Indigenous Entrepreneurship 11 & 12

Case Studies

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Indigenous Entrepreneurship 11& 12: Case Studies

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This is the most recent version of the current curriculum materials as used by teachers in Nova Scotia.

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About the Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies

The Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies was established at Cape Breton University in 2010 in response to Aboriginal community leaders' expression of the need for entrepreneurship, business investment, and corporate skills training for the purpose of creating a model of self-reliance. Named in honour of Canadian lawyer and corporate boardroom leader, the late Mr. Purdy Crawford, the Chair aims to promote interest among Canada's Aboriginal people in the study of business at the post-secondary level.

The Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies focuses its work in four areas:

- Research on what "drives" success in Aboriginal Business
- National student recruitment in the area of post-secondary Aboriginal business education
- Enhancement of the post-secondary Aboriginal business curriculum
- Mentorship at high school and post-secondary levels

Mary Beth Doucette currently holds the position of Purdy Crawford Chair and Associate Professor, Aboriginal Business Studies in the Shannon School of Business at Cape Breton University.

The Chair is an independently funded, partially endowed research Chair.

About the Entrepreneurship 11 & 12 Course Pack

The following concepts were organized with the financial support of the Province of Nova Scotia. They were formatted to complement the existing curriculum for Indigenous Entrepreneurship 11 and 12 Courses by providing locally relevant and subject specific concepts that were not covered elsewhere. The concepts highlight L'nu words, teachings, and context of Mi'kmaw in Nova Scotia, however given the political relationships that exist between L'nu and the Federal Government, they also describe influences of broad reaching Indigenous -Canada discourses.

Six case stories that feature L'nu identifying entrepreneurs were also developed to accompany the concept papers. Each of the case stories was produced with permission of the Entrepreneurs profiled. They cannot be changed without the permission of the Entrepreneur. Teaching notes were also developed to accompany each case. They provide additional contextual background and recommendations for instructors who are using the cases in their classes. The teaching notes are guidelines and can and should be altered for the context.

All of the materials for this project were developed with support of Dr. Tasha Richard (Dal, Agricultural Campus), and students Victoria Dimmek, MSc., Ester Alu, BBA, Nicole Cammeart, BA, and Mairi Denny, BA.

Indigenous Entrepreneurship 11 Case Study: Oakleaves Native Creations

Author(s): Esther Alu, and Dr. Mary Beth Doucette

Introducing: Oakleaves Native Creations

Nancy Oakley, is a Mi'kmaw (Nova Scotia) and Mashpee Wampanoag (Massachusetts) identifying artist, living in Eskasoni. She is best known for her pottery, which she has been making and selling for decades, under the brand, Oakleaves Native Creations.

The cornerstone of Oakleaves Native Creations is the stunning indigenous pottery crafted by Nancy Oakley. Each piece is a testament to her indigenous heritage, and painstakingly handcrafted to reflect the rich and vibrant culture of the indigenous people.

Nancy thinks of herself as an artist first, and not a small business owner. However, as Nancy Oakley transitions from an artist into an entrepreneur, she needs to discover a strategy that allows her to bring an entrepreneurial approach into art. She must decide what the implications of expanding to global markets would mean for her brand.

Key Challenge

Nancy Oakley is thinking about growth and international expansion for Oakleaves Native Creations. She will need to find a strategy that embraces an entrepreneurial approach to art while maintaining her brand's L'nu identity.

Nancy's Story

Nancy Oakley grew up in Massachusetts for most of her life, where she went to art school to major in photography. She took several art classes for crafts including ceramics and pottery, which is where she discovered her love for pottery. Not long after, she moved to Canada, her mom's territory. In Canada, she explored other forms of art, such as beadwork and basketry, which she liked. However, Nancy became increasingly interested in how she could create pottery in her own way.

Living on a First Nations reserve has given Nancy the unique opportunity to draw from her indigenous heritage and infuse it into her creations. The result is a product line that is not only aesthetically beautiful but also culturally significant. It provides a platform for the preservation, expression, and celebration of the Mi'kmaw heritage. The pottery range includes functional items like bowls, vases, and plates, as well as decorative pieces.

Nancy didn't originally envision herself as an entrepreneur. However, being a mom of six kids, selling pottery was a way to support the family while working from home. It also created opportunities for them to travel for art events and powwows.

Consequently, for a long time, Nancy sold her art without need for a website or business incorporation since the majority of Oakleaves Native Creations was tax exempt. "I only incorporated my business recently, because living on the reserve, I didn't feel the need for government involvement in my business."

However, her art exhibition competition with the Craft Alliance London Institute requires artists to display their work on a website, Nancy Oakley has created one. Oakleaves Native Creations is also expanding, and Nancy has now gotten a new gallery.

She is also receiving more orders and has hopes of getting more international art projects as well. Her unique pieces have been recognized on various platforms and have been instrumental in bringing the indigenous Mi'kmaw art to a broader audience.

What challenges did Nancy overcome?

As an artist, Nancy enjoyed the artistic side of the business most. She was not initially trained in business planning and pricing during her art school tenure, but recognized this gap and sought knowledge. For example, the Eskasoni Economic Development Organization offered courses on creating business plans and setting prices, which helped her better position her art as a profitable business. As Oakleaves Native Creations evolved, the business aspect became increasingly significant. As the business success grew for over 20 years, her business plan has become more complex, sophisticated.

In terms of pricing, Nancy didn't initially have a pricing strategy. As a result, at first, she priced pieces below market value. Over time, she observed that the size of the pieces mattered and revised her pricing strategy to reflect an hourly rate, along with the consideration of the artwork's size and the materials used in its creation. She also differentiated her pricing, setting a wholesale price for bulk purchases and a retail price for individual sales, with a larger focus on wholesale selling and bulk purchases. This new pricing strategy allowed her to fairly value her work and increase profitability.

How did Nancy use networking to expand her business?

Throughout her journey, Nancy Oakley has established a robust network that has been instrumental in her growth as an artist. A significant part of her network is the CB Centre for Craft and Design, an organization she has been associated with for over two decades. This association has been mutually beneficial, with the Centre aiding Nancy in her endeavours, such as her trip to Oklahoma to learn about pottery from the traditional people.

Nancy also serves on several boards, including Craft Nova Scotia, Mawiart, Craft Alliance, and Creative Nova Scotia Leadership. These involvements have provided her with valuable insights into the industry and a platform to be informed about and to influence arts policies and initiatives.

Moreover, her networks have also opened doors to funding opportunities through grants for traditional arts. Programs with Art Nova Scotia, which are strictly for Mi'kmaw artists, offer up to $15,000 for art projects. Additionally, being a professional artist, Nancy qualifies to receive grants from the Canada Council. She's been receiving grants from the Canada Council for the Arts since about 2018, further expanding the potential for Oakleaves Native Creations to thrive and grow.

She's continually been expanding her gallery representation. Oakleaves Native Creations was featured in many art shows, she sells her products wholesale to 12 different stores - 10 in Nova Scotia and 2 stores in Massachusetts.

What does Nancy need to consider to grow her business?

As Oakleaves Native Creations is experiencing observable growth, there are several key considerations shaping its future. Nancy Oakley's vision includes international business growth. Her art exhibition competition with the Craft Alliance London Institute can provide the perfect platform to take this initiative forward. Successful international growth, however, will require a careful, well-orchestrated approach. Nancy will need to make strategic decisions about the next steps about whether to expand Oakleaves Native Creations.

One of the biggest challenges Nancy anticipates is navigating the complexities of international taxation, especially given her business's location on a First Nations reserve. The lack of clear guidance or formal regulations on this issue presents a potentially significant hurdle. While her brand is primed to benefit from the global appreciation of indigenous arts, this obstacle could dissuade many from pursuing international expansion.

Indigenous Entrepreneurship 11 Case Study: BNC Design

Author(s): Dr. Tasha Richard, Victoria Dimick

Introducing: BNC Design

Cassandra Hillier works full time as a social worker on the Sipekne'katik reserve where she grew up. While she has enjoyed this job for many years, she has always had a passion for interior design. Creative work comes naturally to Cassandra, she has always had an eye for design principles and for being able to see the potential a space holds if it were reformed. Over the last 10 years Cassandra has increasingly taken on various projects for friends, family, and corporate clients to design their spaces.

Cassandra has a vision of working full time redoing the inside spaces of people's houses and offices, so they look and feel amazing. She enjoys choosing colours, furniture, and decorations to create cozy and beautiful places for people to live and work in. She wants to help people transform their spaces into spaces that reflect their own personalities. She also thinks it is important to include her Indigenous culture into BNC Design work.

Key Challenge:

Cassandra wants to turn BNC Design into a full-time business but must consider financial stability and fair pricing while ensuring the authentic representation of Indigenous teachings.

Cassandra's Story

Cassandra grew up in Sipekne'katik, but has been living off reserve for 12 years in her own home. Cassandra sees herself as an entrepreneur at heart and has had a strong work ethic from an early age. As a teenager, she would clean cars in her community to make some extra money. Her interest in making things clean, appealing, and beautiful did not stop there. It has led her down the path of entrepreneurship in becoming an interior designer. Growing up she always wanted to work and be able to give back to her community. This led her into social work as a path to be able to help others.

What should Cassandra consider to turn BNC Design into a full-time business?

Cassandra worked as a social worker, in social work, for many years. In her position she worked with many people in vulnerable situations. Through this experience, Cassandra completed trauma informed training and intuitively applied this perspective to physical spaces. She spent a lot of time in the Family and Children Services office building on the reserve and realized this was a space that could be made more welcoming. So, Cassandra took a change and approached the Director with her idea and successfully secured the project. The overwhelmingly positive feedback she received once the re-design was done gave Cassandra the confidence to pursue more interior design work. Following a few more jobs for friends and family, Cassandra created business cards and set up a social media presence for BNC Design. Currently BNC is operating as a side venture that is serving mainly Indigenous populations.

Working towards operating BNC Design full time is important to Cassandra because she realizes it is a way for her to help and give back to her community by doing something she enjoys, while also earning a living.

BNC is still in the start-up and business planning stage. However, Cassandra has been considering the idea of going full time. Her vision is clear, but her strategy and business plan are not. Recognizing the need for formal training in interior design to further her skills, Cassandra did some research and connected with Employment and Training in Sipekne'katik, which offers courses helpful in interior design.

She has not taken the next step with the design business as she is finding it difficult to exit her current job as a social worker. Cassandra feels empathy towards her current clients in social work and does not feel it is something she can fully walk away from. Cassandra is worried that if she quits her job to pursue her entrepreneurial dreams, she may not be able to take care of herself or others, recognizing the time commitment and money commitment it takes to be an entrepreneur. Cassandra needs to figure out what else she needs to do to take BNC Design further, but also consider the risks and what she can do to mitigate the risks.

How can Cassandra ensure Indigenous teachings are authentically and accurately represented in her interior design projects?

Cassandra believes it is important to integrate Indigenous teachings and culture into BNC Design's projects. She believes many Mi'kmaw people struggle with their identity and sense of belonging. Through her designs, she wants to create spaces that reflect Indigenous culture, showcasing the talents and stories of her community members. Her journey into interior design has also rekindled her own connection to her Mi'kmaw culture, which she is eager to share authentically with her clients.

Cassandra did not gain confidence in her Mi'kmaw culture, tradition, or language until she pursued her master's in social work with a focus on Indigenous social work. It is important to her that she is reflecting her culture accurately and authentically. She wants to be able to explain to clients the Mi'kmaw Teachings incorporated into design, have the knowledge to answer questions and educate others. Through this she believes she can help others learn and continue her own learning and connection to her culture.

Cassandra knows that to pursue her business full time she will require funding. She has researched funding options from different Aboriginal financial institutions and feels optimistic about opportunities that are available to her as an Indigenous woman entrepreneur. Knowing there is help available to her has given her hope and inspiration to take the next steps with BNC Design.

What does Cassandra need to consider to grow her business?

BNC Design is currently in the start-up phase; however, Cassandra wants to take her business to the next level. She also needs to consider balancing her well-being and ability to be financially stable as an interior designer. She knows she needs to build up her clientele but wants to be sure she is paid a fair amount for her work. Navigating the shift from offering free advice to building a professional network and charging for her services as an entrepreneur has its challenges. Cassandra aims to find the delicate balance between giving back to her community and establishing BNC Design as a full-service design company that employs as many Indigenous individuals as possible.

Indigenous Entrepreneurship 11 Case Study: Muin Clothing

Author(s): Victoria Dimick, Dr. Tasha Richard

Introducing: Muin Clothing

Derek Lewis is a Mi'kmaw (L'nu) man who owns a certified Indigenous clothing company called Muin Clothing Co. The business was established in 2018 and is a heritage brand that aims to tell a complete story of Canada that includes Indigenous peoples. Derek dreams of his business being Canada's heritage clothing brand that honours those that were on the land first (Indigenous peoples) and those that came after (Settler Canadians).

Derek dreams of having a brand that is recognized and worn by all Canadians. As he prepares for his business to grow, he also wants to support other Indigenous businesses as much as possible and remain competitive in the market.

Key Challenge

Derek envisions Muin Clothing Co. becoming Canada's foremost heritage brand, owned and operated by Indigenous communities but embraced by all Canadians. His goal is to scale the business while maintaining a supply chain that fully supports Indigenous businesses.

Derek's Story

Derek Lewis is a member of the We'kopekwitk (Millbrook) First Nation near Truro, Nova Scotia, but also grew up in Paqtnkek (Afton) First Nation After graduating with his undergraduate degree at Dalhousie University, Derek was on track to attend law school. However, just before school was to begin, he decided to switch paths and pursue a career in information technology (IT), building an interest in computers. The IT and computer industry were still a new field at this time, and the only real jobs available were working as a system analyst or network administrator. Derek was unable to find a job working for someone else, so he started his own IT company, Red Arrow Digital Inc., and spent the next few years learning as much as he could about the business world. He took advantage of a nearby entrepreneurial support center in Halifax to study different business concepts and practices that he could apply to his company.

What challenges did Derek overcome?

It was necessary for Derek to get training in Halifax because there were no business programs offered in any Mi'kmaq First Nations at the time. Derek eventually became the first Indigenous cell phone game developer in Canada with his company Red Arrow Digital, which he licensed to Bell and eventually sold. He also used his entrepreneurial spirit in other ways.

For example, Derek saw that many people from his Mi'kmaq community were struggling to secure jobs because they did not have a college diploma. This inspired Derek to open an official post-secondary diploma granting college out of the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre in Halifax called Red Arrow Digital College. He grew this education business very quickly and eventually sold it. Derek pursued his Master's of Education (M.Ed) degree at Acadia University focusing on Education Learning and Technology. He then pursued his Doctorate of Education (Ed.D) at Western University and has worked as a consultant on the side until 2018 when he launched Muin Clothing.

How did Etuaptmumk contribute to Derek's business?

The concept of Etuaptmumk/Two-Eyed Seeing resonates with Derek very much personally and professionally. Muin Clothing got its name because he wanted to build a brand that reflected the concept of Etuaptmumk/Two-Eyed seeing. As an individual, Derek has experienced life growing up in a First Nation community and as an adult living and working with different cultures. He was intrigued by the possibility of using language to unify people.

In Mi'kmaq Muin means bear, in Gaelic Muin means vine, and in Arabic Muin means helper. In three different cultures, Muin has a very positive meaning. In a world where language is being used more and more to tear people apart, Muin is about bringing people together. With Muin Clothing he believes the celebration of cultures embodies Etuaptmumk. Derek sees Muin Clothing as a heritage brand that celebrates the full story of Canada. It honours those that were on the land first (Indigenous) and those that came after (Settler), and those still coming to its shores today (Immigrant)

Once Derek had the concept of Muin, he chose the visual representation of Muin through the bear logo that is put on Muin apparel.

MUIN
CLOTHING Co.

How did Derek use marketing to expand his business?

Derek now sells Muin Clothing products primarily online (website) and ships them across Canada. He also sells at local markets. His customers are not only Indigenous people but all people. He advertises through social media, such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, specifically to reach young people. Muin Clothing prides themselves on their high quality as a differentiator in the market. Now that Derek can produce his apparel at a large quantity, he needs to find the most effective way to scale his production and business.

Following his dream of having an Indigenous supply chain, Derek learned how to design and produce the clothing for Muin. This decision means he can now control two aspects of his business: design and sales of Muin clothing, instead of hiring someone else to do the design. When he has extra time, Derek also offers his design services to other Indigenous companies such as Treaty Truckhouse in Nova Scotia.

How has Derek's identity shaped his views on business?

Throughout his entrepreneurial journey, Derek has faced systematic barriers in building his company. He faced both positive and negative experiences related to his Indigenous identity. In the early stages of his career when he was learning about business, he was intrigued by a concept called economic and social memory. This concept refers to the idea that economic and societal collective memory and learnings are transmitted to the young by the older generation, which influences their perception of their cultural identity and values. Derek used the example of growing up in his community where business concepts were not commonly taught.

Derek's experiences also reflect the challenge of being "othered" as an Indigenous entrepreneur, limiting access to education, networking, and financial opportunities. For example, when Derek would reach out to business organizations for help, they would redirect him to work strictly with Aboriginal Financial Institutions. Derek felt like he was missing out on opportunities to connect with other Canadian entrepreneurs to grow his business.

Derek has always considered himself as an entrepreneur. Since he was a child, he has been curious, and any business idea he had started with the question "what if?". Derek views entrepreneurship as a non-Western activity but rather one that is carried out by immigrant families and Indigenous communities who must try and fit in with the Western business system.

Despite the challenges Derek has faced on his entrepreneurial path, he is motivated by those who have come before him, and his passion to change and share his culture. He wants to show respect to past generations of Indigenous and do what he can for future generations.

Indigenous Entrepreneurship 11 Case Study: Googoo Design

Author(s): Dr. Tasha Richard, Victoria Dimick

Introducing: Googoo Design

Aaron Googoo, a young Mi'kmaw entrepreneur, is the sole proprietor of Googoo Design, an interdisciplinary graphic design studio based in Nova Scotia. Aaron has formal training as a visual artist and graphic designer. He uses his love for the arts to create distinctive works, brand identities and captivating visual pieces for his clients. One area he's proud to specialize in is art and design, which showcase his Mi'kmaw culture and heritage.

Aaron considers himself "A storyteller for others" as he helps clients build and articulate their own through visual communication, artistic expression, and meaningful design. He identifies as an entrepreneur since launching a design business of his own. For him, the most fulfilling part of his entrepreneurial journey is his ability to use his creativity to find unique, purposeful solutions that match his clients' needs.

After graduating from design school in 2009, Aaron faced difficulties finding a full-time graphic design job in Kjipuktuk (Halifax). To make ends meet, he began offering his design services part-time while working full-time at a local coffee shop. His determination to pursue his passion for design led him to adopt resourceful strategies. During this time, he proudly engaged customers in conversations about his design work and distributed business cards to interested patrons. As Aaron considered his path to becoming a full-time entrepreneur with Googoo Design, he had to grapple with the tensions between pursuing his passion and the practicalities of life. His journey also prompted him to reflect on the importance of incorporating cultural identity and authenticity into his business.

Key Challenge:

At the core of this business stage is Aaron's dedication to his values and following his heart to ensure his work keeps its integrity and purpose. He wants to avoid taking on projects simply for monetary gain and focus on opportunities more aligned with his values and interests. Successfully navigating complex contracts and projects will require making intelligent decisions to keep Googoo Design evolving and sustainable while staying true to himself.

Aaron's Story

Aaron Googoo grew up in Sipekne'katik (Indian Brook). He moved to Kjipuktuk (Halifax) to attend the Nova Scotia Community College and NSCAD University, where he has lived for the last eighteen years. Upon graduating, full-time design jobs were sparse. In the early stages of his career, he focused on building a more robust portfolio to establish a reputation in the design industry. He strategically entered logo design contests that helped him make international business connections. His first paid internship was a placement with Environment Canada, which allowed him to attract more local clients and expand his portfolio.

Aaron acknowledges that his education was a cornerstone of his success, lending a unique perspective he otherwise wouldn't have found. It gave him the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in his field. He also emphasizes the importance of self-advocacy in pursuing your dreams. Aaron undertook the initiative of being his own advocate, diligently pursuing opportunities such as securing funding resources and engaging in specialized business support training.

Googoo Design: The Business

Googoo Design officially started in 2014 as a part-time business. Aaron built a name for himself as a designer in Atlantic Canada through his work with Environment Canada and Treaty Education. After years of viewing his design work as a side project, Aaron decided to commit full-time to Googoo Design in 2019. A chance encounter at the coffee shop where he worked led to a major opportunity. He handed his business card to the right person. He got hired to design artwork for an exhibit on Mi'kmaw culture at the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic and illustrative murals for the Canada Revenue Agency. This local project marked a milestone in Aaron's career and significantly gained attention for Googoo Design.

Deciding to go full-time with Googoo Design was a big decision for Aaron. He had to consider the sustainability of his business and recognize the need to value his expertise and worth to make a fair income. He knew he would be giving up a job that offered a steady source of income for one that might not be as consistent. He understood that dedicating more time to his passions and dreams required a serious commitment. Family and friends' support played a crucial role in helping him make this big decision.

Why is integrating his Mi'kmaq identity and values important to his design work?

Aaron feels he has a lot of opportunities because of his cultural identity as a Mi'kmaw designer, as there are few and far between. His ability to provide a unique perspective on design has opened many doors for him, and an emphasis on his culture has helped his business. Using that scarcity of Mi'kmaw designers as an advantage within Mi'kmaki, Aaron saw it fit to celebrate his Indigenous identity as a fundamental aspect of his enterprise. Aaron proudly integrates his culture's rich perspective into his business, offering clients a profound and authentic cultural experience.

As an entrepreneur, Aaron deeply resonates with the concept of Etuaptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing). He feels that his upbringing and dual life experiences in Sipekne'katik and Kjipuktuk have given him insight into "more than one world," allowing him to incorporate the concept of Etuaptmumk into his work. Aaron points out that it is astonishing "what you think you don't know until you try to teach someone about something" and recognizes that he loves helping to share other people's stories so much because it allows him to tell his own. His ever-growing knowledge of Mi'kmaw culture and expertise as an artist has shifted his focus towards helping Indigenous businesses and communities. Aaron is enthusiastic about embracing the values and principles of Etuaptmumk in his work and is thrilled to see its growing acceptance, including among Treaty Partners. He hopes to continue sharing these principles through his work at Googoo Design.

How can Aaron create a sustainable work-life balance that reflects his values?

As Aaron continues expanding his business, he faces unique challenges. He is starting to make a name for himself and is emphasizing his Mi'kmaw identity and values in his work at Googoo Design. These very qualities that have helped him succeed—his unique perspective as a Mi'kmaq designer and his dedication to upholding the principles of Etuaptmumk—have also brought on some complicated problems.

As the sole proprietor of his company, Aaron used to take on many different types of projects that showed off his talents and hard work but also pulled him in many directions. Right now, he's trying to find a healthy work-life balance while creating boundaries that help him run a sustainable, successful business that keeps him financially stable and allows him to enjoy life. As his business grows, there are more things to handle, such as administrative tasks, financial demands, and project management. These demands have added another layer of complexity to his entrepreneurial journey.

At the core of this business stage is Aaron's dedication to his values and following his heart to ensure his work keeps its integrity and purpose. He wants to avoid taking on projects simply for monetary gain and focus on opportunities more aligned with his values and interests. Successfully navigating complex contracts and projects will require making intelligent decisions to keep Googoo Design evolving and sustainable while staying true to himself.

Indigenous Entrepreneurship 12 Case Study: Journey to create Indigevisor (Part 1)

Author(s): Esther Alu, Dr. Mary Beth Doucette

Introducing Indigevisor

Nadine Bernard is a Mi'kmaw entrepreneur. She is the sole proprietor of Indigevisor, a construction consultancy that helps large corporations develop Indigenous engagement strategies. However, her career path as an entrepreneur, and small business owner, was years in the making. How has her lifetime of experiences in various workplaces led to the creation of Indigevisor?

Key Challenge

Nadine wants to use her personal and career experiences as a Mi'kmaw woman to develop a business that will address systemic barriers faced by Indigenous peoples in the workplace.

Nadine's Story

Nadine grew up in We'koqma'q, a Mi'kmaw community in Unama'ki/Cape Breton. She has a strong sense of herself and her community identity. She has always been passionate about sharing Mi'kmaw teachings with others. She believes that:

"Success should be what you leave as a legacy, not the things that you can achieve."

Nadine is a lifelong learner that doesn't back down from adversity. She started her career as a university student in the late 1990s as a young mother. In the final year of her degree, she experienced a family tragedy. She was suddenly a single mother with three children to provide for.

Nadine initially moved to Sydney believing it would be easier to find a good job. In 2013, she set off to start a new journey in the banking industry. She started her first job as a bank teller. Although she was excited about this new job, she was quickly confronted by cultural differences between her and her co-workers. She was disappointed by a series of difficult encounters with co-workers. She believed these encounters were related to her identifying as an Indigenous person because she utilized the employment equity program. Employment equity programs are government funded strategies. They are intended to encourage businesses to hire people from designated groups identified by the Employment Equity Act of Canada.

Employment equity:

- encourages the establishment of working conditions that are free from barriers
- seeks to correct conditions of disadvantage in employment, and
- promotes the principle that it requires special measures to accommodate differences for the 4 designated groups in Canada

The federal Employment Equity Act (the Act) identifies the designated groups as:

- women
- Aboriginal peoples
- persons with disabilities
- members of visible minorities

How do you identify if equity programs meet their goals both in spirit and practice?

There's a perception that people hired through equity programmes enter jobs without qualifications or merit. Thinking back to her first job she said,

"I don't think the staff understood why employment equity programs exist. I don't believe the staff understood what indigenous inclusion means."

She learned more about the corporate strategies that were used to present the company as culturally diverse. For example, creating positions for designated groups and creating hiring programs that are supposed to help Indigenous people, as employees be successful. Despite these programs, they didn't have many Indigenous identifying, or visibly diverse employees. There was also a lack of Indigenous role models and/or mentors in the banking and financial sector generally.

As she learned more about equity programs, she became concerned because they failed to address underlying systemic issues. In some cases, positions that were designated for Indigenous identifying people were filled by non-Indigenous individuals. This was concerning to her because, although it wasn't illegal, it violated the spirit and intention of the employment equity act.

How can lack of understanding of Indigenous people and communities impact Indigenous experiences in the workplace?

She realized there was a lot of work to be done. There was a need to educate management and staff on the importance of the employment equity act, Indigenous inclusion, Indigenous recruitment, and retention, among other important topics.

Nadine had always been taught to be respectful of others. She was taught to treat both Elders and people in positions of authority with respect, by listening and not talking back. When she started working in the bank, it was difficult to vocalize or express concerns when she saw them. *"And when you're taught so much about respect and not disrespecting people in authority, it's hard to go into spaces and challenge the actions of others…"*

Nadine had to learn to stand up for herself. She worked with the organization to create an Indigenous inclusion, recruitment, and retention strategies. In the process, she began to wonder how many other organizations needed the same assistance? She later learned equity concerns reached beyond the banking and finance industry.

How did Nadine's experiences contribute to the creation of Indigevisor?

After she left the banking industry, Nadine spent a couple of years working in several roles that were related to indigenous awareness and inclusion. She volunteered on several volunteer boards of directors and partnered with multiple organizations. For example, she sat on the advisory boards of the Police Commission, United Way, Restorative Justice, Pan Cape Breton Food Hub, Transition House Foundation, and Every Woman's Centre. The work she did on these boards focused mostly on Indigenous inclusion and educating people about Mi'kmaw teachings and culture.

Her early career experiences inspired Nadine Bernard to create Indigevisor. Indigevisor is a consultancy company which means she gives advice to other companies about partnerships and Indigenous engagement. Her primary business focus is advising companies who want to partner with Indigenous communities on big development projects but don't know where to begin and how to approach indigenous partnerships.

Nadine has been through a series of work related and entrepreneurial experiences over the past two decades.

Indigenous Entrepreneurship 12 Case Study: Journey to create Indigevisor (Part 2)

Author(s): Esther Alu, Dr. Mary Beth Doucette

Reviewing Nadine's Story

Nadine Bernard is a Mi'kmaw entrepreneur who grew up in Unama'ki (Cape Breton). On a journey to advance in her career, Nadine encountered a series of events that highlighted the underrepresentation of Indigenous people in workplaces. Now she draws on a lifetime of experiences in various workplaces where she advocated for increased cultural awareness and competency. Through her involvement in several organizations, she discovered a need that many businesses had – lack of understanding of Indigenous representation and cultural awareness. This resulted in the creation of Indigevisor, an Indigenous cultural consulting company. The steps she followed while setting up Indigevisor as a business are outlined in this case as well as the factors she considered while creating her business plan.

After losing her husband, Nadine found herself in a situation where she had to provide for her family alone. Nadine decided to seek employment in the banking sector. This marked the beginning of her entrepreneurial journey. She found there were almost no self-identifying Indigenous people working in the banking industry. She learned that low representation was related to cultural bias and systematized racism in the banking industry but also in multiple fields.

She then decided she wanted to help local organizations to become more culturally aware. So, she began volunteering on advisory boards and committees. Nadine knew that businesses often ask their boards of directors for advice about unfamiliar subjects. They also sometimes form committees of people who have subject matter expertise to give advice about operations. Although people working on committees are not employees, they are given access to a lot of information about a business that customers might not have. Nadine enjoyed sitting on boards because she was able to share information about Mi'kmaw communities and culture while also learning about different business sectors by meeting with employees.

Key Challenge

As Nadine develops Indigevisor, she needs to develop a plan for the business. What steps does she need to take? What factors should she consider as she plans her business?

How did Nadine identify ideas for a business plan?

Nadine became aware of a common theme in many organizations, there wasn't enough Indigenous representation. However, she began to see how business operations could be either negatively or positively influenced by equity programs and policies. Many organizations needed assistance in creating Indigenous inclusion plans and strategies that would have a positive impact on everyone. This discovery inspired Nadine to create a business that assisted organizations to become more culturally aware.

However, to be successful, Nadine would need to create a plan and decide the right steps to take. This is especially important because Indigenous cultural consulting is relatively new. Since there are not a lot of people in this business yet, it may be hard to determine the viability of the business.

Business Planning: Key Considerations

As Nadine prepares to chart the course for Indigevisor, there are several critical factors she must consider.

How is Indigevsor's mission shaped by Nadine's personal experiences?

First and foremost is the clarity about Indigevisor's mission and vision. Nadine created the company because, in her own words, she saw a "deficiency in the involvement of Indigenous people in the development of infrastructure in Canada and especially in Nova Scotia."

To Nadine, success isn't just something to be achieved but a legacy to be left. Her legacy is influencing the next generation of people. Through Indigevisor, Nadine aims to create opportunities and support for not only companies but also for people who are looking towards finding their goals. Nadine's work through Indigevisor is aimed at influencing the next generation of people to have equitable opportunities.

How does Indigevisor determine its target audience?

Nadine created Indigevisor to support organizations in need of Indigenous representation. In the past, she has worked with advisory boards, financial corporations, labour unions, community councils, municipal and provincial government organizations. A lot of her work has also been around construction or architectural projects.

Nadine has offered a wide range of services to organizations that she has worked with. Some services include:

- cultural awareness training to staff, so they would understand Indigenous clients, partners, and employees.
- recruitment and retention advice, helping businesses to think about how they can connect with diverse cultural groups.
- policy review and recommendations, helping businesses to look at their training manuals and employment policies to see if there are ways to better accommodate staff and clients.

She also knew there was room to grow and expand by offering other services directly related to increasing Indigenous representation in organizations.

How can securing funding look different for Indigenous entrepreneurs?

Capital is often one of the central concerns for any start-up. From her experience in the banking industry, she knew that banks would be looking for a certain amount of assets from potential borrowers. As she had no significant assets to speak of, Nadine opted to fund the company using money she had saved over time. Although she could have applied for financial assistance or loans, she wanted to be independent and grew her business slowly over time. She did not apply for external financing or loans to get her business started.

Funding her business by herself allowed her to maintain full control over her business operations without the need for external influence or obligations that loans or third-party investors might bring. However, some risks are associated with this approach, and Nadine also needs to be aware of them. If Nadine had decided to opt for external funding, she needed to analyse the different funding options available to her and the corresponding requirements.

How does Nadine center her business around Etuaptmumk?

Nadine's career journey is a testament to her resilience and adaptability, shaping her identity in remarkable ways. The transitions in her career path were not aimless; instead, they were crucial stepping stones that eventually led to the birth of Indigevisor.

Being very new to the business, Nadine had no knowledge of anyone that could help her build a consultancy and be competitive with her pricing. Initially, she priced too low and found it hard to get into the construction community in Cape Breton as an Indigenous woman.

Nadine's path to overcoming systemic barriers draws from several teachings from her Mi'kmaw culture, such as collective work, humility, honesty, integrity, and strong work ethic.

"If we all work together, we are collectively experts. We are experts that build on respect, humility, honesty, and wisdom."

Nadine believes in communal leadership and shared wisdom as the foundation of Indigevisor. To create an identity that reflected this, she hired a sales consultant to help her with her branding.

The advice she was given was to present her offer without mentioning that she was an Indigenous woman to avoid any potential biases from clients. She did not take that advice, instead her identity and teachings became a central component of her brand. She explains,

"The matriarchal fundamental philosophy is that as a communal leadership as shared wisdom, as women who lift... I wanted that to be what Indigevisor stood for."

As Nadine develops Indigevisor, she needs to develop a plan for the business. What steps does she need to take? What factors should she consider as she plans her business?

Indigenous Entrepreneurship 12 Case Study: Journey to create Indigevisor (Part 3)

Author(s): Esther Alu, Dr. Mary Beth Doucette

Reviewing Nadine's Story

Nadine Bernard is a Mi'kmaw entrepreneur who experienced Indigenous underrepresentation in workplaces. These experiences inspired her to advocate for increased cultural awareness and representation for Indigenous peoples. This led to the creation of Indigevisor - a company that Nadine created to address the problems of

Indigenous underrepresentation. She offers a range of offerings to companies in need of Indigenous consultation and related services. Nadine has run Indigevisor as a part-time business for some time. Now, she needs to decide whether to expand her business and give up her job.

Key Challenge

Nadine is faced with a difficult decision of either focusing on her government job or expanding her business. There are benefits and risks she needs to consider as she decides on the best future direction for Indigevisor.

Growing Indigevisor

Nadine started Indigevisor in 2019 to provide Indigenous consulting services to organizations in need of it. In 2021, the government introduced the indigenous procurement policy. This policy made it mandatory for companies to consult with an indigenous liaison as part of their business plan. As a result, companies in the construction sector needed an indigenous liaison who was knowledgeable in the industry.

Following the announcement of the policy, the demand for her indigenous consultancy services was on the rise. Nadine started to receive a lot of calls from firms in the construction industry. She decided to take advantage of the opportunity to build her consulting company. After getting requests from several companies in the industry, Nadine realised that Indigevisor was becoming less of a part-time gig and more of a full-time business.

How did networking assist Nadine in responding to opportunities and challenges?

Over the years, Nadine volunteered in several organizations. Some of the places she volunteered in Sydney, Nova Scotia included the Police Commission, United Way, Restorative Justice, Pan Cape Breton Food Hub, Transition House Foundation, and Every Woman's Centre. Nadine gained recognition and a reputation as someone who was easy to work with by participating on these boards.

Nadine next joined the Community Sector Council as an Indigenous Liaison. She worked with them for three months on indigenous inclusion strategies that involved educating key stakeholders in response to Call to Action 92 from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Next Nadine worked with the local chapter of LiUNA (Laborers International Union of North America) on indigenous recruitment strategies and training programs for upcoming construction projects. She helped create engagement strategies and information sessions for about 5 months.

Her experience working for LiUNA showed her the demand for advising was high throughout the construction industry. She decided to create a company for all unions in the construction sector.

Nadine's first-hand experiences in the corporate world and volunteering gave her deep insight into the needs of both Indigenous people and the companies looking to hire them. They all needed support for training, recruitment retention, procurement, cultural competency, cultural awareness, policy review and recommendation, strategic planning, decolonizing, and Indigenizing the businesses.

She knew that she could bridge the gap between them and use her knowledge to create a successful business. However, Nadine was not free from risks and challenges. She knew that if she decided to launch a consulting business, its success was not guaranteed.

How does Nadine evaluate the risks and barriers when deciding whether to expand Indigevisor?

As a result of her extensive networking, Nadine was awarded new projects as a business consultant advising companies about Indigenous cultural awareness and engagement. Her first clients included New Dawn Enterprises and Cape Breton Redevelopment Health Projects. However, Nadine realized there was a lot she needed to learn about running a large business.

Especially in the consulting industry, she needed more knowledge on how to build a successful service-oriented business. Barriers to entry into this business were related to:

- knowledge or experience running a business on her own.
- her identity as an indigenous woman, entering the traditionally male-dominated construction community
- balancing priorities of her full-time employment and part-time consulting work

Navigating this landscape required not only expertise but also courage and determination. At this point, Nadine was a single mother, working a full-time job, as well as running both Indigevisor and Slow Cooked Dreams, another business that she owned. The expansion of Indigevisor would demand her undivided attention. The dual roles demanded a balance that seemed difficult, if not impossible, considering her already packed schedule. While Nadine had always been determined, she understood that these challenges could potentially pose significant hurdles to the expansion of Indigevisor.

How can Nadine stand out in a competitive market?

In 2021, the Indigenous Procurement Policy was introduced by the Federal Government. It mandated the hiring of an Indigenous Liaison and an inclusion of Indigenous procurement strategies into organizations' business plans. Due to Nadine's specialization in construction consulting, she began getting a lot of requests to partner with businesses as they bid on construction projects. This was a unique chance for Nadine to further expand into the corporate space and reach out to organizations in need of her services. Also, while her engagement with multiple organizations and initiatives expanded her network, it opened possibilities for a conflict of interest with her day job.

The introduction of the Indigenous Procurement Policy brought along prospects, not only for Nadine, but for other organizations that could move into the consulting space. If a flurry of other consulting services entered the market, Nadine was aware that competition would be on the rise. She had to think of strategies to stand out from the crowd.

Nadine is now faced with a difficult decision of either focusing on her government job or expanding her business. What are the benefits and risks that she needs to think about as she decides on the best future direction for Indigevisor?

Indigenous Entrepreneurship 12 Case Study: Maskwiomin (Part 1A)

Author(s): Dr. Mary Beth Doucette, Esther Alu, Mairi Denny

Introducing: Maskwiomin

Tuma Young is a Mi'kmaw knowledge holder, lawyer, and ethnobotanist who has been collecting stories of plant medicines for years. He has also been teaching others about Mi'kmaw medicines and harvesting as an instructor at Cape Breton University. In 2013, Tuma began working with Dr. Matthias Bierenstiel, a Chemistry Professor at CBU, to study the chemical and medicinal properties of *maskwio'mi* (birch bark extract; in the Mi'kmaw language, maskwi means birch bark and o'mi means gathering or oil). Eventually they successfully launched Maskwiomin, a brand of skincare products (creams and soaps) that are infused with the main ingredient of *maskwio'mi*. The case highlights the challenges associated with growing the business sustainably and ethically in ways that balances the expectations and goal of the owners.

Key Challenge

Should Tuma and Matthais commericalize the product? How can they do this while maintaining the integrity of Mi'kmaw knowledge and traditional practices?

Tuma's Story

Tuma is originally from Malagawatch, a Mi'kmaw community located on the Western shore of the Bras d'Or Lake of Unama'ki/ Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. Tuma, who is also fluent in Mi'kmaw, has always had a passion for collecting stories of local plant medicines. He has spent over 25 years rediscovering lost stories and collected hundreds of plant recipes from knowledge holders to preserve the tradition. One of the ways he passes his knowledge on to others is by teaching Mi'kmaw Studies courses at Cape Breton University (CBU).

Being a Mi'kmaw-born ethnobotanist[1] and knowledge holder for the community, Tuma Young discovered that there were a lot of stories within the Mi'kmaw tradition about the healing properties of plants like *maskwio'mi*, a viscous oily extract harvested from birch bark. He worried that the teachings about how to harvest medicinal compounds of plants were slowly disappearing, and few Elders could recount the processes. This realization sparked Tuma's determination to share plant teachings with as many people as possible.

In the 1990's, only two Elders in the Mi'kmaw community of Membertou in Sydney, Nova Scotia, remembered the stories for producing *maskwio'mi*. Years later, Tuma brought his class and a video crew to the community to learn the harvesting process from these Elders.

In 2013, Matthias Bierenstiel joined with Tuma Young to work collaboratively on the birch bark project after having been invited to join the class field trip as he was interested in learning more about Mi'kmaw culture. Matthias is non-Indigenous Canadian and born in Germany. He moved to Unama'ki Cape Breton in 2006 to work at Cape Breton University as a chemistry professor.

[1] Ethnobotany is the systematic study of the botanical (plant) knowledge of a social group and its use of locally available plants in foods, medicines, clothing, or religious rituals. Rudimentary drugs derived from plants used in folk medicines have been found to be beneficial in the treatment of many illnesses, both physical and mental. Ethnobotanists often live for periods of time in the society they are studying, to observe all phases of their lives, including mythology, religious practices, and language, in order to determine the specific plants used and the methods involved in their preparation. They often use archival documents, stories, and legends as sources of information about agricultural methods and folk remedies of the past.

Why is it important for Tuma and Matthias to respect Indigenous knowledge systems before any potential commercialisation of the business?

Tuma helped the group learn how to produce *maskwio'mi* by harvesting a relatively small amount of birch bark. The bark is placed inside a metal can with holes on the bottom and placed over a smaller can. A campfire is lit and during 2 to 3 hours a viscous oil drips into the smaller receptacle can. This oily extract is *maskwio'mi.* A small amount of the oily extract would be combined with animal grease to create ointments, or medicine. Hearing this, Matthias said, "Hey, that's chemistry!" as solid bark is converted in a chemical transformation into an oily liquid. His experience as a scientist kicked in and started asking questions like, "I wonder if this process could be replicated in a controlled lab? What kind of equipment would we need? What are the chemical compounds making up this oil?"

As Matthias's scientific questions became more complex, he knew on-going experimentation would need funding if it was going to continue. Tuma and Matthias used the principles of Netukulimk and Etuaptmumk to study the birch bark extract balancing Indigenous Knowledge and science as well as working with the local Mi'kmaw community. Matthias discovered and developed (a process that took over 5 years!) that he could replicate the traditional processes in a controlled lab with a specialized electric oven without needing to build a campfire. This led to a series of other questions about the quality of what was produced. How potent was it? What could it be used for? Was there a way to remove the smoky campfire smell? Whereas Tuma showed local community the traditional ways of making *maskwio'mi* and celebrating Mi'kmaw knowledge in order to keep it alive and grow the knowledge. Suddenly, Tuma was inundated with request to provide more *maskwio'mi* products as infused soap or infused creams as people used the products and reported that their skin ailments were vanishing. Making the extract and *maskwio'mi* products is a laborious process. Similar to making break in one own's kitchen, it is so much more convenient to buy bread in a grocery store. Tuma asked the community for consent of potential commercialization and Elders responded that Tuma and Matthias could go ahead with commercialization "in a good way, the right way so that everyone benefits." The more effective process to produce the bark extract is essential to make skincare products to be sold as soaps and creams. This partnership became the foundation of Maskwiomin company, an independent company.

Indigenous Entrepreneurship 12 Case Study: Maskwiomin (Part 1B)

Author(s): Dr. Mary Beth Doucette, Esther Alu, Mairi Denny

What responsibility does each partner have toward the Mi'kmaw community and the Elders who shared their stories with them?

Tuma was trained as an ethnobotanist. He studied stories of traditional medicines and the names of medicines. But he also trained in the field of law. As a lawyer he advocated for Indigenous rights and sought recognition of Mi'kmaw legal traditions within Canadian justice systems. He knew that many Indigenous Elders hesitated to share Mi'kmaw plant teachings because in the past when teachings had been shared, big non-Indigenous companies profited from them, while communities who held knowledge didn't see any of the financial or economic benefits. But, if you didn't share teachings because you're afraid they'd be stolen or mis-appropriated, then you also risk losing them. Stories must be told in order to be kept alive.

When knowledge is shared within the Mi'kmaw community, there is an unwritten social contract that is informed by other teachings like Netukulimk and Etuaptmumk. Teachings are shared as stories for the benefit of the community. As long as the teachings are kept by community members and not shared, these teachings preserve tradition. When Tuma was teaching in his classes, students would learn all the traditions and how they supported one another.

Matthias had also been thinking about the ethics of working with Indigenous knowledge. He recalled hearing a radio interview in 2005 with the first Inuit lawyer. She was talking about Indigenous law, and her understanding of how Inuit legal concepts are different from Canadian concepts that are mostly founded in English law practices. She explained that the culture of communal societies is fundamentally different from cultures of individualist societies. She explained the difference between communal rights and individual rights by talking about customs of ownership. She said, a seal hunting knife is always given to the person that can make best use of it.

How can Maskwiomin be "ethically commercialized" by leveraging knowledge and protections of the Canadian legal system?

Tuma saw this partnership with Matthias as an opportunity to explore legal concepts like intellectual property rights from a perspective of L'nu Law rather than mainstream European legal traditions which are the foundation of Canadian business law. He knew that *maskwio'mi* was one of dozens of Mi'kmaw medicines that could be studied and commercialized for the benefit of all communities. But the Canadian legal system uses laws on intellectual property including trademark, patent and copyright laws, to help the person who invented a product or process to benefit first. These laws focused on individual ownership of ideas and not communal knowledge systems that would benefit the community who kept and protected the teachings. Tuma was interested in developing a business model that would support the "*Ethical commercialization*" of traditional medicines. To do this, he knew he needed to ask permission of the community. Maskwiomin company follows current Canadian laws and regulation on federal, provincial and municipal levels. For example, skincare products are regulated under provisions by Health Canada. However, Maskwiomin company is going the extra step to balance and infuse non-legally binding L'nu practices in its business when applicable and possible.

Both partners thought it was important to proceed as a partnership in the product development process. They shared a common goal to develop a product and a viable business. They agreed to proceed for different reasons and with different concerns about future success.

Indigenous Entrepreneurship 12 Case Study: Maskwiomin (Part 2A)

Author(s): Dr. Mary Beth Doucette, Esther Alu, Mairi Denny

Reviewing Tuma's and Matthias' Story

Tuma Young is a Mi'kmaw knowledge holder, lawyer, and ethnobotanist who has been collecting stories of plant medicines for years. He has also been teaching others about Mi'kmaw medicines and harvesting as an instructor at Cape Breton University. In 2013, Dr. Matthias Bierenstiel, a Chemistry Professor at CBU, asked Tuma to help study the chemical and medicinal properties of *maskwio'mi* (birch bark extract; in the Mi'kmaw language, maskwi means birch bark and o'mi means gathering or oil) after learning about the traditional extraction process during a field trip.

Key Challenge

What are some of the challenges that Matthias and Tuma might face if they decide to commercialize *maskwio'mi* infused products? How might these challenges be mitigated?

How did Matthias and Tuma transition to become entrepreneurs?

Matthias and Tuma did not set out to be business owners. They were both researchers and educators that were driven by social and scientific curiosity. At this point in the process though, they had discovered a new opportunity and began thinking of themselves as entrepreneurs. They realized they needed to learn more about business planning.

Because they both worked at a university, they asked colleagues in the business school for advice and guidance. They also applied for research grants that were designed specifically for researchers working in product development and innovation. Through these programs they were able to enrol in a program on entrepreneurship that was designed for people in the same position as they were, product development and commercialization.

Tuma was excited about this opportunity to working with Matthias to develop a product that could be commercialized. They both wanted to recognize the traditional knowledge that was held and being used to develop a product, but what processes would they follow to ensure they proceeded in a good way?

How can Tuma ensure Maskwiomin is reflecting culture accurately and authentically?

As a lawyer he advocated for Indigenous rights and sought recognition of Mi'kmaw legal traditions within Canadian justice systems. Tuma's interest in product development was to satisfy his legal questions about modern communal rights and business ethics. He would speak with the Elders who had shared their stories of *maskwio'mi* production with his classes. Elders would want to know about the opportunity to sell and access the healing products. He imagined they would also have strong opinions about how to proceed.

Tuma shared the stories in his classes because you must share teachings to keep the knowledge alive. But Elders were reluctant to share Mi'kmaw plant teachings because they had been mis-appropriated in the past by large non-Indigenous companies. The global corporations profited while communities who held knowledge didn't see any of the financial or economic benefits.

There is no law in Canada that requires Tuma and Matthias to get prior consent from the community to produce and sell products that use *maskwio'mi*. But Mi'kmaw Elders would say that knowledge holders should be consulted and included throughout the process.

As a first step in the process, Tuma assembled a group of Elder advisors from Membertou. He asked them for advice about how to proceed in a good way. These Elder advisors were supportive of the development and sale of the products and they hoped that this business would benefit the community. For example, they hoped local youth would be hired and become involved in the business as it grew (jobs). They also wondered if there would be investment and potential profit sharing to the community, but such needed to be discussed as the company grows within the reality of running a business. There is also an intangible benefit to the community in form of promotion of Mi'kmaw stories and culture because of *maskwio'mi*, as Maskwiomin products are advertised and sold.

When Indigenous and non-Indigenous entrepreneurs enter a venture what must be considered and agreed upon prior to formalizing a partnership?

Matthias had also been thinking about the ethics of working with Indigenous knowledge. He recalled the interview he heard in 2005 about the difference between Inuit and Canadian legal concepts. Were there Mi'kmaw teachings that reinforced the idea that knowledge should be shared with those who would make good use of it?

Tuma wanted to explore legal concepts like intellectual property rights from a perspective of L'nu Law. If the business was going to grow beyond the local community craft markets, he knew they would have to register the business and protect intellectual property using Canadian norms. The Canadian legal system uses intellectual property legal tools (including trademarks, patents and copyrights) to help the person who invented a product or process to benefit first. These laws focus on individual ownership of ideas. Scientists like Matthias are encouraged to patent the designs of any machines built in their labs so that if and when they have a breakthrough product that can be sold, they are legally the only person who can decide how their designs are used during the duration of patent protection. Another option to protect Intellectual Property is not to talk about it at all. This is known as trade secret. Only a few trusted people are given all the secrets to being able to make a given product, often called "the secret sauce".

They needed to answer the following questions: What would they do to protect the intellectual property rights associated with the equipment Matthias designed (the process that makes the process commercially viable on a large scale)? Was there a difference between the products produced using a traditional method and those produced in the chemistry lab? Who will be recognized as owning the knowledge about the process that is used to produce the product?

The answers to these questions would inform their decisions about whether or not to proceed with a business but also, how big did they want the business grow? And if the business did grow, how would the community benefit or be harmed?

How do Tuma and Matthias protect their product and the integrity of traditional knowledge?

After seeking advice from Elders as well as business lawyers at CBU and Membertou, they decided to register the company as a partnership. This would allow the pair to make use of technology for product development and maintain intellectual property when and if the business became profitable.

Legally, the process used to produce *maskwio'mi* was a campfire process that is known to the public and not protected by patents. In addition, the campfire process is low yield and from a perspective of quality control, the product would not be consistent. Technology developed by Matthias in his lab was necessary to scale the process up to be commercially viable, because the product could be mass produced with consistent quality.

Matthias is the one person who knows all the specific details about the process and methods that this machine was designed to replicate. He owns the Intellectual property (IP) as he developed the machine. However, in absence of patent protection, anyone could simply make their own machine. This is why trade secret is powerful as not give away how the extract is made. IP includes the trade secrets associated with processing the extract, preparing it to be mixed with other ingredients, and the recipes for the final products, are all separately protected.

When Tuma and Matthias set up a partnership, they created a company that is federally incorporated, registered extra-provincially in Nova Scotia. Matthias and Tuma are equal partners who each hold 50% share ownership of the company. This was under the advisement of their business lawyer. They made the IP rights to the extract machine and extract a part of the company's intangible assets as both of them had their respective IP transferred to the founded company. This means the IP rights are now held by the company. Additionally, they filed trademark applications on the name Maskwiomin (a modification and new word generation of the Mi'kmaw word *maskwio'mi*) and the currently used "M" logo. Canadian and US trademarks were filed in 2022 and the process will take several years to complete and will cost about $30,000 in legal fees.

Indigenous Entrepreneurship 12 Case Study: Maskwiomin (Part 2B)

Author(s): Dr. Mary Beth Doucette, Esther Alu, Mairi Denny

How do Tuma and Matthias combine their unique knowledge and skills to develop *maskwio'mi* products?

Registering the company was part of the business planning process. They needed to be registered legally to formalize the partnership, file paperwork, and to set up business accounts. The other part of the business planning process involved development of a business plan. The two attended entrepreneurial workshops and training.

They had identified basic skincare products of creams and soap infused with *maskwio'mi* (birch bark extract). According to oral tradition and the stories Tuma had gathered, this oily extract was known to have medicinal, and healing properties. The problem was that very few people knew how to produce the extract in a way that preserved and activated the medicine. The medicine only worked if you followed a particular set of steps. In the business world, a first, non-fancy product is often called minimally viable product, MVP.

The knowledge about traditionally producing birch bark extract, *maskwio'mi*, was known by so few people that it was in danger of being lost. The knowledge needed to be shared. But if you shared it too broadly, then there was a risk that it would be stolen, mis-used, or appropriated for the gain of others (e.g. large pharmaceutical companies).

The solution was to share the knowledge with others about traditional harvesting and production, which is a messy and labour-intensive process. By sharing the knowledge with people who are familiar with and trained in modern scientific technology, a new process and machine was developed that eliminated most of the manual labour required to produce in a traditional manner, making the medicine more accessible. In the chemistry lab, Matthias proved that the extract from the traditional way of production and the new way of production are the same.

Matthias put all the pieces of knowledge together that were necessary to build a machine for extraction. He knew Mi'kmaw stories, understood organic chemical compounds, and could design mechanical extractive process that replicated the traditional process in a laboratory setting. If the company registered and patented the design, according to international patent laws, the company would hold exclusive rights to produce the machine components for the next 20 years.

The traditional harvesting process involved combining the extracted oil with animal fats, which could then be used as a salve or ointment. When the oily extract was extracted using a machine in a lab, it could also be more easily stored and then infused with other creams, lotions, and soaps. Then the medicinal properties of the *maskwio'mi* products could be tested to see if they all worked equally well as traditional salves.

How can Tuma and Matthias use market research to determine the viability of their product?

If Tuma and Matthias saw profits, they also needed to decide what to do with them. The business question that the pair would have to answer, is it worth it to pursue commercialization? How much money does the company need to be financially sustainable? How long will it take for the company to break even and make a profit? The factors they considered would depend on whether or not they could make a product that people were willing to pay for. They decided to do some market testing that would help them outline a marketing strategy.

Once the original campfire batch of soap/cream ran out, the community members who had received the product were asking for more. Anyone who was part of the class field trip also knew how to produce *maskwio'mi* using traditional methods, and some did.

They began sharing samples of their product (soaps, lotions, and salves) with groups beyond the Mi'kmaw community. They were curious whether the product would appeal to a wider audience. They also began informal and formal market testing.

The feedback from people who tried the samples, product testers, was positive. It seemed to appeal to people who used it to treat a variety of skin conditions, (e.g. bug bites, skin rashes). The soaps even sped up healing of small wounds or minor abrasions. The potential demand for the *maskwio'mi* infused soaps and lotions was obvious.

One property of *maskwio'mi* received a wide mix of feedback. The extract smells like campfire. Some people love this smell and other people cannot stand the smell. Some people who disliked the smell nevertheless came back and wanted more product as the *maskwio'mi* product cleared up their irritated skin. People might be enthusiastic about smelly products when they are provided for free (samples) but would the smell prevent people from buying products from a store? If they wanted to continue, they would need to do more intensive and potentially costly market research and product development.

A professional marketing expert commented on the campfire smell and stated that the company should "own" it, meaning using the campfire smell as a distinctive property of the *maskwio'mi* product and also link to the traditional way of campfire. Currently, Maskwiomin offers a selection of creams and soaps infused with *maskwio'mi* at different concentrations and added additional essential oils such as sweetgrass or lavender. This gives the customer flexibility to have a faint smell of campfire or a strong smell with the extra strength ointment version.

How can Tuma and Matthias refine the product to appeal to a wider audience while preserving its authenticity?

In the development of the Maskwiomin brand, several factors were taken into consideration. For example, to ensure that the Mi'kmaw culture was embedded in the product branding, the name of the brand was coined from two Mi'kmaw words, maskwi meaning birch bark, and o'mi meaning oil.

However, it is important for Tuma and Matthias to analyze if this will be recognized in the market as a Mi'kmaw brand. The original birch bark oil extract has a natural smoky odour that may not have been appealing to a wider audience, by adding essential oils as scent ingredients, Tuma and Matthias further refined the product to appeal to more people.

An important milestone in the Maskwiomin journey was the decision to engage the expertise of a marketing agency to boost sales and hire university and community college students to assist with marketing. One funding opportunity was through a Mitacs project. The students' backgrounds were in business, marketing and graphic design. Through this partnership, interns were hired to leverage classroom-acquired skills and craft engaging content for social media and print, driving product recognition and boosting sales. In Matthias Bierenstiel's words, "The Mitacs project helped us to make Maskwiomin not only known in Canada but worldwide and to celebrate the traditional knowledge of the Mi'kmaw people."

As part of Maskwiomin's branding, they also needed to decide where and how to distribute their products. To get their products into bigger stores, they would need to produce larger batches of product, and smaller batches would not be as profitable. This process is called scale-up. Another important thing to think about is how the product will be marketed. Is it more appropriate for it to be marketed as a

pharmaceutical medicine or as a cosmetic product? The burden and cost associated with getting natural health product registration for *maskwio'mi* is very high and will take many years. Currently, as the brand continues to grow both through word-of-mouth marketing and PR coverage, they also need to ensure that they have a sustainable expansion plan that balances all conflicting interests.

"How can Maskwiomin scale the business and balance multiple potentially conflicting expectations and priorities?"

Eventually Tuma and Matthias successfully launched Maskwiomin, a brand of skincare products (creams and soaps) that are infused with the healing properties of *maskwio'mi*. The case highlights the challenges associated with growing the business sustainably and ethically in ways that balances the potentially conflicting expectations of the owners. As Maskwiomin expands, Tuma and Matthias have to come up with a strategy that is sustainable and scalable. How can Maskwiomin scale the business and balance multiple potentially conflicting expectations and priorities?

Tuma and Matthias experienced some challenges getting approval from Health Canada to categorize *maskwio'mi* as a natural health product as such a category currently does not exist. At first, it needs to be shown scientifically and objectively that *maskwio'mi* has medicinal properties. The burden and cost associated with getting natural health product registration for *maskwio'mi* is very high and will take many years. Nevertheless, Health Canada has a birch bark extract category under cosmetics regulation and *maskwio'mi* falls into the category of Betula papyrifera bark extract, and internationally recognized category by INCI (International nomenclature of cosmetics ingredients). Maskwiomin can thus sell *maskwio'mi* products under cosmetics regulation.

What opportunities and challenges can come from increased recognition and demand?

Over the years, Maskwiomin has received significant attention from both consumers and the media with its unique approach to skincare.

In 2019 they received a five-year grant from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, which, in Tuma's words, would be a "huge step in recognizing Indigenous knowledge and supporting research on it".

In 2020, Tuma and Matthias entered an entrepreneurial competition where they won $40,000 for Maskwiomin for developing an innovative product. This came with an executive innovation training and start-up mentorship. In 2023, they have received a $25,000 grant from NSCC's Forest Innovation Voucher Program which was used for marketing and new packaging design. "We have a special formula based on traditional Mi'kmaw culture that's crafted from birch bark extract. The grant will help us market and deliver our products to a larger market," stated Matthias Bierenstiel.

This increase in PR coverage and positive word of mouth has led to an increase in demand, and Tuma and Matthias need to think of ways to scale the business.

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