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Where We're Going, Not Where We've Been: Indigenous Leadership in Canadian Higher Education

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Where We're Going, Not Where We've Been: Indigenous Leadership in Canadian Higher Education

Abstract

Despite increasing calls for systemic change in the Canadian higher education sector, Indigenous Leaders continue to be under-represented, under-funded and overworked. This qualitative study investigates the purview of Senior Indigenous Leaders within Canadian higher education, drawing on interviews conducted with four senior Indigenous Leaders in Canadian universities. The study, underpinned by emancipatory Indigenist research, draws on literature predominantly written by Canadian Indigenous scholars. Reporting on Stage Five of a qualitative Australian project - *Walan Mayiny: Indigenous Leadership in Higher Education*, this paper is the first of four international aspects of the larger project.

Findings suggest these Indigenous Senior Leaders overcome significant barriers to gain senior roles while the weight of systemic change is carried by individual Indigenous Leaders. The question addressed is how Senior Indigenous Leaders can unsettle systemic barriers so that universities are facing in the direction of where they need to be going, and not where they've been.

Key words

Indigenous leadership, higher education, Canada, university, governance

Where We're Going, Not Where We've Been: Indigenous Leadership in Canadian Higher Education

Introduction

The increasing amount of literature promoting equity and diversity in the Canadian higher education sector can give a misleading impression of change (Tamtik and Guenter, 2019): a deeper reading of literature suggests the growing momentum of Indigenous rights in education and substantive responses to the *Calls to Action* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015) disguise an entrenched resistance to systemic transformation (Henry et al. 2017; McDonald 2016; Pidgeon 2016; Tamtik and Guenter 2019). Also disguised is the reality facing Indigenous Leaders of systemic barriers to promotion, delimited realms of influence and inequities of Indigenous peoples' representation in leadership roles and governance (Louie 2019; Mohamed and Beagan 2019). Many universities have developed a less discriminatory focus on Indigenous education (Tamtik and Guenter 2019), such as the creation of Indigenous-focused senior administrative programs, yet Pidgeon (2014) argues the reality is that inclusion of Indigenous representation is not across the board and is often met with resistance, obstructionism and discrimination. Concerns over unique expectation of Indigenous staff in institutions lacking in diversity, and Indigenous content tacked on to colonial pedagogical styles of learning under the guise of inclusion (Battiste 2002; Gaudry and Lorenz 2018) are well founded and bode for shallow successes.

The prevalence of racially discriminatory practices within the higher education sector manifests in overt and covert ways. Mohamed and Beagan (2019) and Henry et al. (2017) report a comprehensive analysis of racism, racialization and Indigeneity in higher education is

notably absent. Literature points to universities operating under a ‘façade of meritocracy and colour blindness’ (Mohamed and Beagan 2019, 340), with racial equality in the sector constrained by epistemological racism (Scheurich and Young 1997) and cognitive imperialism (Battiste, Bell, and Findlay 2002). Given governance structures steeped in a ‘predominant hegemony of Euro-centric paradigms of educational leadership’ (Fallon and Paquette 2014, 198), hiring and employment inequity (Louie 2019; Tamtik and Guenter 2019) and an historical paucity of Indigenous representation in senior leadership positions, how can Senior Indigenous Leaders unsettle such entrenched systemic barriers? The aim of this paper then is to investigate the positioning, purview, and prospects of Senior Indigenous Leaders within Canadian higher education: the question to be addressed is how Senior Indigenous Leaders can unsettle systemic barriers so that universities are facing in the direction of where they need to be going, and not where they’ve been.

Literature Review

A Brief Overview of Indigenous Higher Education in Canada

Amongst colonised nations, the Canadian higher education system has a comparatively long history, having existed since the 1700s (Pidgeon 2014). Yet from the very start, the establishment of higher education institutions created tensions, with the building of universities on Indigenous lands significantly contributing to displacement and attempted erasure of Indigenous people and their living environments (Debassige and Brunette 2018). When universities did open their doors to Indigenous people in the 1920s, it was at the cost of enforced disenfranchisement of their Indigenous treaty rights (Debassige and Brunette 2018). In reality, very few Indigenous Canadians were offered higher education until the 1960s (Gonzales and Colangelo 2010) when Native education and Native Studies programs in public universities were established (Battiste and Barman 1995).

With the publication of the foundational position paper *Indian Control over Indian Education* (National Indian Brotherhood 1972), the issue of Indigenous educational sovereignty came to the fore (Pidgeon 2016). Yet despite the response of a growing momentum for change at all levels of Canadian education, a review conducted by Nakhiae (2004) on the distribution of racial groups in top administrative positions between 1951-2001 renders visible a systemic discrimination and hegemonic model of power that characterises the higher education sector in Canada (Fallon and Paquette 2014). Data over the fifty-year period places British and then French leaders dominating the top tier, commanding more privilege and power, with very small increments in the inclusion of marginalised groups at the senior administrative level of governance. Nakhiae (2004) concluded under-representation of Indigenous and racialised peoples and/or non-European groups in senior administrative roles is indicative of racialised stratification, suggesting ‘recruitment, promotion, power and privilege are granted based on race’ (100). Contemporary research contends the Canadian university system remains open to allegations of persistent inequity and a systemic lack of racial diversity (Mohamed and Beagan 2019).

Most recently, the higher education sector responded to the recommendations of the report on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015), issuing calls to redress the intergenerational harm caused by the residential school era between 1831 and 1996 (Pidgeon 2016). The TRC was unequivocal in arguing the higher education sector had a significant role to play in reconciliation (McDonald 2016) and in developing philosophical and structural changes to enable Indigenisation of universities. Gaudry and Lorenz (2019) contend the *Calls to Action* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015) gained prominence in Canadian public discourse, most especially evident in Canadian universities, who then engaged in ‘sustained discussions about how to act on these calls’ (Gaudrey and Lorenz 2019, 159) about policies previously not

considered. Notwithstanding the significance of a positive response to the *Calls to Action* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015), research indicates barriers to educational success continue to exist at every level of Indigenous education in Canada (Henry et al. 2017; Kuokkanen 2016; Mohamed and Beagan 2019; Pidgeon 2016; Pratt et al. 2018), creating a smaller size pool available for recruitment into the higher education sector, and most particularly, into leadership positions (Louie 2019). Mohamed and Beagan (2019) found that each position beyond assistant professor in 2018 still had fewer people of colour, suggesting that racial discrimination increases with positions of power. Additionally, Henry et al. (2017) found inequities between the remuneration of Indigenous and White scholars in Canada, despite being on the same tier, and with similar records of achievement and with the same prescribed responsibilities.

Fulfillment of TRC commitments is further threatened by the burgeoning culture of neoliberalism in Canadian universities. Henry et al. (2017) contend the rise of neoliberalism has led to managerialism, performance indicators and benchmarking, influencing research agendas as well as who is employed and what is taught. The authors conclude neoliberalism disproportionately disadvantages equity-seeking groups, undermining positive and emancipatory responses to the TRC.

Gaining Tenure and Promotion

In response to the *Calls to Action* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015), many Canadian universities have attempted to ameliorate Indigenous under-representation at all levels through active recruitment strategies (Henry et al. 2017). Yet Indigenous academics remain under-represented, especially in senior leadership roles, facing ‘considerable barriers of White privilege pervasive in these institutions’ (Louie 2019, 796), as cognitive imperialism in the form of racialised politics of knowledge production and dissemination (Battiste, Bell and

Findlay 2002) continue to dominate the sector. Mohamed and Beagan (2019) contend the structure of the institution, lack of Indigenous administration and White tenured professors tell Indigenous faculty ‘they are not welcome, and that the likelihood of advancement is low’ (340), thereby functioning as a disincentive to those Indigenous academics seeking promotion to senior leadership positions. Furthermore, institutional racism reinforces systemic barriers to the promotion of Indigenous leadership when the rigour of Indigenous scholarship is erroneously questioned, (Mohamed and Beagan 2019), when greater esteem is given for publication in top-tier academic journals that favour Western epistemology (Henry and Tator 2012; Louie 2019), and when Indigenous academic performance is diminished by accruing insufficient grant money (Henry et al. 2017).

In terms of gaining tenure and promotion, Henry et al. (2017) argue Indigenous academics more highly value the relational aspects of Indigenous epistemologies and axiology, such as collegiality, affinity and networks in their role, rather than academic output or production. Yet alignment with ‘soft-metric’ elements of the role result in a downward spiral of diminishing returns in production of ‘hard-metrics’ of the sort that secure positions and enable further promotions. In response, Kovach (2019) argues for reform of Eurocentric assessment standards, with ‘tenure and promotion criteria that acknowledge the intangible, relational aspect of Indigenous scholarship’ (304), placing Senior Indigenous Leaders in strength-based positions. Louie (2019) argues structural privileging of Whiteness persists throughout the Canadian higher education sector, despite increased hiring of Indigenous academics, administrators and the employment of Indigenous people in leadership roles.

For aspirational Indigenous academics, the struggle to gain promotion into senior leadership positions is ever-present, and as the findings of this study reveal, the struggle extends beyond ‘getting there’ into the realities of ‘being there’.

Methodology and Methods

Context

This paper reports on one aspect of the international phase of an Australian based project: *Walan Mayiny: Indigenous leadership in Higher Education* (note *Walan Mayiny* means ‘strong people’ in the Aboriginal Wiradjuri language of the Central-West of New South Wales Australia). The project explores and evaluates the roles, responsibilities and influence of senior Indigenous appointments in the university sector and investigates the way universities do business with Indigenous leaders, considering the factors affecting institutional fit, how Indigenous appointments are valued and contribute to Indigenous outcomes. In doing so, it considers the structural barriers to senior Indigenous appointments as well as the advantages (Coates, Trudgett, and Page 2020). In addition, the project will develop new tools and methods to explore this under-theorised area.

The investigation is comprehensive, ranging from experiences of recruiters responsible for the recruitment of senior Indigenous positions in Australia– Stage One (Trudgett, Page, and Coates 2020), through to Indigenous Australians who hold Indigenous-specific senior leadership positions (Stage Two), senior executive positions (Stage Three) and Indigenous academics - Stage Four. Although the focus of Stages One to Four in the project is on the Australian context, Stage Five recognises the significance of international perspectives and draws on Indigenous experiences and perceptions of senior leadership in Canada (this paper), with papers on the United States of America and New Zealand in publication. We expect global issues will resonate through the project, despite the different traces colonial regimes may have left on some higher education systems and different shared histories of colonial experiences (Gonzales and Colangelo 2010). Therefore, the final paper in Stage Five will be comparative,

focusing on what can learn about Indigenous senior leadership in higher education when viewed through a global lens.

These similarities and differences will also assist in the development of a model that will have significance to Australia and other colonized nations world-wide. The project will culminate in a final paper synthesising all five stages of the research with a model of best practice for embedding sustainable and ethical Indigenous leadership structures in the higher education sector. The authors hope publication of the various aspects of the study will promote dialogue amongst Indigenous leaders internationally, furthering the promotion of justice in higher education. Additionally, the authors hope the study as a whole will encourage all leaders in the sector to draw on the strengths and talents of all peoples.

Indigenous Research Methodological Approach

Consistent with the wider *Walan Mayiny* project, this study is underpinned by the notion of emancipatory, Indigenist research. Rigney (1999) contends research must be grounded in a resistance to racial oppression, and founded on the three principles of an emancipatory imperative, political integrity, and privileging of the Indigenous voice. McConaghy (2000) and Smith (1999) also contend Indigenous voices must be centred in research, especially given the history of exploitation, prejudice and ‘speaking for’ that has dominated the academic domain. Therefore, throughout the project Indigenous voices and scholarship are deliberately centered as an agential response to the historical dominance of Eurocentric ideologies in academic discourse (Herbert 2010; Kovach 2018). This standpoint is a particularly poignant response to Western-centric governance models and structures that dominate the higher education sector in Australia, Canada, North America and New Zealand, shaping governance, policy, practices, curricula and setting the model for recruitment, employment and tenure. A pervasive legacy of colonialism draws on national and/or global perceptions of Indigenous people as being

homogenized (Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson 2016), thereby disallowing discourses of individual agency and the uniqueness of communities' experiences. The notion of distinctiveness is particularly relevant In Canada, where Indigenous peoples comprise of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis populations (Pidgeon 2016). This study acknowledges diversity within Canadian Indigenous peoples and First Nation, Inuit and Metis perspectives form the core of this paper.

Data Collection

Data in this study is based on interviews with four Indigenous Leaders in senior roles in Canadian universities. Participant selection was based on the criteria of being an Indigenous academic in a senior role at a Canadian university, located by using a google search using the keywords Canada; Indigenous; Leaders. As a result, we identified nine Indigenous academics in senior leadership roles to participate in the study, with four taking part. Given that meaning making is the core purpose of this research, using the principle that more data does not necessarily lead to more information when interviews are deep and rich (Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam 2003), allowed for a thorough understanding of the living experiences and perspectives of the participants. Our prediction that such rich and deep interviews would mean saturation point was quickly achieved (Glasser and Strauss 1967) was found to be accurate. Additionally, a smaller sample size reduces participant fatigue, as recommended by Punch and Oancea (2014). In what we found to be a sector characterised by increasingly demanding workloads (Gaudry and Lorenz 2018), consideration of participant fatigue was necessary.

Interviews were conducted using zoom technology after initial plans to conduct the interviews in person were abandoned early in 2020 due to Covid-19 travel restrictions. Both interviewers and interviewees acknowledged the unique circumstances that led to replacing face-face interviews with zoom technology, yet the spirit of collegiality in extenuating

circumstances was strong, and participants were chatty and the dialogue purposeful. Participants were asked to respond to 14 questions about their leadership position, role, challenges, successes, and perceptions of their sphere of influence. Interviews lasted between 44–54 minutes.

Analysis

In order to manage the complex responses to interview questions, data analysis was conducted using the qualitative software package NVivo 11 (Bazeley 2013). The initial coding was deductive, using a descriptive approach (Neale 2016). The next step was an inductive review of data, involving the identification of the main concepts and ascribing of key themes. In this way, the rigour of analysis was improved by using both deductive and inductive analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). All participants have been de-identified, with names and gender concealed to protect identity and privacy. Additionally, in the spirit of Indigenous research (Povey and Trudgett 2019), all participants were asked to review their transcripts and approve the content to be used in analysis and writing up of the findings. Finally, as three Indigenous and one non-Indigenous Australian authors of this paper, we acknowledge our context may represent a limitation to the study, however, the privileging of Indigenous voices by centring Canadian Indigenous scholars and Indigenous perspectives is designed to ameliorate this limitation.

Findings

Fair funding for all?

One of the most far reaching institutional inequities relates to funding models, and inequity of funding in the higher education sector is strongly felt in Senior Indigenous leadership positions. For example, one participant is the lowest paid Dean of the university, with the rate of pay

being half of that of some other Deans. The participant commented that this inequity exists despite being on the same tier as other Deans. The participant explained:

But it's no use trying to worry about money. There's deeper issues going on. So we raise it all the time ... because the deans who are the deans of the so-called minority faculties are the lowest paid deans on campus.

An important point to be made here is about the unresolved 'deeper issues' that underpin inequitable funding, with the participant suggesting that voicing the issue of racial inequality falls on deaf ears.

Senior Indigenous leadership roles are further problematized by the allocation of funding. A participant outlined specific fiscal constraints, including an 18% budget cut between 2016 and 2018 that created an unsustainable model for Indigenous programming. Work normally done by staff is completed by Indigenous faculty in leadership roles, including considerable amounts of afterhours work to ensure continuity of the programs:

That's I think true in a lot of Indigenous programming, right? It's where we have all the responsibilities of people with the same kind of positional rank as us but none of the resources.

Two participants agreed the onus falls on Senior Indigenous Leaders to make the system work, with one participant arguing:

We're kind of now seeing that there is an increased expectation for Indigenous faculty staff and even students without the accompanying resourcing.

The model is also seen as being self-perpetuating:

It's going to require what has always sustained Indigenisation in Canada which is people doing extra. I think a lot of the time the system here is working - is reliant upon people going above and beyond rather than adequately supporting it. (Senior Indigenous Leader)

Funding is further confounded by a neoliberal fiscal system that demands additional funding to support research initiatives and to boost the productivity and output of the faculty. One participant argues the funding model presents them with a particularly acute challenge in light of the fiscal impact of Covid-19 on the sector, describing the situation as ominous. Faced with the likelihood that Indigenous staff may very well lose their positions, pressure is exerted on faculty to generate revenue to ensure sustainability. External funding models for Indigenous academics in leadership positions may clash with the Leaders' ethical responsibilities and accountability to the community. The Indigenous faculty can then be placed in in an invidious situation:

I'm getting kissed in the ear by resource extraction companies ... when we know about the links of resource extraction companies to missing and murdered Indigenous women. I just turned down a [multi]million donor discussion which is going to save positions because I – we've had people in our faculty in the last two years who have lost somebody to the MMIW' (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women). (Senior Indigenous Leader)

Critical of the dispersal of funding in response to the TRC, one participant contends the period of optimism following the release of the TRC has 'fizzled out in the last year or so', claiming the year of 2018 saw 'an increased expectation for Indigenous faculty staff and even students without the accompanying resourcing'. Criticism of fiscally backed strategic decisions

made in responses to the TRC extends into the domain of universities choosing the more expedient option. A second participant explained:

Most universities in Canada could have responded to the TRC in one or both of two ways. They could have removed barriers that make it a welcoming space for Indigenous faculty, staff and students - and or they could have done the work and built stronger relationships with Indigenous communities. Now it's not a huge surprise which one most universities picked. That was to remove barriers because it's a lot easier to remove stuff than it is to actually build relationships. So that's what this university has focused on.

Participants have detailed obstructions ranging from the quotidian of their workdays through to strategic planning and governance of the sector. In this way, inequity amongst funding models across the higher education sector can then be seen through a lens of conservatism that stands in the way of transformative change.

A Responsibility to More Than the Job

All Senior Indigenous Leaders interviewed for this study argue an additional example of 'deeper issues going on' is the cultural violence that accompanies the expectation that Indigenous people in leadership roles will bring traditional culture and community connections to the job, but as an unrewarded adjunct and limited by funding.

Participants confirm this is also the case in leadership positions: all four participants agreed on the personal and professional significance of cultural obligations including participation in ceremony, spending time on land, holding traditional roles in community, ongoing reciprocal obligations along with the responsibilities of holding and sustaining Indigenous Knowledges. All participants also described the complexities and tensions of

sustaining cultural obligations whilst on the job, even though connection to community is a requisite of their employment. One Indigenous executive leader is employed 4000 miles away from home territory, and clearly articulates the predicament:

They wanted me because the connection to Indigenous community and practice that I have, which meant you're 4000 miles away.. In order to do what I do here, I have to have that.

The participant then explained how Senior Indigenous Leaders bear unique responsibilities of sustaining and renewing Indigenous Knowledge's and relationships in a workplace that makes dissonant demands on their time and energy. Similarly, another participant explains the tensions between work and cultural commitments:

Then from a wider community perspective we obviously meet with elders when they come in. I sit on various Indigenous organisations, boards of governor. Now that I'm not doing much in the way of research anymore, I don't get out to the community as much as I would ... But this position really is a very difficult position to do both the administrative part and the community function. It's nearly impossible to do.

This tension reaches into the area of student support, a responsibility that is often fulfilled in the Leaders' own time:

I think for a lot of people supporting Indigenous students is incredibly important and if it comes to having a bit of free time or making sure a student is supported when they need it, most of the people will choose the students over their own personal life. (Senior Indigenous Leader)

However, the participant questions the ethics of this practice when it becomes normalised, raising the issues of exploitation:

I think that's admirable in a lot of qualities but when that's the norm, when that's how the system functions.

Such unexamined expectations are not only counter-intuitive, but also discriminatory, because, as Little Bear (2000) argues, Indigenous Knowledges need to be renewed and relationships maintained, and, as Indigeneity is often a requisite of employment in higher education, the sector has a responsibility better understand and integrate cultural responsibilities of Indigenous academics, executives and administrators into workplace agreements.

The Full Dance Card

All participants expressed frustration at being time poor, under-resourced and overworked:

It's 40-40-40. So that's basically how it often works out for us. I'm sure a lot of people, 40 per cent research, 40 per cent teaching, 40 per cent service, then you've got 120 per cent of your time occupied. (Senior Indigenous Leader)

The participant developed the idea of burn-out, making connections between burn-out and high staff turnover by explaining how people unsuccessfully attempt to manage the national trend of unrealistically high job expectations of Indigenous Leaders in higher education, through changing jobs:

In Canada we're getting a lot of churn, people moving from one senior Indigenous position at one university to another senior because they burn out at one. So instead of

getting time to recharge they just hope the new context will allow them to recharge. Of course, it doesn't.

The link between inadequate funding and burnout is substantiated by a participant who proposes:

Support staff and a culture of having an adequate amount of support staff who have a reasonable workload is vital.

In yet another example of the paradoxical double-bind ensnaring Indigenous Leaders, one participant argues their 'dance card' has been full since universities responded to the *Calls to Action* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015), with many faculties and senior administrators seeking advice from Indigenous Leaders, often in a one-way direction with little reciprocal sharing. This includes additional roles of policy advice that become 'incorporated into university wide policy, like with honoraria', involving:

A lot of additional consultation work and policy development work beyond just doing what I think an average person in my position in another faculty would be doing.
(Senior Indigenous Leader)

The double-bind may also involve the sector positioning the Indigenous Leader in compromising circumstances. Participants report tensions between 'jagged worlds' (Little Bear 2000) where the university's may have expectations that Indigenous Leaders act as a cultural advisor, or even as a go-between, who is tasked to resolve misunderstandings. A participant suggested:

One of the challenges of course is that the work we do with community can also be upset when other parts of the university or other faculty members of the university do

something, because we're often then the first point of contact for community, which is a challenge, right? When someone else screws up they come to us and then we have to basically work through this problem because somebody else hasn't developed the kind of relationship we have.

The participant also worries when universities task Indigenous people to:

Basically, tow the party line on something to kind of blunt the force that it could have in the community. So, I just think it's important that universities understand that they shouldn't be putting Indigenous leaders out in front on unpopular issues just because they're Indigenous.

A different participant rails against the Senior Indigenous Leader being positioned as cultural translator:

When our reservations were formed, where you were put on reserves and there was a government official who was the Indian agent and they're the ones who keep you locked up there. So essentially what it is, is you're trying to make me your Indian agent. Take forward your colonial agenda. (Senior Indigenous Leader)

As findings show, the prevalence of 'well-worded mission statements and cosmetic changes' (Henry et al. 2017, 300) can masque the perpetuation of colonialism in a conservative sector with a long history of colonial hegemonic practices and a resistance to change.

What Works

Success Stories

Despite these limitations on influence, all participants have navigated an institutional culture steeped in whiteness and colonial mechanisms, claiming many successes worthy of celebration in their senior leadership positions. One Senior Indigenous Leader explained:

We do a lot that's exceptional based on the challenges we face and the work we have done to overcome them.

Developing strategic plans and policy documents was identified as a significant success by one participant. Although the process was time consuming, the Leader highly valued the outcome:

A strategic plan that values community engagement in teaching, research and service contexts and creating a faculty evaluation rubric that requires professors to operate according to the rubric and the importance of community engagement.

Increasing the public profile of Indigenous Studies has had an overall effect of increasing funding, with one campus introducing an elective Indigenous Studies academic program that has doubled in student registration since its inception, with students enrolled from all faculties on campus.

The prioritisation of staff and student capacity building is well represented in accounts of achievements by all Senior Indigenous Leaders interviewed in this study. For example, success in mentoring Indigenous students to ‘peak their interest in research, that there’s value in Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous research methods’, is valued, as well as ‘becoming the first point of contact for students’, and ‘building community on campus’. Revising policy and building workshops to assist student enrolments, assisting students to understand university expectations, and how to meet these expectations, were seen as substantial achievements in support of increasing equity and access in the sector. On one campus, ‘building

administrative capacity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous administrators' through leadership courses, albeit funded from the departmental budget, has been a successful initiative.

The importance of relationships in building success and instigating change is a common thread woven across the interviews. In one instance, the size of the faculty increased by 50% when a Senior Indigenous Leader successfully negotiated with the provost's office to win a substantial part of the TRC funding; the success of this initiative was attributed to 'a strong relationship' with the provost's office. In another example, collaborative decision making embedded within the internal structure of the faculty has been an effective initiative:

A lot of day-to-day decision making gets operationalised by the staff, which is really good, because they're the ones having to deal with a lot of the stuff. Our staff I would say have a lot more say in governance decisions than elsewhere.

These strength-based experiences of positive and meaningful influence are positive expressions of enactment of power with an emancipatory agenda that bodes well for transformative systemic change.

Changing Direction

Participants overwhelmingly support calls for transformation. One participant argues:

So I think a lot of it is that universities assume that the old school, like unencumbered young white men, are the norm, which they're not at universities anymore. It's kind of a good thing and that the university should kind of maybe accept the fact that this is the new reality and start thinking about how it runs to kind of reflect where we're at and where we're going rather than where it's been.

Given the significant size of the chicanes, the question arises as to how can Indigenous Leaders be better positioned to exert their influence and extend power to effect such changes in direction? One participant advocates rather than problematising Indigenous presence, that changing the system through the introduction of Indigenous leadership and governance styles will benefit not only Indigenous staff and students, but also the institution as a whole:

Get people to start thinking about Indigenous people as partners to be engaged with because we have good ideas. Because we have good ideas for even non-Indigenous stuff because, you know, our governance systems, the way we think about things, actually has a lot to help other people.

Representing Indigenous voices and Indigeneity on campus was highly valued by participants: one participant described a strong Indigenous leadership quality being able to represent the voices of Indigenous staff, students and faculty at the executive level, thereby promoting equity by giving voice to the marginalised. The quality of building ethical and trusting relationships figures highly, with participants concerned their relationship building skills are taken advantage of by non-Indigenous executive who want the problem solved quickly without ‘going through the discomfort of the kinds of relationships that they need to that ensure more ethical ways to act’ (Senior Indigenous Leader). Participants identified an ability to develop and sustain relationships of trust with Indigenous people on campus and prioritising community engagement as a desirable quality:

But I think that is built with trust and openness and ability to engage people on multiple levels and multiple levels, and we’re always getting feedback and working towards that.

The ability to develop collaborative leadership styles is valued, inspired by Prairie Indigenous societies that feature ‘democratic and collective and open decision making’ (Senior Indigenous Leader).

Strength and patience were also identified, as participants found a need to :

Hold your ground with people who will constantly try to water down what you’re doing. So, a lot of the time you do need to I think also challenge very powerful people in a university structure and try to say, no, that’s not what we agreed to.

Patience, not only in developing trusting relationships and staying the course when times get tough, but also in strategically waiting:

Universities are these big slow moving things. So, I think a patient approach to this is really important because there’s going to be setbacks and there’s going to be stuff that happens and we’re really talking about fundamentally changing not only individuals’ world views but systemic change of how the biggest institutions in society work.

Indigenous Leaders face an enormous task where the qualities of patience, perseverance and strength built on relationships and a spirit of working together towards a shared vision will be much in demand.

Discussion

Participants in this study find themselves wedged in the double bind of meeting cultural commitments simultaneously with fulfilling workplace commitments, a position supported by a number of Indigenous academics in the higher education sector, most notably Asmar and Page (2009), Mohamed and Beagan (2019), Page and Asmar (2008) and Thunig and Jones (2020). Louie (2019) notes this often goes without acknowledgement by non-Indigenous

presidents and senior executive. This paradoxical situation is especially relevant for Indigenous Leaders in senior roles when the prerequisite of employment is circumscribed by Indigeneity, yet enactment of Indigeneity is constrained by the colonial governance constructs. The resultant liminal world of Indigenous Senior Leaders is fraught with frustration and circumscribed agency. Such circumstances have been defined in terms of cultural taxation (Padillo 1994), in reference to the wide range of additional responsibilities allocated to faculties of colour. While research on culture taxation is extensive, the focus of Canadian research has primarily been on academics (D. Henry and Tator 2012; Henry et al. 2017; Louie 2019; Mohamed and Beagan 2019), detailing unusually high levels of service work and extra time spent defending scholarship and challenging racism, with a toll on productivity (Mohamed and Beagan 2019), that negatively impacts on tenure and promotion.

Research shows Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing are devalued as well as taxed at all levels of employment in the sector. However, this current study offers unique insights into the specific culture taxation challenges Indigenous Leaders face, manifesting as caveats to overt and covert expressions of power, with a resultant bounded capacity to enact transformative change. Indigenous Leaders face daily challenges of outmoded governance structures, the increasing influence of neoliberalism, fiscal modelling that curtails a too-full dance card, burn-out resulting from engaging with a higher education sector founded on epistemological racism (Scheurich and Young 1997) and cognitive imperialism (Battiste et al. 2002), or poorly considered responses to the TRC. Yet the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015) and the *Calls to Action* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015) made it clear universities had a substantial role to play advancing reconciliation and transforming discriminatory legacy of colonialism. Prior to the TRC, some universities had begun to recognise the need to consider structural and governance changes (Pidgeon 2014), however after the documents' release and ensuing publicity, concerns arose about the

prevalence of rhetoric and tokenistic actions. Fears arose as universities increasingly misconstrued initiatives of mandatory courses in Indigenous studies, increased hiring of Indigenous academics (Henry et al. 2017; Kuokkanen 2016) and reconciliatory language and rhetorical shifts in policy (Gaudry and Lorenz 2018; Tamtik and Guenter 2019), as transformative actions.

Senior Indigenous Leaders who participated in this study explicitly called for the authentic transformative actions of increased employment of Indigenous people in enabled leadership roles across the higher education sector, and for meaningful involvement of Indigenous peoples in decision-making governance roles at the university. Leaders also campaigned for leadership built on collaborative governance relationships and cultural responsiveness that acknowledges and promotes Indigenous contributions; a standpoint well supported in literature (Henry et al. 2017; Louie 2019; McDonald 2016; Tamtik and Guenter 2019). Literature shows Senior Indigenous Leaders employed in institutions of higher education call for more than inclusion, integration and cultural awareness, as embedding Indigenous governance systems within the institution can be transformative and lead to long-term systemic change (Kuokkanen 2007). In a similar vein, Minton and Chavez' (2015) propose Indigenous leadership become 'a formal part of the university system' (257); a standpoint that is plainly obvious, yet problematic in reality, as described by the participants in this research.

Nevertheless, whilst findings suggest positive changes to the positioning and influence of Senior Indigenous leaders in the sector are tempered by caveats, some important changes are taking place in Indigenous leadership within Canadian higher education. Senior Indigenous Leaders who participated in this study have detailed areas of positive growth in their realms of influence, such as securing funds for Indigenous Studies courses and projects, capacity building

for staff and students, in-house policy changes, a strategic plan targeting community engagement and some degree of greater control over faculty governance. Evidence suggests the sector is slowly but surely being turned to face the right direction.

Conclusion

While calls for Indigenous Leaders to steer reform in higher education are gaining momentum (Debassige and Brunette 2018; Pete 2016; Pidgeon 2016), the undertaking is unfairly imbalanced because the bulky weight of change is carried by individual Indigenous Leaders (Gaudry and Lorenz 2018), who are ably assisted by a small number of responsive staff and supported with community backing (Louie 2019). Additionally, many Senior Indigenous Leaders are engaged in promoting and navigating uncomfortable changes intended to disrupt colonial status quo and instigate structural changes, further increasing their weight of responsibility to unsettle the behemoth of Western higher education.

Debate continues about what the transformed structures may look like, be they modelled on inclusion, reconciliation or decolonial Indigenisation (Gaudry and Lorenz 2018). Nevertheless, consensus can be found amongst the Senior Indigenous Leaders interviewed in this study and Canadian Indigenous academics (Battiste, Bell and Findlay 2002; Gaudry and Lorenz 2018; Henry et al. 2017; Kovach 2019; Kuokkanen 2016; Louie 2019; Mohamed and Beagan 2019) that systemic change is the desired long-term outcome. As shown in the findings of this study, Indigenous Senior Leaders have given testimony about what they are doing to change the alignment of higher education so it is facing away from colonial mechanisms and White ideologies that sustain racial inequity to instead turn in the direction of Indigenous rights and sovereignty in education.

Indigenous Leaders face an enormous task that is confounded by the slow gyrations of institutional, long-term systemic change (Henry et al. 2017), yet research clearly shows

Indigenous academics in senior positions are willing to continue carrying the mantle, and to get on with the job they want to do as Indigenous Leaders.

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