

The 6 Conditions of Systems Change

Examples in the Context of EleV

The following defines the 6 Conditions of Systems Change and provides examples relevant and aligned to the EleV Roadmap and Learning Framework.



Policies



Practices



**Resource
Flows**



**Relationships &
Connections**



**Power
Dynamics**



**Mindsets &
Mental Models**



Policies

This refers to the rules, regulations, strategies, priorities, and directives that determine actions in a sector or country. These can exist at the level of a locality, state, province, region, or national government, or in oversight bodies of government, business, and non-profit institutions.

Example: An Indigenous Education and Engagement Department at a university noticed high attrition rates among its Indigenous student population. Despite the availability of holistic student supports, students were not reaching out for support and many would withdraw from the institution. Though staff had put well-intentioned time and energy into establishing strong relationships with Indigenous students, communication channels could break down when students found themselves struggling.

Key champions within the Indigenous Education and Engagement Department realized that the institution's policies and practice around academic integrity were not in line with the holistic approach of the department. The department convened senior leadership from various departments to discuss how to reduce barriers and provide supports for students on academic probation. Though the conversation did not produce immediate results, it did inspire discussion on changing the language of institutional policies from a punitive to supportive tone.

The Indigenous Education and Engagement Department continued to raise the need to change institutional policy to create a more supportive space for Indigenous students. Eventually the department raised enough support to put forward a proposal to change the term "academic probation" to "academic concern" and place greater responsibility on faculty to create relationships with Indigenous students and support them through their education journey. These small policy changes at an institutional level created a more supportive atmosphere that resulted in more successful outreach by staff to students who had paused their studies, and started a larger inter-departmental conversation about how to best support Indigenous students.



Practices

These are the habits and actions of communities, coalitions, networks, and nations operating at a collective level across society. Practices are what a population and organizations across a society do, as opposed to the policies that guide them.

Example: A university wanted to hire Indigenous faculty who did not have PhDs but were recognized by their communities as qualified teachers based on their traditional knowledge and lived experience. The faculty unions strongly opposed this and created a deadlock in the hiring process.

The university recognized that the faculty unions opposed the hirings because they felt they were protecting the integrity of their profession. The university administration adopted a new practice to promote better understanding regarding the hiring of Indigenous teachers. The university administration and the faculty unions decided to meet regularly to discuss equity, anti-racism, and decolonization as it related to the interests of the faculty union. By meeting regularly to have these focused conversations, misunderstanding and mistrust were addressed and reduced. Faculty unions feared that the integrity of their profession was in jeopardy if Indigenous faculty without PhDs were hired, but through regular meetings and conversations they soon began to realize the inherent colonial supremacy in devaluing traditional Indigenous knowledge and lived experience.

Through adopting this new practice of regular and focused conversations on decolonization and the hiring process, faculty unions became advocates for hiring Indigenous faculty who did not have PhDs.



Resource Flows

This refers to how money, people, knowledge, and other assets are allocated and distributed.

Example: Leaders in the energy sector were noticing that young people were often ambitious and forward-thinking in their visions for the future of clean energy in their communities. They were generating creative solutions to community energy needs, but often lacked the resources for implementation. An organization in the energy sector started granting directly to young people who were proposing clean energy projects. The grant review team was made up of young people and community leaders so that the vision and direction of young people were central to the entire granting process. This seed granting served as the catalyst for numerous community-based initiatives, often leading to positive shifts in energy consumption. Further, the grantees were matched with industry leaders and experts for mentorship throughout the duration of the grant term. This transfer of expertise to the grassroots level enabled young people to succeed in their projects.



Relationships & Connections

This refers to the strength of connections and frequency and quality of communication among actors in the system, including those with differing histories and viewpoints.

Example: A college was working with four Indigenous communities with the goal of ensuring they were collectively supporting Indigenous students to attend and succeed in school. Despite everyone being well-intentioned and having a shared vision for supporting Indigenous students, communication between the college and Indigenous communities tended to breakdown every few months and each time it felt as though everyone was starting over from the beginning. The result was inconsistent communications and supports for Indigenous students.

Key champions within the communities and the college realized they weren't working together and communicating effectively. After coming together for a strategic planning session, they decided they needed to hire Education Navigators who would act as the bridge between the communities, the college, and the students. The Navigators would work closely with students, communities, and institutions and work to ensure the students had what they needed to succeed. Navigators would also identify barriers the students experience and bring those forward to the communities and the college to address together.

Four Education Navigators were hired. They were all members of the communities and split their time between campus and the community. It took some time, but once the Navigators were in place the relationship and communications between the college and communities grew stronger. This translated to more responsive and targeted supports for students, as well as new collaborative opportunities for the college and communities. Despite the bureaucratic and slowness often associated with colleges, over time the college's ability to quickly respond increased, and because of the strengthened relationships with communities they were able to communicate any delays or hurdles and work through them together.



Power Dynamics

This refers to the distribution of decision-making, authority, and formal and informal influence between and among individuals and organizations.

Example: A university wanted to work with local First Nations communities to offer programming that was responsive to their needs and aspirations. Through conversations, it was quickly discovered that repackaging previous courses offered by the university would not work and, for this endeavour to be successful, the university and First Nations community would have to work together and co-create a program. Through a co-creation process, it was determined that the courses must be offered close to home for Indigenous students, recognize and integrate local Indigenous knowledges, take place over a condensed period, and offer pathways for future employment and study opportunities.

Offering programming in community flipped the power dynamics usually located in the classroom. In most academic settings, students are expected to attend a designated classroom and follow the syllabus offered by the instructor. In the community-based programming, instructors were expected to travel to the students and operate as guests on the territory and in the classroom. In this setting, students felt comfortable setting expectations for their instructors that centred on wellness, reciprocity, and respect.

This approach to programming - co-created and student-centred - challenged Western delivery models and benefitted students and instructors. Students were able to access meaningful programming that benefitted their communities. The programming resulted in high completion rates, transitions to university programs, and connecting Indigenous students to jobs in their communities. The opportunity to teach in community provided instructors with personal and professional development. Instructors were able to build stronger relationships with Indigenous students and learn more about their own disciplines through the knowledge shared by Indigenous students and Elders involved in the program.



Mindsets & Mental Models

These are the habits of thought — deeply held beliefs and assumptions, and ways of operating that are taken for granted and influence how we think and what we do.

Example: An employer recognized that their workforce was not diverse and representative of the communities they served. They recognized that they had no Indigenous staff. Senior leaders within the employer had read the 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and recognized that all Canadians, including the private sector, have a role to play in reconciliation. The employer decided they needed to do more to hire Indigenous people and launched a new recruitment strategy.

After several months, the employer hired three new Indigenous staff. The new staff were onboarded and started their work. A few months later, the employer began to perceive some emerging issues with the new Indigenous staff members. They weren't performing as the employer had expected, and several months later two of the three Indigenous employees had left their positions. In less than a year the employer went from zero Indigenous employees up to three, and then down to one. The employer felt as though the individuals simply weren't a good fit and looked to recruit new Indigenous staff. This cycle of recruiting, hiring, then losing Indigenous staff continued for a couple years, until finally the employer decided to pause and reflect on what wasn't working.

The employer had the best of intentions and decided to reach out to some of the Indigenous staff who had left the organization. Fortunately, a few of the former staff agreed to a discussion. It became clear that even though the employer was eager to hire Indigenous people, they hadn't done the work internally to ensure Indigenous staff were supported. The former staff shared that they struggled to feel like they belonged but felt tokenized and did not feel that the work the employer was doing had any positive impact on their communities.

This feedback was a surprise to the employer as they took great pride in the work environment they'd cultivated. They'd won awards for their practices. Senior leaders within the employer had established an organizational culture and environment that made sense to them and many of their staff but had failed to recognize that their staff and colleagues were largely white, post-secondary graduates who came from middle to upper class backgrounds.

In response, the employer brought on an Indigenous consultant to support the organization to develop a plan to not only hire Indigenous staff but to retain them. The plan began to take shape. It included dedicated supports and mentorship opportunities for Indigenous staff, establishing an Indigenous staff group, providing external training opportunities led by Indigenous trainers for the entire organization, new opportunities for Indigenous staff to connect with each other, and building deeper partnerships and relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations (including launching pro bono services for Indigenous-led charities). The employer realized that there was so much more to living reconciliation than simply hiring a few Indigenous staff. It required deep reflection, being honest and uncomfortable, and a commitment to learning and doing differently.



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