Rethinking Collective Action Beyond the Frameworks of Management Sciences? Methodological and Epistemological Reflections by Non-Indigenous Researchers on Addressing Management Issues in Canadian Indigenous Contexts

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ABSTRACT

In a Canadian political context of reconciliation with First Nations, the recognition of Indigenous knowledge is increasingly influencing academia. Despite this trend and the realization that understanding management in an Indigenous context seems to present an opportunity to build a new relationship with what is referred to as management, management sciences struggle to integrate knowledge derived from First Nations practices. This article aims to clarify and address several issues that arise for non-Indigenous researchers in management sciences wishing to study and understand management issues in an Indigenous context: is it desirable to undertake such an understanding project? Is it feasible, and if so, with what epistemological and methodological challenges? In this text, we are not seeking to position ourselves as experts on management issues in an Indigenous context; rather, we seek to analyze the research practices of non-Indigenous researchers when they engage with such questions, based on a year-long intervention research with a Canadian Indigenous community reflecting on its governance and organizational structure. Our analysis identifies three main elements: the need for non-Indigenous researchers to understand the First Nations connection to the collective, the consideration of an appropriate research methodology, and the recognition of the limitations of traditional management approaches in the face of the holistic Indigenous perspective. These limitations, far from being obstacles, instead offer an opportunity: the unique perspective of First Nations on management provides a chance to enhance our understanding of management sciences, but this requires a redesign of our epistemological and methodological approaches.

Keywords : *First Nations ; Indigenous Research ; Epistemology ; Methodological Considerations*

1. INTRODUCTION

In a Canadian political context characterized by a general desire for reconciliation with First Nations and the acknowledgment of wrongs caused by colonialism (Blackstock, 2008), the voices of Indigenous populations are increasingly heard both in political discourses and in academia. This newfound presence is leading to a revaluation of the value of traditional knowledge in the academic world (Ball, 2004). Today, issues related to ecology, environmental protection and climate change (Gobby & Guertin, 2020; Ngono & Tipi, 2020; Jessen et al, 2022), as well as those concerning education or social work (Ellington, 2019; Blackstock, 2009), are increasingly considered in light of Indigenous knowledge. The publication, in Canada, of the final report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has given new momentum for innovative ways of collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigneous researchers (Held, 2019). However, while the importance of collectivity is often placed as a core principle within aboriginal traditional knowledge (Gram-Hanssen, 2021; Little Bear, 2000), Western management sciences are slow to undergo a revaluation of First Nations' knowledge regarding these dimensions (Jammulamadaka et al. 2021). Such a gap is for instance exemplified by the lack of any work related to administration or management in an Indigenous context in the Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences, the prime journal in understanding Canadian managerial trends and topics of interest. First Nation communities operate on different, more or less explicit principles for managing collective action (e.g. the two-eyed seeing principle (Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall, 2012; Reid et al, 2021) or the self-government through constitutional design (Alcantara & Whitfield, 2010)). Yet, there is little empirical data and theoretical frameworks to understand the complexity of management in Canadian Indigenous contexts, both in terms of its social dynamics and the more technical and structural dimensions of collective action.

Gaining insight into management within Indigenous contexts presents a unique opportunity to redefine conventional perspectives on what constitutes effective management. In the context of First Nations, the collective interests consistently take precedence over individual desires; decision-making is then characterized by a consensus-based approach, creating a collective alignment of different stakeholders rather than imposing an individual vision to others (Horn-Miller, 2013). This may offer a novel perspective on how to manage collective action, prompting a reevaluation of the conventional notions we teach, learn and use in management sciences. Consequently, exploring new perspectives of how collective

action may unfold holds the potential to yield fresh and fertile insights, enriching our comprehension of the organized world.

However, doing so is not that simple. Since studying collective dynamics is intricately tied to culture and relies on the experiential subjectivity of the researcher (Weick, 2012), studying Indigenous' concept of collectivity is a particularly sensitive matter. When compounded with the sensitivities surrounding highly politicized subjects such as Indigenous knowledge and governance, this can pose challenges. Researchers can then easily fall in what Chowdhury defines as meta-ignorance, i.e. incorrect epistemic attitudes of researchers due to being ignorant of the contextual history as well as the emotional and political aspects of a social problem (Chowdhury, 2023). While meta-ignorance is unavoidable to a certain degree, Chowdhury distinguishes it from his notion of meta-insensitivity, which arises when researchers miss multiple opportunities to capture the marginalized groups' voices, experiences, and expectations. When meta-ignorance can still offer ground for new understandings, its potential shift towards meta-insensitivity is fundamentally problematic when dealing with marginalized populations, as it allows the perpetuation of a neo-colonial attitude by undervaluing their lived-in experiences in how they think and act through their social and organizational problems.

The inevitable risk of meta-insensitivity raises several questions for a non-Indigenous researcher in management sciences wishing to study and understand management issues in Indigenous contexts: *Is it desirable to undertake such a project of understanding? Is it possible, and if so, what epistemological and methodological challenges does it pose?* We are far from being the first scholars to ask these questions: social sciences have offered some elements regarding what Indigenous research, Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous methodologies may be (Kovach, 2017; Quinless, 2022; Wilson, 2008), especially in social work, anthropology, environmental and decolonial theories. However, due to the fundamentally specific nature of managerial studies towards its own practical application, the lack of literature on the topic in management is problematic – making the need to ask methodological questions ever-more so important through a management science lens. The apparent unwillingness of business schools to follow this epistemological pattern of other humanities is even more so concerning considering their historical use as a colonizing tool, by defining what constitutes good or 'backward' management practices in colonized societies (Jammulamadaka et al. 2021).

In this article, we build on an autoethnography conducted during a year-long intervention research initiative deployed with a Canadian Indigenous community that was in

the process of contemplating and deliberating upon its governance and organizational structure. We do not wish to assert ourselves as authorities on management issues within an Indigenous context. Instead, our focus is on examining the epistemological and methodological challenges that non-Indigenous researchers face when grappling with these specific inquiries. Our contribution is thus to shed light on how researchers who do not share an Indigenous background approach and investigate these management-related matters. All in all, we wish to contribute to the ongoing discussion (e.g. Mir & Mir, 2013) on how to decolonize management sciences, by exploring how organizational theories from non-Western cultures such as Canadian Indigenous cultures, often marginalized or dismissed in the past, may contribute to a more diverse and inclusive understanding of organizational dynamics. We argue that an ethical study of a differentiated collectivity still allows ground for a newfound understanding and insights of the organized world.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 First Nations communities in Québec : Managerial realities

The Indigenous communities in Canada are broadly categorized into three recognized groups. The Inuit reside in Inuit Nunangat and are a group of historically and culturally similar Indigenous peoples that traditionally inhabited the Artic and subarctic regions of North America. Métis is a group primarily located in the western provinces of Canada, that includes individuals with mixed European and Indigenous heritage who self-identify as Métis and distinguish themselves from other Indigenous groups. The First Nations group consists of 630 communities in Canada, representing over 50 nations with distinct languages, histories, and cultures. In Quebec, there are mainly 10 of these First Nations spread across 43 communities (11 if Inuits are included): Abenaki, Algonquins (Anishinabee), Attikameks, Cris (Eeyou), Hurons-Wendats, Innus, Wolastoqiyiks (Malécites), Micmacs, Mohawks (Kanien'kehà:ka), and Naskapis. Together, these populations account for just over 1% of the province's population, totaling around 85,000 inhabitants.

A First Nation community, or a 'band', is a place inhabited by often different First Nations living on the same piece of land which at the moment of its creation had shared characteristics such as familial, cultural, territorial and historical belonging. Indigenous communities differ in various ways, but were all established through several waves of sedentarization, mostly initiated and legally instituted by Canadian government authorities (most notably through the Indian Act, 1867). They operate as distinct and self-governing collectives and impact significantly the socio-economic and health development of Indigenous

populations (Picard, 2010). While not all First Nation individuals are attached to a specific community, the community is seen as a place where social bonds are formed, and familial connections are rooted. It serves as a space for identity affirmation and cultural transmission.

Indigenous communities are managed by a group of elected community members - the Council - led by a Chief. The Council roughly encompasses three major functions. Firstly, a political function involving an election system that selects various public and political representatives who determine the community's political and communal objectives (and act as legal representatives of the community in legal and social gatherings). Secondly, a social function entailing the organization of a range of social services delivered to community members (such as health services, education, policing, infrastructure building etc.). Lastly, an economic function as it is often the primary employer of the community members, regularly employing over one-third of its members throughout its different functions.

Through their council, First Nations operate based on distinctive, often implicit principles for coordinating collective efforts. This difference in 'managing the collectivity' takes its roots in the different way First Nations approach the nature of knowledge and power and its relation to the collectivity (Kovach, 2017). Since First Nations' approach to knowledge creates a qualitatively different worldview, there has been several Indigenous authors that have tried to incorporate its qualities in different theoretical approaches, not only to value its specificities but also elevate them as independent and coherent thinking systems. For instance, the notion of the two-eyed seeing principle (Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall, 2012; Reid et al, 2021) addresses the possibility to look at a same phenomenon through one eye with the strengths of indigenous knowledge and from the other eye the strengths of Western Knowledge, therefore highlighting the different ways both 'eyes' see and understand the world. Amongst the characteristics of the Indigenous eye, the willingness to bring back spirituality and religion back into ways of seeing the world is a key component (Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall, 2012).

Despite the documentation of these different guiding principles, there is a scarcity of both empirical data and theoretical frameworks to grasp the intricate nature of management in Canadian Indigenous contexts. This deficiency pertains not only to the social dynamics but also extends to the more technical and structural dimensions of collective action. As such, delving into the intricacies of management within Indigenous contexts may provide a rare opportunity to redefine conventional perspectives on management. In the context of First Nations, where collective interests consistently outweigh individual desires, and decision-making is consensus based : Horn-Miller (2013) for instance describes how current participatory democracy within the Council of the Kahnawà:ke community relies on "*the same principles of respect for*

individual thinking and ideas and unanimity in decision making that were used by (her) ancestors". She stresses that the community's constitution "*focuses on resolving community or national concerns rather than individualistic ideals. In this way of thinking, each individual is part of a greater collective body; every act that an individual performs has direct or indirect impact on the world around them.*". This distinctive approach offers a fresh lens through which to view the composition of organized entities, prompting a reassessment of traditional managerial concepts. As a result, exploring alternative perspectives on how Indigenous collective action unfolds holds the potential to generate novel and valuable insights, enhancing our understanding of the organized world.

2.2 Navigating the Indigenous Chimera

First Nations communities are extremely diverse – beyond their number and belonging to different nations, language, or culture. There is indeed a plurality of election systems, of articulations between political and administrative functions, or of economical endeavors. For instance, some communities give purely advisory roles to their elders, while others give them more extensive judicial and/or legislative roles (Alcantara & Whitfield, 2010). Yet, Indigenous communities often tend to be represented as one comprehensive entity, underrepresenting the differences that can be found among different communities (Krueger, 2019). This creates an indivisible "*Indigenous chimera*," where all Indigenous collectives would resemble one another and operate on the same cultural and/or management principles (an issue found in other contexts where Southern voices aim to be heard (Alcadipani et al., 2012)). This is problematic as it tends to underemphasize crucial differences between these groups, but also because it tends to create an artificial clear-cut separation between what is considered 'Western' and what is considered 'Indigenous'. This Indigenous chimera is evident in the tendency to position Indigenous knowledge in parallel or in opposition to non-Indigenous knowledge, rather than its interactions with it. This strategy of coexistence of knowledge positions non-Indigenous and Indigenous knowledge in a binary way (Guay, 2009), thereby limiting the visibility of its overlaps and possible interactions between these forms of knowledge. A good example of this dynamic can be found in the Indigenous theoretical approaches previously mentioned, such as the notion of the two-eyed seeing principle (Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall, 2012; Reid et al, 2021).

The tendency to separate Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge can lead to several issues, notably reinforcing the risk of "*Hollywoodization*" of Indigenous knowledge due to the current popularity of "*Indigenous voices*" in popular discourse (Barlett, Marshall & Marshall, 2012). There may, indeed, be a temptation today to just "make it up", and sacralize Indigenous

knowledge to legitimize some courses of action - thus relegating Indigenous knowledge to a political tool or even solely to an entertainment status (ibid).

If we were to apply this logic of 'coexistence of knowledges' to Indigenous management issues, this means that Indigenous management principles can only be understood in the context of their opposition to a non-Indigenous mode of operation (for example, embodied by the Canadian federal management system), while also rendering Indigenous management homogeneous and potentially overshadowing the complexity of differences in operations within and between different communities. More importantly, looking at Indigenous management in the context of its difference from non-Indigenous management overlooks the fact that individuals within Indigenous collectives consciously and unconsciously integrate both forms of knowledge to produce an original modernity (Shahjahan, 2005). Thus, there is a need to design an epistemological alternative to the strategy of coexistence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge, and putting these knowledge systems into interaction can be aided by adopting a co-creation strategy (Guay, 2009). As a co-creation strategy aims to organize a meeting between non-Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous knowledge, this would allow Indigenous management to be perceived, understood, and shaped in the context of all possibilities and available knowledge. A co-creation strategy would thus theoretically allow an entryway for non-Indigenous researchers to collaborate and co-create new knowledge with First Nation communities away and beyond 'co-existence of knowledge models'. However, due to the historical and political dynamics surrounding First Nations, research models et methodologies need to be extremely self-reflexive and critical as to avoid a utilitarian approach regarding Indigenous knowledge (Drawson, Toombs & Mushquash, 2017).

2.3 Indigenous research and Indigenous methodologies

Reflections on how to conduct research about and/or with Indigenous contexts is nothing new to academia and has been a growing topic in most humanities. We are far from being the first scholars to ask these questions: social sciences have offered some elements regarding what Indigenous research, Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous methodologies may be (Kovach, 2017; Quinless, 2022; Wilson, 2008), especially in social work, anthropology, environmental and decolonial theories (e.g. Zurba et al, 2022; Drawson, Toombs & Mushquash, 2017).

Indigenous research has historically been carried out *on*, rather than *in collaboration with,* Indigenous Peoples in Canada (CRSH, 2022). A choice of methodology is a political act, as it relates to the process of creating knowledge. Due to the negative historical relationship

academies and researchers have had with Indigenous people, often reifying the existing power structures, and reproducing western hegemonic discourse on indigenous matters *(*Quinless, 2022*)*, researchers need to be ever-more cautious. Therefore, if future research is to be presented in an anti-colonial framework, researchers need to be critical about the methodologies they employ as to avoid falling into the traps of extractive research, "*which has been and continues to be the outcome of a non-interrogated Western gaze upon indigeneity"* (Kovach, 2017, p216*).*

Choosing an appropriate methodology for Indigenous research depends on several dimensions: the purpose of the research, the research question, the consideration of Indigenous voice and knowledge, but also, more fundamentally, the capability of the research team to concentrate both on colonial relations and practice, and to create a critical link between theory and practice. This most-often requires a thorough introspection of the researchers within their research process on their positionality, intentionality, power relationships, and accountability (Quinless, 2022).

It has been argued that decolonizing current research methodologies is bound to be partially ineffective as it is hard to remove the underlying epistemology and ontology these methods are built upon. Accordingly, a truly Indigenous perspective which would represent appropriately Indigenous knowledge would require an Indigenous centered methodology (Wilson, 2008).

All these methodological considerations are anchored in humanities that are not specifically in the management field, and so the distinct practical orientation inherent in managerial studies poses a challenge, as the scarcity of literature on the subject becomes a noteworthy concern. Unless non-Indigenous researchers are to abandon managerial Indigenous studies, this underscores the increasing importance of posing methodological inquiries through the lens of management science to address the existing gaps in knowledge and application within this specialized field.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this article, we aim to explore these epistemological and methodological challenges based on an intervention research experience that we conducted between September 2022 and August 2023 with a Canadian Indigenous community reflecting on its governance and organizational structure - which we will call the Kishik community for confidentiality purposes.

We first started working in September 2022 on a project in collaboration with a First nation community in the north of Quebec on the issues of its governance and organizational structure – a key endeavor for many First Nations collectives (Ladner, 2003; 2006; 2009; Coates, 2008). Following the conclusions of the systematic review from Dion and colleagues (2020) advocating for conducting collaborative research with Indigenous populations, we adopted a community-based participatory research approach, described by Israel et al. (1998) as a research method that seeks to bridge the power differentials often present in studies involving marginalized populations by fostering genuine collaboration between researchers and community members. Emphasizing mutual sharing of expertise not only enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding of their topic through close engagement with reality, but also ensures that the knowledge created during the research project is directly applicable and beneficial to the community, since they participate in its creation. This methodological posture attempts to address the inherent power imbalances that can arise in research, particularly when dealing with communities facing structural disadvantages (Dion et al, 2020). The recognition of these power differentials is crucial in crafting ethical research practices, prompting a shift towards policies that mandate meaningful community engagement and approval in studies involving vulnerable populations (ibid).

Although as researchers, we can never be certain on how the results of our research will be subsequently used, we can avoid falling into the trap of claiming objectivity in the knowledge we produce as non-experts from an unfamiliar field. As a way to partially resolve the methodological issues of our positioning as non-Indigenous researchers in an Indigenous field of research, we decided to engage concurrently with an auto-ethnographic process. This auto-ethnographic process (Ellis & Bochner, 2011) was aimed at documenting, beyond what we concretely understood about the situation of this community, our own reactions as researchers throughout the entire process. The analytic autoethnographic approach is a method that aims to describe and analyze the researcher's personal experience during the study of a phenomenon (Anderson, 2006). The foundation of this approach is based on recognizing the subjectivity of the researcher (their emotions, reflections, developments, etc.) and how it influences their research. By highlighting the various subjective elements of the researcher, this allows to place them in a more comprehensive conceptual framework of analysis. Auto-ethnography is then created by identifying the different key moments of experiencing a phenomenon and then combining them with the foundations of its understanding. In doing so, this approach allows us to translate our own thinking paradigms and shed light on possible frictions emerging from our encounter with Indigenous reality, thus addressing our research question. Furthermore, by

clearly documenting the sensemaking process that the researcher employed, it becomes easier to deconstruct and counter-argue the knowledge derived from research, thus reducing its potential for dogmatism in (the many) cases we as researchers were wrong.

We thus worked over a year with the chief and the members of the Council of an Anishinaabe community - Kishik - of about 1000 persons. Indeed, this community was facing organizational design issues. When we started interacting with them, the General Manager of the community (a key role in any First Nation community (Robichaud, 1992), as a crucial link between the political dimension of the Council and the different department managers) had departed from her role several months before and had not yet been replaced. The Council had experienced multiple turnovers in General Management over the past years and had been operating within a certain structural instability for a decade. As such, for several months, community activities had been unfolding without the General Manager position being filled - a very unusual event that redistributed power and responsibilities in a new way within the band council. In September 2022, we started meeting on a regular basis with the chief of Kishik, who saw that structural change as an opportunity, and who shared with us her thoughts about how the community was working and about how it may function in a different less-hierarchical way. Following multiple discussions with the chief and the Council, we co-created and facilitated a two-days participatory workshop in January 2023 involving all elected band Council members and all the directors of the different departments of the community (e.g. head of the police, head of the health services, head of education, etc.). Through a game-based approach that created a sense of trust and togetherness between the participants, the workshop prompted very open discussions on the current and desired organizational design of the community – granting us access to how the participants perceived their own organization. Following these exchanges, several processes were initiated to better coordinate the actions of each department, and we followed implementation of the changes that occurred during the following months.

The aim of this article is not to dive into the organizational design of the community per se, but to reflect on our own experience, as non-Indigenous researchers who worked on this project. While the relevance of an autoethnographic methodology in documenting our experiences is evident, its relevance is confronted to several issues in communicated the data and analysis. One way we addressed this challenge is through the utilization of a dual-level analysis, comprising of an auto-ethnographic dimension and a synthesis dimension made from the modeling of our thinking patterns in ‘cognitive maps’. These cognitive maps were then embedded within a chronological framework and inserted at crucial points within our research process. Thus, in this work we rely in addition to our autoethnographic material, on a successive

modeling of our thinking patterns (individual and collective) throughout the 12 months of the project : based on the analysis of our autoethnographic material, we have indeed created cognitive maps modeling the evolution of the various elements of our understanding of the problem Kishik was facing, whether they relate to technical, social, political, or cultural dimensions of the situation studied. Together, this dual analysis mutually reinforces itself, facilitating a platform for discussion with both readers and the research field.

4. FINDINGS

The analysis of our auto-ethnographic material allows us to identify three main lines of results regarding the epistemological and methodological challenges that emerge while conducting management research in Indigenous contexts.

4.1 Covering the basics

The first result lies in the profound need for the non-Indigenous researchers to acquire a set of key knowledge about the indigenous relationship to the collective and the concept of community. Not unsurprisingly, we quickly realized, when we started working with the Kishik community, that we were very unprepared for what was bound to happen. While we had read many articles on Canadian Indigenous communities, and that both authors had previous experiences with Indigenous studies (one of the authors of this article is trained in anthropology and the other one had been teaching in Indigenous executive programs in management for a year), we knew nothing. Indeed, nothing had prepared us for the managerial dimensions of Kishik as a structured collective action. Even though we were, for instance, both quite knowledgeable about how cultural and traditional elements shape actions in Indigenous context, the way a community works, with its council, with its employees, with its members, was something we hadn't read about : this was accentuated by the fact that when when preparing to meet with the council and later, with the community, we couldn't really find any material specifically on Kishik, and had to rely on second-hand sources. Overall, we thought we understood better the situation than what we actually did.

Among other things, we can emphasize three elements that are key to understanding management within First Nations communities. First, there is an omnipresence of governance issues in all managerial problems, from the smallest to the most decisive. For instance, every conversation regarding how to manage a meeting led to broader discussions regarding the roles and responsibilities of the Council towards the population. Another example is that any

discussion about potential changes regarding operation management led to reflections on how the community and its members related to these changes.

Second, we realized that the complexity of social and cultural dynamics generates a sense that "*everything is interconnected*" and that circumscribing a specific simplified management issue is extremely difficult. Specifically, as the Council holds political, social and economic roles, any decision made by Council members or department managers on one of these roles impacts all three dimensions of the Council. Therefore, any political decision impacts social dynamics and economical endeavors, and is thought and discussed as such.

Third, we would like to share the presence, in any collective reflection, of the territory, the land, as an integral stakeholder. This probably came as the biggest surprise. The relationship of First Nations with nature is obviously not new, and anyone interested in Indigenous cultures or way of life will right away appreciate the entanglement of human activities and nature. Yet, this seeps even into technical formal aspects of management - and we certainly didn't expect discussions about Kishik's organizational structure to integrate dimensions on the community's relationship with the territory.

4.2 Debunking the Western gaze

The second element emerging from our analysis is the necessity to conceive a methodological research process that goes beyond the collaborative research strategy with a community: the methodological process must also consider a series of evolutions of our own cognitive patterns as researchers, acknowledging the multiple contradictions, and even misunderstandings that arise during the research.

By tracing, over the course of one year, the evolution of our cognitive maps regarding how we were understanding the project, we can show how some of our understandings of Kishik's situation changed greatly over time. As researchers, this process requires humility as it depends on fundamentally confronting our limitations and our ignorance throughout our research process, therefore saying if, when, and what we were right and (mostly) wrong about in our understanding of Kishik's Council. For instance, we were fairly convinced that elders were advising the Council, in a more or less formalized way. We thought we would be confronted at some point with a 'double authority' within Kishik, questioning the even possibility to rethink its structure or its governance. We had to realize at some point that this was not the case in this specific community, despite being told as such in other readings we had done preemptively to meeting Kishik's members. We thus had to acknowledge our mistake and

our ignorance, so as to deconstruct what Kishik was and how it functioned. Figure 1 below shows the evolution of our cognitive maps between September 2022 and June 2023.

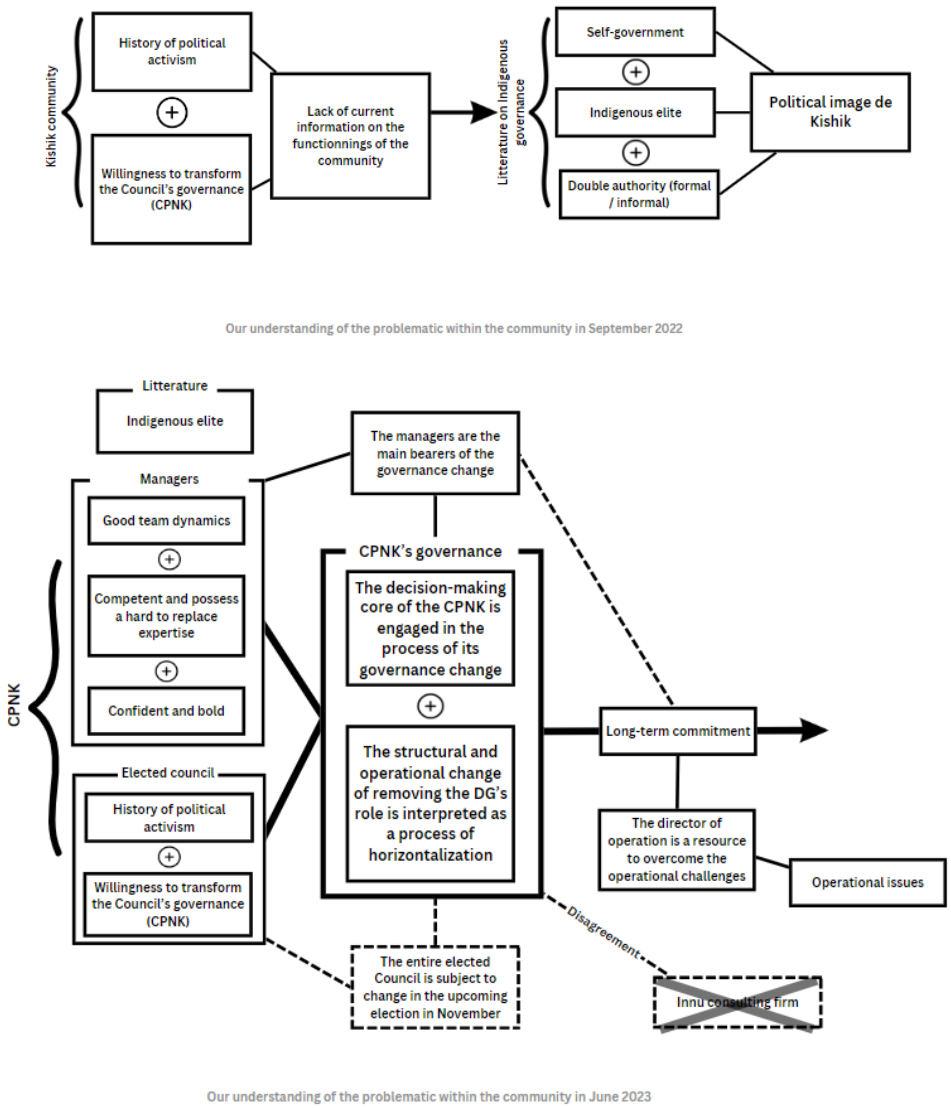

Figure 1 - Evolution of our cognitive maps

Furthermore, creating cognitive maps allowed for further discussion on our own limitations as key components in understanding the dialect and potentialities between Western and Indigenous epistemologies. This granted a certain transparency to our own sensemaking process as researchers and enabled us to create a platform to discuss and share with the community what our thoughts were and how they evolved over time, effectively placing us in a 'non-expert seat'. This particular positioning aligns with the goal of designing a decolonial co-creative process with the community to debunk (partly) our Western gaze.

4.3 Acknowledging our limits

Finally, a third pathway of analyzing our auto-ethnographic data invites us to accept the limitations of understanding and collaboration according to usual approaches and frameworks in management. Debunking our Western gaze, as undersigned in the previous section, is important, but can only be done to a certain extent. In particular, the relationship to knowledge in an Indigenous context is profoundly holistic and experiential (O'Connor, 2010), shaping *de facto* the value of any knowledge in its sole relation and applicability to reality. Management sciences (in the Western world) have been built on processes of abstraction and conceptualization. Such abstraction of non-Indigenous management paradigms would indirectly imply a loss of relevance and accessibility of management knowledge for Indigenous practitioners – thus pointing to the coexistence strategy of these knowledge systems as described above. This would also mean that the non-Indigenous academic approach to knowledge creation would be inherently problematic in the context of Indigenous communities.

We share a vignette of what happened when we tried to use a simple tool classically mobilized during any intervention research: we made a report, a week after facilitating a two-day workshop with the managers and the council of Kishik. Considering that Kishik's team was reconvening for two days a mere two weeks after the workshop to discuss and make the budgets, we decided to write an 8 pages document that synthesized the interactions and the organizational structures that the participants of the workshop had discussed. We thus sent to the chief and the whole Council our thoughts and observations - which appeared to us as key elements to support their on-going reflections. Two months later, we met the Council to discuss our observations and gain further insights on the changes that were operationalized within Kishik. We then realized that none of the material we had developed, either a written report or a PowerPoint presentation, was considered relevant for them. Throughout the following discussions, we realized that the knowledge we had created and were trying to share about managerial elements within the community was simply not useful nor required for further discussions. Yet, such discussions did happen, organizational changes were taken, and our inputs were valued, but not through sharing explicit abstract knowledge. This led us to the reflections depicted in the vignette below, underlying the cognitive and emotional dimensions that we encountered as researchers: acknowledging our own limits, the extent of what we could do, then appears critical to further dive into Indigenous research.

Vignette 1

The next day, I find myself in a café in downtown Montreal, still pondering over what went wrong with the preparatory document we sent to the council's board. Is it still a communication issue? However, this time we had clearly informed Kishik's chief that we would be sending a preparatory document for the budget meeting, so it seems strange that the document simply 'slipped through the cracks'. We can therefore assume that they did have the document available at the time of the budget discussions, and they could have used it if they wanted to.

On the day's occasion, I have with me the book " 'Bonjour ! Kwe ! À la rencontre des langues autochtones du Québec' by Caroline Montpetit, recommended by Lucille (Montpetit, 2022). It's a book that discusses a variety of the Indigenous languages and the reflections of several thinkers on the nature and status of these languages within their communities. I browse through the chapters that interest me, especially those addressing Kishik's First Nation. The book explains that many Indigenous languages are fundamentally descriptive, meaning that the words incorporate elements that describe them. An example from the book is the word 'horse': in the past, there were no horses in the traditional territories of Québec's First Nations, but there were moose, which have two hooves per hoof - and since the horse only had one hoof per foot, it was called 'the one with one hoof per foot'.

A few hours later, I meet up with my colleague (the co-author of this article) to go see the permanent exhibition on Indigenous populations at the McCord Museum in downtown Montreal. This is in line with the idea of reading the book on languages, and in preparation for writing the case study, my colleague often said that it was always beneficial to gather information from different sources and platforms to look at the same subject of study from a different perspective. At the museum, the presentation format of the exhibition is interesting and unusual: the history of the various First Nations is told through the presentation of various everyday objects. Blankets, baby carriers, tools, clothing, etc. In other words, the exhibition is presented through the physical dimension of the culture of these various populations. The concrete aspects of daily life are used to explain a heritage, a way of life, and a worldview specific to these groups. Even the explanations regarding the territory and locations are based on the concrete relationship that these populations have with them: the name of the lake 'lake of the spring fish' indicates when to fish there, etc.

A realization strikes me. If language, history, culture, and space are defined through their relationship to the concrete, what about knowledge? What happens if knowledge only

makes truly sense in its relationship to the concrete? In the case where knowledge also only gains real value in its relation to reality, the abstraction of knowledge risks playing a counterproductive role in its appropriation and use by these different cultures. The abstraction of knowledge would indirectly imply a loss of relevance and accessibility. This would also mean that the allochthone academic approach to knowledge creation would be inherently problematic for these populations. If we continue to further this logic, the summary report we created to accompany the budget process would largely lose its relevance. Beyond the fact that the board and directors may simply not have had and/or taken the time to read the summary document, it is possible that the document actually has very little meaning to them. The fact that the board and directors did not consult the document could therefore be less a question of loss of interest in the subject or in our potential contribution, as evidenced by the continued reflections and activities towards the horizontalization of Kishik's functioning, but rather perhaps the fact that the document did not provide them with anything relevant. Now, this would transform the question of 'why such and such a document is underutilized' into 'how to create a working relationship and collaboration when not using the same foundations and blocks of understanding'. Perhaps ultimately, when addressing First Nations issues, we talk too much about culture, but we don't think it enough.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we develop the idea that the aforementioned limitations are, in fact, an opportunity. The distinctive approach of First Nations towards management represents an opportunity to enrich our management thinking frameworks but requires a rethinking of our epistemological and methodological paradigms. Beyond the desirable idea that Indigenous researchers in management should be trained to build future collaborations, questioning the current forms of developing managerial knowledge and associated research appears crucial.

The difficulty in translating Indigenous epistemology in an academic text which stands in stark contrast with an eurocentric perspective on knowledge creation should not discourage non-Indigenous thinkers to approach these topics. Rather, we argue that if researchers approach Indigenous research, Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous methodologies reflexively, in ways to avoid falling in an extractive methodology and offer a platform to diminish meta-insensitivity (Chowdhury, 2023), they can create a platform to discuss and co-create new knowledge systems, therefore enriching both perspectives.

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