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APPRECIATING THE CHALLENGE OF COMMUNITY CHANGE

ISMO HEIKKILA, NATIONAL DIRECTOR, ABORIGINAL SERVICES, T.E. WEALTH

ONE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHALLENGES WITHIN COMMUNITIES IS MANAGING CHANGE – BOTH THE CONTENT OF CHANGE AND THE PACE OF CHANGE. THE SPECIFIC CHALLENGES WILL VARY IN COMPLEXITY AND DURATION, AS WILL THE APPROACHES THAT BAND LEADERSHIP APPLIES TO THESE ISSUES.

Only through a shared focus, collaboration and the disciplined attention of leaders and members will the nature of community change become understood and accepted. Appreciation of the best of what has existed, and continues to exist, in the community today establishes a sound foundation. Upon this foundation the community will move toward the shared destination of a desired future.

Community change typically occurs through a combination of default and design. Change by default takes place when systemic conditions alter the dynamics of the community, forcing action toward a preventable future. Change by design is planned by community leadership and its members, with intent of a preferable future.

A universal event that causes community change is the anticipation, arrival and subsequent management of new wealth. This is an opportunity to design the nature, content and pace of change, enabling community leaders and members to manage the change process.

A basic approach to adult learning, as this process of change relates to new wealth in a community, can be described through five steps that a member would experience:

Awareness – becoming aware that wealth is being received by the community

Understanding – learning about the details of the issues involved

Engagement – thinking about, and feeling, what the personal and community implications are

Commitment – willingness to learn and be open to new knowledge

Action – being comfortable in voicing both agreement and objections and in making decisions

Think about a hypothetical situation in which members of a community start out their day and realize that communication is not happening! No one is speaking – no telephone calls, emails or texting. Hours go by, and people are silent. How long before productivity, problem solving and decision making are significantly affected? Nothing has changed during that time.

THE ROLE OF FEEDBACK

Therefore, the challenge of managing change is fundamentally a communication challenge. Community communication, and all of what that means, is implemented through history, the unique community culture, political will and current communication channels.

Let's examine some key elements of communication. Everyone understands the initial component of communication: there's a Sender, a Message, and a Receiver. What occurs far too often is that the element of feedback is not acknowledged. Did the main Receiver fully understand the first Message? Did the initial Sender confirm back to the Receiver that the message was understood correctly or not?

Every organization, household and community experiences misunderstanding of messages.

Most of the time misunderstanding is due to assumptions, without actually checking of accuracy. When communication should have occurred vs. when it *did* occur is another aspect of how misunderstanding happens. For example, "why didn't they tell us sooner?"

INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATION VERSUS THE GREATER GOOD

In addressing the issues of community change, it's necessary to include consideration of individual and collective motivations for the acceptance of, and the resistance to, pending change.



“Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing themselves”

– Leo Tolstoy

What is resistance to change? At a basic level, most individuals have degrees of resistance to any kind of change. This normal, defensive and protective reaction to exposure to change raises anxiety. Anxiety about the nature of the impact of change on a personal or community level is likely the result of incomplete understanding, and perhaps lack of trust. Yet even when complete disclosure and understanding are established, this doesn't necessarily mean that anxiety is eliminated, as there could still be serious issues that require addressing.

Minimizing the impact of the fear of change requires dedicated and focussed communication, with both formal and informal channels of feedback available and accessible between leadership and members.

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world”

– M. Gandhi

Consider the magnitude of a large change as a result of new wealth arriving in a community. Leadership and members might experience “initiative fatigue” as a result of numerous new priorities and projects that have become possible. The networking of discussions and opinions being generated by youth, families, elders, on and off reserve members, etc. can become overwhelming. All the while, every individual is wondering how any of the final outcomes, if decided upon, would affect them personally.

THE BENEFITS OF INCLUSION

This brings us to what is known as gaining buy-in. The responsibility falls upon leadership to provide clarity, transparency, objectivity, member inclusion and decision making around community strategy. Once a strategy is confirmed, tactical implementation becomes manageable. An approach that has been effective is to confirm the core values of the community's culture and establish a communication foundation that addresses current and future needs. In order to truly appreciate anything – for example, a person, an idea, a flower, a value – one needs to be aware and to pay attention. With a disciplined focus of attention, appreciation is the natural result.

When communities are anticipating a major change, leadership's tendency is to not take risks by attempting a new approach in dealing with an issue. It seems safer to use what has been tried in the past and that has been successful. Unfortunately, a new influx of wealth is exactly that – new. So there really isn't a set precedent in addressing this new change.

***“No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.
We must learn to see the world anew.”***

– A. Einstein

Also, relying on non-native methodologies has a tendency to fail as they do not always fully encompass Aboriginal ideology along with the uniqueness of a specific community's culture. Aboriginal people have a core attribute of viewing how the world of nature and their own world are integrated. This is likely a result of an ability to pay attention and therefore to appreciate the trueness of nature.

Our experience indicates that by embracing their rich history of stories with common themes, lessons and values, and by thinking and inquiring about the best of the past and present, communities can design and create a future that ensures sustainability.

ISMO HEIKKILA joined T.E. Wealth in 2004 and brings more than 30 years of training, organizational development and consulting experience to his role as National Director, Aboriginal Services. Working alongside T.E. Investment Counsel, Ismo provides advice on communication and financial education strategy to help Aboriginal leaders manage the change in their communities.

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Building Today... for Future Generations

As a proud corporate member, T.E. Wealth congratulates AFOA's 15 years as a centre of excellence in Aboriginal finance and management. Our dedicated Aboriginal Services team works with Communities and Trusts in the provision of:

- investment advisory services
- financial education programs
- communication strategies

Celebrating over 40 years of excellence and with offices across the country, T.E. Wealth provides completely independent and objective advice.

Jack Jamieson
Vice President
Aboriginal Services
toll free 1-866-430-0537
jjamieson@teic.com



www.tewealth.com/aboriginal/

Ismo Heikkila
National Director
Aboriginal Services
direct 416-640-8572
iheikkila@tewealth.com