move forward. The Chief may get elected and think they are just dealing with the community, but there's a lot of stuff outside of the community that impacts the community that the Chief might not be aware of or have the ability or capabilities to navigate.

The knowledge-sharers felt that it is important for the members and the governance to understand the support of the Tribal Council and how it may help their respective community. The primary role of Wabun is to organize and facilitate the delivery of health, education, governance, economic, and resource development services on behalf of the affiliated members. It is also important to note that membership to a Tribal Council is voluntary and, therefore, the First Nation should derive benefit from the relationship. It was suggested that a member from the Tribal Council (e.g., the Executive Director) could provide this information to the governance and administration through a discussion-style meeting. The discussion approach was suggested as it affords the governance and administration an opportunity to develop a relationship with the Tribal Council and become more informed about what the Tribal Council can do for the First Nation. This learning will provide First Nations leadership with a clear understanding of the structure and opportunities at the Tribal Council level that are available to the community and

individuals within the community. Overall, the people sharing knowledge felt that having some knowledge about how the Tribal Council operates will be very useful for the governance and administration in order to ensure that programs are enhanced and not duplicated. In addition, having meaningful discussions with the Tribal Council will help to build relationships, understanding and be an intentional forum to collaborate amongst communities to work more meaningfully together.

Territorial Level—Nishnawbe Aski-Nation

Knowledge-sharers concurred that the role an overarching territorial organization can play in assisting individual First Nations needs to be more widely understood. A territorial organization is the primary support for advocacy and secretariat services for the First Nations. Chief Mdaaswi shi-niizh shared,

> It is the Chief's job to ensure that the communities are being represented properly when it comes to the politics of the First Nation. It is a much busier schedule than it used to be, with all of the territorial organizations.

Knowledge-sharers indicated a need to understand the territorial organizations' declaration of the people within Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN). This includes "the right to receive compensation for exploited natural resources; the right to receive compensation for the destruction and abrogation of hunting, fishing and gathering rights; the right to negotiate Treaty as understood by our people, land and resources; and the right to approach other world Nations to further the aims of the Cree and Ojibwe Nations of Treaty No. 9" (Nishnawbe Aski Nation, 2022 para 1). NAN represents 49 First Nations; their purpose is to support and advocate on behalf of the Tribal Council and First Nations. The Elders, administration and Chiefs suggested that leadership and administration from NAN speak with each of the Tribal Councils and

individual First Nations to build relationships and understand the priorities of each of the communities. Elder Niiwin also suggested that it would be helpful if,

> NAN developed a training program like our liberals, conservatives. Any one of those major parties have candidate training for their elected leaders. Chiefs [within the NAN] territory could have training as well.

The intent of this learning is solely to ensure that First Nations leadership has a clear understanding of the structure of and opportunities at the NAN territorial level for the community and individuals within the community.

Provincial—Chiefs of Ontario

As the political structure widens to the provincial level, it can be difficult for First Nations to associate with 134 First Nations in Ontario, especially for smaller tribal councils, such as Wabun. The role of the Chiefs of Ontario is to support the leadership and generate unified voices for major strategic initiatives. Nshwaaswi shared that it would be helpful if the political organizations started to think about leadership development and planning to ensure there are fewer barriers:

> There has to be some kind of a one-on-one with the provincial and territorial organizations where they're offering board training or something that the Chief's level or, or different opportunities where the Chief and Council do not have to let their membership know that they're off doing some kind of professional development.

Knowledge-sharers voiced the perception that the First Nations from southern Ontario are often the priority in provincial forums as they have larger land mass and more members. It was recommended that a workshop on the roles and responsibilities of the Chiefs of Ontario be provided by the organization and made available to the local First Nations so they may discover

how they can work in partnership. The main objective of the Chiefs of Ontario office is to facilitate the discussion, planning, implementation, and evaluation of all local, regional, and national matters affecting the First Nations people of Ontario. The Chiefs-in-Assembly, led by all 133 Chiefs in Ontario,

> help[s] to hold up self-determination efforts of the Anishinaabek, Mushkegowuk, Onkwehonwe, and Lenape Peoples in protecting and exercising their inherent and Treaty rights. Keeping in mind the wisdom of our Elders, and the future for our youth, we continue to create the path forward in building our nation's as strong, healthy peoples respectful of ourselves, each other, and all creation. (COO, 2022 para 1)

The aim of this learning is to ensure that First Nations leaders have a clear understanding of the structures and opportunities available at the provincial level for the community and individuals within the community.

Federal Level—Assembly of First Nations

For some communities, understanding the importance of the Assembly of First Nation on a day-to-day basis may not be a priority. However, understanding the role of the Assembly of First Nations is important to ensure that each community sees themselves as part of a bigger collective of Nations who are strategically making decisions for First Nations across Turtle Island. Naanan explained that often,

> [When]we are at a Chief's meeting and a lot of us are talking about what the future Chiefs and the future children need and what do we want for them, and I think sometimes the process is hard because we're still under the Indian Act.

According to the AFN's website, the "role of the National Chief and the AFN is to advocate on behalf of First Nations as directed by Chiefs-in-Assembly. This includes facilitation

and coordination of national and regional discussions and dialogue, advocacy efforts and campaigns, legal and policy analysis, communicating with governments, including facilitating relationship building between First Nations and the Crown as well as public and private sectors and general public" (AFN, 2021, para. 2).

The intent of this learning with the AFN is to ensure that the First Nations leadership has a clear understanding of both the structures and opportunities available at the National level to the governance and administration and the roles and responsibilities of the Assembly of First Nations.

Summary of Governance Learning

The learning needed at the governance level requires dedication not only from the individual people who are administrating or governing the First Nation but also at the community level. The learning that is recommended demonstrates the wholism that is often required to fulfill a leadership or administrative role and suggests that there must be foundational learning such as the areas suggested above to develop a level understanding of First Nation politics. This learning is intended to be the foundation of learning and can be built upon over time.

Summary of Gikendaasowin (Knowledge Shared)

The above suggestions for leadership development can be contextualized as learning that can be done at individual, community, and leadership levels. It is important to understand that this learning is rooted in a strengths-based approach and highlights diverse realities and truths. Brant (2021) notes, "The social and governance structures of Indigenous Peoples have been systematically attacked, marginalized, institutionalized, and then neglected; children were often the pawns" (p. 215). It is my intent that these learnings evolve in a way that is helpful for each of

the communities; the knowledge is meant to be shared and shaped to fit the individuals for whom it is intended.

The themes that are rooted in culture are intended to be tailored and specific to each person and community. This means that each community will have their own process to determining who their knowledge keepers are, which teachings feel are helpful for the circle and how they choose to engage with that learning. The learning is intended to be done in a way that is safe for everyone involved by respecting that each person has their own space at the table to share their connection to culture. It is meant to feel familial and rooted in the responsibilities that Creator gifted the Anishinaabeg, which was to take care of the land.

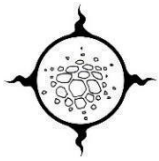
The learning that was targeted to individuals was founded on taking the time and space needed for the leaders to look within. Oftentimes in work environments, we are not encouraged to reflect on our own gifts and how those gifts may contribute or impact our current or future leadership style. This exercise can be so helpful to ensuring that people understand where they are coming from and how they may connect with others based on their gifts. Acknowledging and becoming aware of how our own approaches will help to intentionally build relationships with others. In addition, it was suggested that a big part of who First Nation communities has to do with family connections, which is so important. The learning that is recommended is to ensure leaders are aware of their connection and reflect on how those connections may positively or negatively impact their experiences as a leader for their community. The learning is intended to strengthen the leader's individual internal capacity by providing training and also support.

The community learning was intended to be done to engage with the community, have the members feel connected and informed and most importantly part of the decision-making process. It is the hope that through workshops about lateral kindness, that the community can

begin to call-out some of these behaviours and work towards healing together. The community learning focused on foundational knowledge of the history of Turtle Island, on-going colonialism, and specific community history. Community history will be determined by the community and the knowledge keepers or historians who have that knowledge. The intentional workshops on community direction will be a way for the community to connect to determine what the priorities are for their generation but the generations to come.

In governance-specific learning, it is the intent that the elected leadership and administration spend some intentional time working through their roles and responsibilities through their policies which will translate into practices. From the onset of their term, it will be essential for the circle to determine their approach to decision making, and set their priorities around economic prosperity, ensure they are meeting their fiduciary responsibilities and determine how they wish to exercise their sovereignty through Nation-to-Nation politics. The leadership will be going through all the learning through their term, but the foundational learning that was suggested is for the leadership circle at the beginning of a term to take intentional time to sit together, learn about one another and what each person brings to the circle. Honouring each leader's gift is an exercise that can be done in ceremony, in circle, around the kitchen table or in the board room—whatever feels wise for the leadership of the community.

Each of the themes shared is intended to provide individual communities with recommendations for learning that will allow them to custom design programs to fit the needs of the communities and to implement these learning opportunities in a timely way, while recognizing that communities are on their own election cycles and their own learning journeys it is intended to be a starting point. As one of my Knowledge Keepers, Bill Hill always shares, to start we must simply, begin.



The Ember

Knowledge that is transferred for generations to come.

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the lifetime of experiences of First Nations leaders including Elders, senior administration, and Chiefs working within First Nations politics and to document the best ways to support First Nations governance.

While on "The Pathway," I introduced the reason for this learning: a passion and desire to understand the best ways to support leadership within Wabun Tribal Council and honour the knowledge-sharers who had extensive lived experience working in First Nations governance as former Chiefs, current Chiefs, and senior administrators. "The Stones" helped to ensure that the fire was ethically protected and that it continued to stay in its desired location. Gathering "The Kindling and Brush" served as a metaphor for how I came to know about this topic, the logs provided me with the methods to do this work in a good way and "The Spark" was ignited by questions that burned deep within me. "The Flames" were burned to honour the advice and stories of each of the knowledge-sharers. "The Smoke" billowed to bring together all the knowledge and to send it to others and back to the Creator. "The Ember" represents the transfer of knowledge to others so they may start their own fires within their own communities.

Throughout the conversations, I learned that a wise way to support First Nations leaders is through a wholistic approach that includes support not only for the individual but also for the entire Nation. The observations and recommendations offered can be implemented within individual First Nations, or at the Tribal Council, territorial, or National level. This learning

journey was always intended to be rooted in the individual truths and realities of the knowledge-sharers.

Culture emerged as foundational to this learning not only for governance and administration but for the entire community. The beauty of culture is not easily defined and means many different things to different people. The knowledge-sharers envision culture as history, family, teachings, language, and land; the intent is to strengthen the culture for both the individual and the entire community.

The eight phases that comprise my learning journey do not necessarily follow the traditional template for a doctoral dissertation; they do, however, meet the criteria for academia and, more importantly, they build a fire that will generate embers for future generations.

On a personal level, I have worked alongside First Nations leaders for over 15 years, working for and with many of the knowledge-sharers; I anticipate continuing this work for years to come, adopting a kitchen-table approach. I recognize this learning to be spiritual, as shared in "The Spark" section. There is no doubt that a strong sense of culture helps to shape who I am; it is integral to my ways of knowing, being, and doing.

This learning journey is based on my experiences, connection with Wabun Tribal Council, and conversations (informal and formal) with Elders, leaders, community members, and other Indigenous academics. The suggestions shared throughout this learning are offered and presented with love, honesty, and integrity.

Summary of the Learning and Recommendations by Question

To summarize and make this learning useful for future leaders, I return to the learning questions introduced in "The Pathway," as well as "The Spark." During this learning journey, there was no problem to fix; rather, I raised a set of proactive questions for the future of leaders

within Wabun Tribal Council. There are many layers to learning, and it must be noted that each person within the First Nations community comes with their own knowledge, experience, and expertise.

What Are the Key Teachings/Skills That You Feel Elected Leaders Should Carry Before They Are Elected?

The ability to lead is within each of us; but leadership styles can be either useful or harmful for a community, depending on their context; cultural foundations are varied and deeply rooted:

> In many cases, Indigenous leaders—past and present—had many of their cultural traits taken away from them; this included language and ceremony, leaving generations of First Nations people in a cultural no-man's land. However, the residual seeds of the culture are so deep; it took generations for them to spawn a regrowth. (Brant, 2021, p. 217)

It is, therefore, important to understand oneself as a leader and one's community through culture and as Anishinaabe people. Specific recommendations focus on the importance of understanding historical context, family relationships and experiences, mentorship, and self-care.

Historical Context

Colonialism and systemic racism have imposed ways of doing onto First Nations, but most leaders still lead with Indigenous ways of doing, being, and knowing at the forefront. Leadership should be well-versed in traditional ways of knowing, being, and doing but should also understand the surrounding the ongoing landscape and political context in order to support the First Nation from a land perspective (environmental), relationship & human perspective (social), and sustainability perspective (economic).

Family Relationships and Ties

It is essential to acknowledge and honour the importance of strong family values and that family experiences have an impact on the development of successful leaders. Learning focused on helping leaders to understand, address and navigate family dynamics while in political office is very important to ensure the leadership are supported as most communities have strong familial connections. It is important to understand where familial values and practices come from so leaders can better understand how their positionality may impact their decision-making, communication, and perceptions to the community members.

Youth and Mentoring

Youth perspectives are essential to thriving First Nations communities; and will help to ensure that current leadership is meeting the needs of the community. Fostering mentorship opportunities between youth and administration/leadership will help generate sustainability and help prepare the community for future growth. Implementing this type of approach can help the leaders to stay connected with the community members but also foster an entire generation of future leaders. Mentorship should be done both formally and informally in order to strengthen capacity for the current and prospective leadership.

Self-Care

Understand that each of us is always on a learning journey: We are meant to learn and grow each day. Leaders should be secure in who they are as individuals, first and foremost, and should honour their own learning journeys while also being gentle with themselves each and every day. It would be my recommendation that each leader have access to culturally safe support for their wholistic wellness journeys.

What Knowledge or Skills Do You Feel Are Useful for Elected Leaders to Gain During Their Time in Office?

Most of the practical-learning recommendations came from this question, and most are beneficial to the entire community. Rooted in culture, specific learning should occur at the individual, community, and governance levels, which are not mutually exclusive. Most often, the leaders are also community members. This means that the learning should also occur across the community. It was suggested that this approach could also generate mentorship and strengthen capacity.

Individual

Dedicated time and resources for individuals to learn about and from the Land; their own language, the history of the community; the families that shaped the First Nations; Anishinaabe teachings; and the stories that came from their ancestors. Spending time specifically on these topics in intentional, dedicated learning environments with knowledge keepers in these areas would help to foster an environment of learning and growth.

Community

Ensure the community has spent the time to develop learning and resources on the background knowledge and skills needed to serve the community in a good way. These learning opportunities include understanding the current situation of First Nations politics; understanding community-specific contexts; determining community direction through planning; promoting lateral kindness; and effective communication. If the community members are able to work through these learning opportunities together in a facilitated, intentional way it may lead to a common understanding which the community could build on.

Governance

Build capacity by creating intentional learning that highlights the current roles and responsibilities of governance and administration; understanding the gifts of the leadership circle; honouring policies and practices; engaging in effective decision-making, financial management, and economic development; understanding Nation-to-Nation rights; honouring obligations; and seizing opportunities.

What, in Your View, Would Be the Best Way to Support Current and/or Future Elected Leaders?

First Nations leadership-development programs should be flexible (able to work in community, tribal, and provincial settings) and cognizant of First Nations culture, needs, and issues; programs should also promote awareness of current and innovative leadership practices. Aligned with previous research, First Nations leadership development should incorporate Western knowledge, skills, and education (Ottmann, 2005) when required in order to prepare leadership for potential internal and external relations. Specialists—both internal (e.g., language or land-based experts) and external (e.g., a CEO from a political organization or a financial expert)— could be brought in to facilitate programs. The Elders agreed that the leadership circle and community should be connected to Aki (the Land). While a kitchen-table approach is best for the facilitation style, leadership-development programs that are done in a timely way, are affordable, relevant and accessible will offer important support for community-based leadership development.

Timeliness

Schedule training specific to the governance circle and aim for completion within the first three months of the election of the new Chief and Council. Training that is rooted in culture and

community should be offered year-round to ensure that the community is receiving knowledge and opportunities that support continuous development.

Affordability

Reduce financial barriers to access to First Nations leadership-development programs; currently, these are not generally affordable and are often tied to grant funding. Access to current programs can be very competitive and generates further barriers to learning.

Relevance

Ensure that learning is prioritized by those for whom it is intended by asking members what is most needed; the leadership circle should ensure that learning is a priority and this should be modelled in the community.

Accessibility

Offer in-person and/or virtual workshops with a trained facilitator, at a time and place that is mutually convenient. There was no specific recommendation on format (e.g., one learning session, an evening workshop, or a 2- or 3-day learning module); rather, it was suggested that the format should be flexible and should meet the needs of, and be approved by, the current governance circle.

Significance of the Learning: Transferring the Ember

Kenny and Fraser (2012) share, “We did not come this far, carrying and preserving the ancestors’ leadership knowledge, just to leave it behind” (p. 58). Over hundreds of years, the practice of leadership in First Nations communities has taken on different forms in response to the changing landscapes of such issues as autonomy, colonization, and resistance (Kenny & Fraser, 2012). For thousands of years prior to colonization, leadership was based on the character of the Land and the needs of the people in their traditional territories (Kenny & Fraser, 2012);

Indigenous people from around Turtle Island had their own approaches to leadership and leadership development. Before the implementation of the Indian Act, leadership positions were inherited and governance was conducted according to traditional values and beliefs that influenced community growth and prosperity (Ottmann, 2005). Due to the negative impacts of colonialism, leadership has become disconnected not only from the knowledge of traditional governance but also from the practices in the current system. Chiefs and Councillors now have fewer powers and less independence and experience displacement from land (Godlewska et al., 2010).

Kenny and Fraser (2012) suggest that "strong Indigenous leadership is developed when the younger generations are empowered to reclaim cultural values by investigating local living genealogies, oral histories and reflective practices" (p. 62). Leadership has been described as both a gift and a responsibility for First Nations leaders (Kenny & Fraser, 2012). For the communities within Wabun Tribal Council, discussions regarding wise ways of governing their own First Nations have only just begun. While I do recognize the shared histories of oppression and colonization, I do not suggest that all First Nations people have walked the same path, lived the same lives, suffered the same challenges, or define resilience and success the same way. The communities within Wabun Tribal Council have expressed an interest in exploring learning opportunities to support their First Nations leaders while in office. Wholistically, the learning includes the entire community in the process and that speaks volumes to the importance of connection, relationship, and reciprocity to the Anishinaabe people.

With the aging of the Elders and language speakers within Wabun, lifelong learning and intergenerational relationships are key to developing a sustainable leadership program (Kenny &

Fraser, 2012). Ultimately, each Wabun Tribal Council community will determine what types of training are best and what the best way to move forward will be for the community.

Recommendations for First Nations

The following recommendations have been generated to ensure that First Nations leaders and community members are put in a position that honours their gifts and suggestions for the future generations.

Ensure that the community has adequate, timely information about elected candidates prior to the election.

Good governance for First Nations starts with the members electing a Chief and Council who will lead in a good way. First Nations councils control services such as education, economic growth, financial management, social assistance, and housing allocation. Despite this, under the Indian Act, the Chief and Council do not have clear lines of accountability to their own members and citizens (Quesnel & Ishkanian, 2017). Given the substantial power that the Chief and Council has in the First Nations community, it is important for members to be given the opportunity to actively participate in elections in a way that they feel is meaningful. For example, a recent study has found that there is a great deal of support for online voting. For First Nations members, online voting is a critical tool to reach and engage off-reserve citizens (Goodman, 2018).

Members should be afforded the opportunity to critically reflect, ask questions, and fully understand who they are electing as Chief and Council. Many of the knowledge-sharers suggested having a candidate night to allow community members to talk about expectations and to ask candidates questions about their vision for the community.

Inspired by the Elders' desire for a resource that would help the community think about who they are electing and why, I compiled a list of themes and created a story weaving in the Seven Teachings and culture. I believe this should be embedded into everything that we do as Anishinaabe people. Inserting the name of the candidate into the following framework (see Figure 11) is intended to help with identifying, ranking, and decision-making about who would be a good Chief for each of the communities.

Figure 11

Framework for Candidate Story

*_____ is loved, loves others, and has a deep **LOVE** for my community. _____ is always **HONEST** and communicates well with all people. _____ understands the history of Turtle Island and its impacts on our people. _____ is **HUMBLE** enough to ask questions, and is always learning. _____ can use a blend of traditional and Western knowledge to help our people. _____ has **RESPECT** for the Land and recognizes its importance to our people. _____ respects that every being has a role in Creation. _____ celebrates individual and community successes. _____ understands the constantly changing world around our community. _____ will use their teachings as **WISDOM** to help guide our community into the future. _____ has the **COURAGE** to protect our community, culture, and traditions. _____ will do their best. It is my **TRUTH** that _____ would be a good leader for my community.*

Note: Framework was created and designed by Randi Ray

First Nations should ensure fair, adequate compensation for First Nations governance and administration.

Strategic and experienced First Nations people are highly sought after in the workforce and have rightfully been well-compensated for their skill sets. The challenge for most of the First Nations within Wabun Tribal Council is that most Council members are not paid for this full-time position. This creates situations in which Council members are only able to be available and responsive to the Chief, administration, and community on an evening or weekend basis. Recruiting talented people to run for an elected position or take on the role as senior administrator is an ongoing challenge for First Nations.

Ensure that training for First Nations leadership is timely and affordable.

Elected officials feel a strong motivation to dive right into their duties following an election. To facilitate this, the knowledge-sharers recommend that the administration organize leadership training for newly elected officials as soon as the Council is put into place, preferably within the first three months after the election. This training must also be affordable.

Ensure continuity by making space in the circle for past Chiefs, knowledge-keepers, or Elders for one-year post-election.

To ensure there is continuity within the First Nation, knowledge-sharers recommend that the former Chief stay in the leadership circle for a one-year term to support the development of the new Chief and Council. This recommendation stems from many conversations regarding knowledge, continuity, and the need to ensure that the Council and administration do not have to start from scratch every election cycle. Guidance from those with knowledge of First Nations history, politics and community context, is helpful. Elders and other knowledge-keepers with

significant expertise working within First-Nation politics also provide insight, offer direction, and help to shape the community for future generations.

Prioritize funding for First Nations leadership development.

Although education is an inherent treaty right for First Nations, there is no direct funding available to First Nations leadership to strengthen capacity within First Nations. It is important to remember that the Elders and some current Chiefs did not pursue post-secondary education as they were often forced to decide between keeping their status and higher learning.[9] Senator Murray Sinclair shared, "Education is what got us into this mess and education is what will get us out" (quoted in Watters, 2015). It is suggested that the community prioritizes this type of training from a monetary perspective.

Suggestions for Future Learning Journeys (or Re-Search)

Create a leadership-development program (with evaluation plan) for Wabun Tribal Council communities.

Government funding should be allocated to develop a leadership program based on the recommendations from the knowledge-sharers for Wabun Tribal Council. An evaluation plan should be embedded into the program to ensure it is effective over time. This will also ensure that the learning is up to date and evolves within the context of the community.

Explore traditional-governance structures as a way of governing current First Nations.

Learning should be done to explore the relationship between traditional-governance systems and Western styles of government. Understanding how to incorporate the traditional

[9] Note: If Status Indians attended post-secondary education before 1960, they would be disenfranchised and would no longer be recognized as Indians under the Indian Act.

clan system into modern-day leadership could be useful in moving First Nations governance into the next seven generations.

Explore the development of a succession-planning program for First Nations leaders.

Learning should be undertaken to explore and understand wise ways to support First Nations in strengthening leadership capacity within their First Nation. Understanding ways of mentoring, developing leaders, and keeping community members engaged could prove useful to the future success of First Nations communities.

Concluding Thoughts

At the beginning of this process, one of my advisors, Dr. Parr shared with me "this dissertation will not be your life's work—it is just the beginning." At the time, no one could have predicted that in the six years it has taken me to finalize this dissertation—I would have founded a consulting firm whose values are rooted in strengthening capacity within First Nation communities. My life's work now is to ensure that as an Anishinaabe Kwe, I am helping others to understand the importance of un-learning what we were taught as Canadians about how Canada came to be and how ongoing Colonialism through policies like the Indian Act continue to impact First Nation people today. The gifts I carry are that I have the ability to speak truth to power because of my privilege including the teachings I have been given and the scholars I have had learned from, my level of western education, and my upbringing.

I grew up in a political household where I had the privilege of attending meetings with Elders, Chiefs, Council members, and community members from a young age. I have spent decades listening and observing all while formulating my own opinions and observations in parallel to gaining a western education.

What I have come to understand and appreciate is that we are all doing our best with what we have—and the reality for First Nation political leaders is that they are all at very different starting points.

The Elders had all grown up with their traditional language of Ojibwe and had experienced racism and discrimination at Residential Schools and through their experiences with gradual settler-colonialism and the implementation of the Indian Act. The Elders' wisdom was profound: they had the opportunity to reflect on what they had seen over their lifetimes and offer approaches they feel would be beneficial for the future. The Elders taught me that it is incredibly important to look back and understand context before looking forward. What I learned from the Elders is that much of what could help First Nation leadership starts with honouring traditional Anishinaabe values such as the seven teachings. Wisdom from Elders who have experience in governance is an incredible asset to a community as they offer context on how things have been in the past, keep members grounded in the present, and suggest ways to move forward for the future.

The administration in a First Nation community is often overlooked and under-appreciated. During this learning journey, it became evident how crucial a strong administration is to the leadership of a First Nation community. While elected leadership is fluid, administration is the foundation through which the community members feel connected, safe, and have their concerns addressed. I learned that the relationship between administration and Chief and Council must be open, transparent, and frequent as there is constant change happening dependent on political landscapes and the community at large. It is my belief that the key to a strong leadership within a First Nation community is directly related to how the administration can meet the needs of the governance and the community members.

Through my own experience as a band member and the discussions that I have had with my own family, community members and other First Nation people across Turtle Island, I have come to understand that we are all on our own unique learning journeys to discover who we are as Anishinaabe people. The reality is that for a lot of First Nations people, due to ongoing colonialism they did not grow up speaking the Ojibwe language, did not grow up on our community lands, may not have had the opportunity to participate in traditional ceremonies or receive cultural teachings, and certainly did not grow up understanding the nuances of First Nation politics. For most community members, unlearning and re-learning is a complex journey that impacts each person differently and can foster feelings that range from connection and relief to guilt, shock, and often discomfort. This is an important process to go through, as with many processes (like this learning journey), it is the time spent reflecting and the teachings that you learn through the process that are most meaningful. The challenge that I have witnessed and observed for First Nations people is that we often do not have supports for people to go through this un-learning together as a community and that is often where feelings of disconnection manifest. I feel strongly that what I learned through this process is that First Nations leadership should create intentional time to meet with members to generate learning opportunities and also build information relationships.

I have always had respect for First Nations Chiefs. During this learning, my respect and understanding for the complexities of the role intensified. The Covid 19 pandemic brought to the forefront many of the challenges that were already facing First Nations and highlighted the inequities to food security, resources, human resources, accessibility and left many leaders alone to attempt to sort through and put measures in place for these complexities. Many people, while under stress or pressure, tend to resort to their own internal biases and blame others for negative

impacts to their own daily lives. Due to the impacts of the Residential School System, First Nations people are often subject to lateral violence and First Nations Chiefs are often the ones who are at the forefront of the blame. Chiefs are often managing the pressure of making decisions that impact an entire community's physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health, often without the human resource support to help make extremely-timely decisions. From the time I was seven years old, I had the privilege of learning that elected leaders, like all of us are human—and they need compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and support. I believe that at a time where access to political leadership through technology is at our fingertips, where hurtful criticism can come from behind a screen and whereas a society, we are quick to comment—being a political leader can be one of the most wholistically draining roles in Indian Country.

What I have learned from the people who have stepped into their roles as Elders, Chiefs, and senior administrators is that I am grateful there are people like them who choose to step into the space each day with their eyes wide open to the realities of serving their respective communities.

Moving forward, I have learned that empathy and understanding will be key as our First Nations begin to reclaim, redesign, and rebuild what sovereignty looks like for First Nations communities. I learned that sitting together around the fire, or the kitchen table, will be spaces where we re-learn our language, share our teachings, meet with our ancestors, share our stories, where we laugh, where we cry and where we decide what is wise for us—together. Indigenous knowledge systems are interconnected and always developing; they connect our past, present, and future (Absolon, 2011; Peltier, 2015). I am incredibly grateful to my committee, the Nipissing University Education Department, and the greater academic community for challenging me within the Western education system while allowing room for me to explore

Indigenous knowledges and methods concurrently. Chi-miigwetch for the opportunity to approach this learning journey in a wholistic way. In the wise words of Elder Batise,

> There is not an academic living that didn't learn their experiences from home. That's where they were. They just acquired the skills as they went on, and they earned their name as an academic (personal communication, February 27, 2020).

This research provided a glimpse of the many questions that one can spend a lifetime answering. Leadership, like culture, is ever-evolving. It is fluid in nature and, like a crystal, has many mysterious but intriguing facets. It is a certainty that I will never truly arrive at a definitive answer on First Nations leadership and development, but I will encounter truths that will tide me over until another journey comes along.

Post Fire: Retrospective Insights

During my defence presentation, I was asked a few questions that enabled me to reflect on the work in which I was engaged. I have the utmost appreciation and gratitude for this experience as it challenged me to think about the impact of this work for others and for future generations. Over my lifetime, I have had the opportunity to learn about the impact of colonization on my own family in addition to my community. As an Anishinaabe kwe who works with First Nation communities, industry, and governments, I have not only experienced these impacts, but I am critically examine them on a daily basis. The work that I do professionally and personally to disrupt ongoing colonial violence can be mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually exhausting. For the purposes of this work, I intentionally focused on a strength-based approach to understand opportunities for leadership development as I fundamentally believe that it is stories of strength and resilience that will move the discourse towards intergenerational healing and action for First Nation communities. Many are quick to criticize First Nation leaders and governance approaches, not allocating time to understand the realities leaders face. I find it admirable that they made the choice to step in and to be honest, I was most interested in their wisdom not their critique.

For these reasons, I intentionally chose not to critically examine the Indian Act or traditional Anishinaabe governance as they were both not central to the work of the knowledge-sharers involved in this inquiry. Without a doubt, the Indian Act has impacted and continues to impact, First Nation governance. The reality for the First Nations with whom I worked is that they are still learning about their own history, colonialism, the Indian Act, and Traditional governance systems, all of which is a positive step for these communities. This is not to say that a critical analysis of these systems should not be discussed; these understandings were, in fact,

recommended as learning for future leaders as part of this journey. From a methodological perspective, I acknowledge that the questions may have determined, in part, the responses that followed; it is possible that questions that were more critical in nature may have yielded more critical responses from the communities. I made a conscious decision to stay rooted in the intent of this learning, which was to explore ways of improving support instead versus criticizing what has not been working for decades.

As a daughter of a Chief and also as a professional helper, these discussions have been part of my everyday life for decades. For some, it may appear that my relationships have a level of bias, but my view is that these relationships, both personally and professionally, have afforded me entry into the conversation and the ability to connect with knowledge-sharers in a way that may have been more meaningful than it might have been for others. As an Anishinaabe kwe from one of the communities, I understood the complexities of leaders were facing not only from a leadership and governance perspective, but just as importantly, as people. I understood that the knowledge-sharers were doing the best they could with the information they had at the time and that often, they were not treated with empathy, dignity, and respect. I have experienced this throughout my lifetime as it relates to how First Nation leaders are treated, but more shockingly, how our own First Nation people can or tend to treat each other. I have often found myself grappling with the overt criticism of First Nations leaders in literature, community conversations, or social media. With the lack of adequate compensation, little to no intentional support and or accountability mechanisms, the question I ask myself over and over is, “Why would anyone want to be an elected official in a First Nation?" Throughout this inquiry, and in my work, I stay rooted in zaagidiwin (love) and I am always the person who supports others who choose to step

into the role of leadership by doing everything I can to help. Setting others up for success will continue to be at the forefront of my mind and my heart.

My Commitment to You as a Learner

At the beginning of this journey, I made a commitment to the people who shared their knowledge. As a Anishinaabe kwe who is doing my best every day to stay rooted in the seven teachings, I want to honour that each person reading this will have their own views and perspectives about my learning based on their experiences and worldview. I honour you, the reader, by:

> Respecting the diversity in your spirituality, beliefs, and values or critique of this learning journey. I will continue to be clear in my approach. I will be grateful for the time you took to read and make sense of my learning journey. I will respect your individuality and respect your teachings. I will appreciate silence. I will stay aware of the wisdom of Elders. I will appreciate humour as a key teaching tool and continue to laugh. I will be honest in the relationships that I share and that others share together. I will stay humble and will be grateful for any feedback that has been given along my learning journey. I will role model for others by speaking the truth, being a part of the process, and continue to respect my teachings. I will do my best to ensure the people sharing knowledge truth will translate into action, without causing harm, and that is my truth to you and to myself. I stay rooted in kindness in my approach to this learning journey. I will honour my vision and will continue to think ahead for the next seven generations.

I have made the intentional decision to stay true to my commitment throughout this learning and stay rooted in the value statements presented above. I honour that other searchers may have other paths that bring them to their location, and that they may gather different kindling, generate an

entirely new spark, have different logs added that would generate an entirely different flame and would billow unique smoke and ember to be transferred for the next generations. I also acknowledge that now having I also honour that as my relationships continue to grow with the people sharing knowledge and that my positionality will change as I grow as a learner and human being. As I spend the next chapter of my life implementing some of this learning, the work will evolve in a way that continues to honour the relationships in a way that is respectful, reciprocal, responsible, relevant as I look to transfer the ember or build an entirely new fire.

Baa maa pii giiwabmin.

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Appendix A

Conversation Guide

My learning journey is motivated by the following curiosity: “What is the best way to support our First Nations’ elected leaders while in office?”

Elder Conversations

I will approach six Elders from their respective communities and offer them Semaa to share their stories and invite them to tell me about themselves and their communities. I will explain the purpose of the research to the Elders and I will provide them with a copy of the PIL. The Elders will be asked the following types of questions:

1. What skills do you feel a Chief should have during their time in elected office?
    a) What skills do you feel Chiefs need to learn?
    b) What supports would be helpful?
2. What approaches do you feel would be the best way to support current or future elected Chiefs?
    a) What types of skills do you see our future leaders needing (e.g., financial, business, public policy, public speaking...)
    b) What would be the best way to facilitate that training (e.g., at the band office, over a course, an educational tool, in-person training, mentoring...)?
3. I will also ask the Elders to direct me to the former Chiefs from Wabun communities with whom they feel would be integral to speak with.

Executive Directors/Band Manager Questions:

1. What are the key teachings/skills that you feel Chiefs should carry before they are elected?
2. What knowledge or skills do you feel are useful for Chiefs to gain during their time in office?
3. What, in your view, would be the best way to support current and/or future elected Chiefs?

Former Chief Questions

I will approach six former Chiefs from their respective communities and offer them Semaa to share their stories and invite them to tell me about themselves and their communities. I will then ask each of the former Chiefs to reflect on the following types of questions:

1. What do you wish you would have known during your time in office?

    a) What skills did you need to learn quickly?

    b) What supports were given (if any)?

2. What knowledge helped you in your role as Chief?

    a) What skills do you have (e.g., business, culture, interpersonal) that help with your role?

    b) What are your success stories? What are you most proud of as a leader of your community?

3. What approaches do you feel would be the best way to support current or future elected Chiefs?

    a) What types of skills do you see our future leaders needing (e.g., financial, business, public policy, public speaking...)

    b) What would be the best way to facilitate that training (e.g., at the band office, over a course, an educational tool, in-person training, mentoring...)?

Current Chief Questions

I will approach six current Chiefs from their respective communities and offer them Semaa to share their stories and invite them to tell me about themselves and their communities. I will then ask each of the current Chiefs to reflect on the following types of questions:

1. What do you wish you would have known before you were elected?

    a) What skills did you need to learn quickly?

b) What supports were given (if any)?

2. What knowledge helps you in your current role as Chief?

a) What skills do you have (e.g., business, culture, interpersonal) that help with your role?

b) What are your success stories? What are you most proud of as a leader of your community?

3. What do you feel would be the best way to support current or future elected Chiefs?

a) What types of skills do you see our future leaders needing (e.g., financial, business, public policy, public speaking...)?

b) What would be the best way to facilitate that training (e.g., at the band office, over a course, an educational tool, in-person training, mentoring...)?

Appendix B

Information Letter

Aanii, Boozhoo, Kwe Kwe, Giiwedin Noodin Kwe 'dizhinikaaz. Anishinaabe n'dow. Gaawiin ningikenimaasi nindoodem. Flying Post miinwa Red Rock miinwa N'swakamok n'doonjibaa.

Chi-miigwetch for considering sharing your stories with me! Through this learning, I hope to explore the leadership development needs of current and future First Nations leaders, with the hope of ensuring the long-term sustainability of First Nations communities. Your knowledge, experience, and contributions are extremely valuable and can help shape the future for First Nations governance. This learning will help me to secure a Ph.D. degree and will help to inform wise practices for my passion to work with First Nations Chiefs. I plan to build my career around supporting our communities in the area of leadership and mentoring First Nations youth. With your permission, your stories may be used for publications, conference presentations, for curriculum development, and as a resource to help our future generations.

If you agree, I will be asking you to reflect on the following questions:

1. What are the key teachings/skills you hoped you as a Chief would carry before you are elected?
2. What knowledge or skills do you feel are useful for Chiefs to gain during their time in office?
3. What, in your view, would be the best way to support current and/or future elected Chiefs?

Before we begin our journey together, I want to commit the following to you:

I will respect your spirituality, beliefs, and values. I will be clear. I will make the time that you are able to share with me a priority. I will respect your individuality and respect your teachings. I will appreciate silence. I will stay aware of the wisdom of elders. I will appreciate humour as a key teaching tool. I will be honest in the relationship we share. I will ensure that you feel purposeful and part of this journey. I will stay humble and ensure it is a good time to meet, I will not be intrusive, and I will always be grateful for the help I receive along my learning journey. I will

model for others by speaking the truth, being a part of the process, and respecting my teachings. Your truth will translate into action, without causing harm. I will have kindness in my approach to this learning journey. I will do this because I am committed to think ahead for the next seven generations.

Throughout the time that I am meeting with you, I plan to audio record our conversations and take the time to listen and reflect on your stories so that I am able to understand what you are sharing. I estimate that sharing our stories will take about 1 hour, but this is entirely up to you and I do not want to set any limits on our time together. Based on the knowledge generated from our time together (and the time I spend with more Elders, and other Chiefs). I will generate a collective story that will include the main themes from each story and share that story back with you. Once we have agreed on the story, we will decide how we want to share the information to help others. We will work together to determine who will store the data and we will determine this through a Community Research Agreement (see example attached). I will take the responsibility to ensure that we set guidelines to ensure the long-term storage and retention methods, post-analyses of the information shared and will honour that responsibility.

You will have the opportunity to use your name, a pseudonym, or remain anonymous in the stories shared. As I am giving you the opportunity to tell your own story and to determine the needs or wants for your communities, I do not anticipate this research will cause any psychological harm. Your story may leave a legacy of your leadership or that of others by whom you were/are mentored to share wise practices and strengths of our people for the next seven generations of leadership. If you do feel that you need to speak with someone, I would recommend contacting your local Aboriginal Health Access Centre, the First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line at [redacted] or the Mental Health Helpline (who have First Nations counsellors & Elders) at [redacted]. The stories are being shared with 4-6 Elders, approximately 5-12 former Chiefs and 5-6 current Chiefs. Due to the reality that the number of Chiefs in the Wabun Tribal Council and other PTOs is relatively small, your stories may be identifiable to others within this defined group and within the communities. I also want to acknowledge that like with any research, there is a possibility that upon sharing the findings, that there could be criticism.

If you feel at any time you do not want to participate in this research, you can withdraw at any time and I will be respectful of your decision. You will simply just indicate you are no longer able to participate and your data will no

longer be used for the study. At any point you are in need of professional support, I will ensure that you are linked with the proper supports. If you feel that ethical boundaries were violated, you can contact the Nipissing Research [redacted] or Jason Batise, the Executive Director of Wabun Tribal Council, Jason Batise at [redacted] I listed Jason as a contact for this research because I want to hold myself accountable and follow what I understand to be the protocols in the Wabun Tribal Council communities but he is not part of the research team, does not have access to the data or the identity of the participants. I also want you to know that by consenting, you have not waived any of your legal rights in the event that you feel there was research-related harm.

If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me at [redacted] or [redacted] or my supervisors, Dr. Cindy Peltier at [redacted] or [redacted] or Dr. Michelann Parr at [redacted] or [redacted] This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Nipissing University's Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Coordinator, Office of Graduate Studies and Research, Nipissing University, 100 College Drive, North Bay, ON P1B 8L7 or [redacted]

- I have accepted Semaa and I agree to participate in this learning journey.

Name: _____ Date:_____ Initials of Witness: _____