

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

DESIGNED ISOMORPHISM WITHIN AN ABORIGINAL HOUSING INITIATIVE:

POSITIVE CHANGE AND GROWTH FOR ALL

BY

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The undersigned certify that they have read the dissertation entitled

### **DESIGNED ISOMORPHISM WITHIN AN ABORIGINAL HOUSING INITIATIVE: POSITIVE CHANGE AND GROWTHFOR ALL**

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### **Doctor of Business Administration**

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## **Dedication**

This Dissertation is dedicated to my Mother, Stella Prue. Thank you for your endless support over the many years it has taken to reach this milestone.

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation is concerned with research regarding the construction of a multi-family housing initiative involving groups of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers. The research builds upon a previous retrospective study which had reported on the isomorphic activity between individuals and organizations belonging to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups. This previous initiative involved cooperation between members of the construction industry in Alberta and an Aboriginal community, and resulted in institutional isomorphic outcomes which were generated through the experience, understanding and acceptance on individual and organizational levels of both groups. It was observed that organizational actions and context influenced cultural shifting within both parties, and assisted in dealing with project challenges. Unlike this previous retrospective case study, this dissertation research consists of a planned and conscious isomorphic and immersion process at the project's outset, which continued throughout the project. This research examines whether this planned or "conscious isomorphism" has an impact with regard to the effective provision of new home construction for the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada. By extension, the research also adds to the body of knowledge with regard to Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships and partnerships, to the adaptation of new employees into unfamiliar settings, and to the linkage between institutional theory and culture perspective.

## **Preface**

Please note that for the purpose of this dissertation, the focus is not on those people belonging to a specific First Nation band or Métis settlement community, but to all Aboriginal people, living anywhere in Canada, on or off-reserve or settlement.

Individuals referred to as Native or Aboriginal people in Canada include First Nation individuals as well as Métis and Inuit peoples. This dissertation's scope includes both on and off-reserve housing, the latter of which is not accorded fee simple land designation, so the distinction is important. There is an inconsistency in the literature as to terms and when to capitalize, so I have chosen to capitalize all terms relating to the potential race or ethnic background of an individual, group of people, or community.

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## **Chapter I: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

This dissertation and research journey began with a general research question which spoke to the deplorable state of Aboriginal housing in Canada, and hoped to gain insight, meaning, and possible resolution(s) or at least some meaningful go-forward research direction suggestions. As I am sure is the case with most, if not all graduate candidates, the journey took a path which was not always clear and straight, and which also led to a significant narrowing of scope, in order to be manageable and realistic. Interestingly, the findings of this narrow scope may have far-reaching implications.

Early in this doctoral process, I wrote a paper that had to do with an on-reserve housing project where local Aboriginal workers were partnered with outside (non-Aboriginal) construction industry companies. The paper built on the noted linkages between institutional theory and culture perspectives (Kondra & Hurst, 2009), which are theoretical in nature. I noted many practical parallels to these theoretical linkages in light of personal past experiences, and therefore was able to use my experience with the on-reserve housing project to provide a retrospective case study-type approach which supported the linkages. The primary “lens” through which these linkages were observed was through “isomorphism,” a term used to describe when and how individuals and groups in organizations, and organizations themselves, adopt the behaviour of one another, changing in order to operate more effectively.

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The paper went through several revisions and the final product was co-authored with Dr. Kay Devine, and ultimately published (Prue & Devine, 2012). It was shown that individuals, construction organizations, and the Aboriginal community which was involved in the project all adopted behaviour which was similar to the other groups, and in a way which was mutually beneficial for all parties. The paper concluded that using isomorphism may be an effective way to construct homes on Aboriginal communities, a useful tool for Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interactions in general, and a way to predict and manage employee behavior and adaptation in new organizational environments.

This dissertation builds on this pre-existing work by conducting a planned isomorphic project (hereby termed “conscious isomorphism”) which is different to the past project noted above, where the isomorphic behavior occurred organically. Further to potential support for previous theoretical and practical findings, the intent is to measure whether isomorphic behavior can be learned, repeated and predicted, and if isomorphism can be an effective tool for Aboriginal non-Aboriginal relationships in the construction industry, and in general.

### **1.2 Significance of the Research**

Institutional theory has evolved and gained momentum over the past 25 years, in large part because of its ability to explain the tendency for organizations to conform in a variety of ways (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). This homogeneity between organizations, or isomorphism, helps to explain common organizational alignment in areas like

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operations and structure (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hinings & Greenwood, 1988). Organizational culture theorists are likewise concerned with the alignment of shared collective meaning and values (Schein, 1990; Smircich, 1983). The more aligned these collective meanings, the stronger the organizational and/or corporate culture, which can serve to define the organization, as well as individual and various group's relationships within it. Further, as Smircich (1983) notes, the context in which alignment occurs must be considered in order to gain more insight into such collective meanings. Recently, institutional processes (isomorphism) have been integrated with organizational culture on a theoretical level in order to offer a better way to understand the interplay between macro (isomorphism) and micro (culture) forces within organizations (Kondra & Hurst, 2009). By examining the previous project and conducting the proposed research in terms of both institutional isomorphism and organizational culture we are able to observe and present a pluralistic view of events (Kondra & Hurst, 2009; Van de Ven & Poole, 2005).

This dissertation speaks to the impacts of conscious isomorphism with respect to a housing initiative involving members of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. In addition to speaking to this isomorphism as it relates to the Aboriginal housing crisis in Canada, the research will implicitly speak to Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations, potential labour-related areas of interest (e.g., attraction, retention, satisfaction), and the pluralistic relationship between institutional theory and culture perspectives.

### **1.3 The Research Questions**

Following are the research questions which guided the research:

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- 1) What effect(s) does a designed and consciously implemented isomorphic process have on an Aboriginal housing project, involving both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partners in areas such as Aboriginal relations and employee acceptance, satisfaction and retention?
- 2) In what ways does it improve cross-cultural relationships within those work groups?

In order to address these research questions, a research project was undertaken, which the remainder of this dissertation will outline. In Chapter 2, the context within which the study was situated is presented while Chapters 3 and 4 present past literature relevant to the study and the theoretical framework that was adopted. Chapters 5 and 6 present the research methods used for the project and the findings that emerged. These findings and their implications are discussed in Chapter 7, while Chapter 8 concludes the project.

## **Chapter II: CONTEXT**

### **2.1 On-Reserve Housing Background**

Fee simple property in Canada is an actual estate in land, and a form of freehold ownership. It is the primary way in which real estate is owned in common law countries, and is ordinarily the most complete ownership interest that can be had in real property (Cribbet, 1978). First Nations reserves and Métis settlements are not awarded this status, and the land ultimately remains the property of the government, who maintains the right to “extinguish Aboriginal title” (Section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867 "British North America Act 1867"). Although the BNA Act maintains that the government has a fiduciary duty to preserve the Aboriginal title, there are some obvious downsides. These include the fact that there are limited lien rights for contractors, builders, developers, or others who wish to conduct business on these lands. The absence of fee simple title makes it more difficult to deal with financial institutions in the same manner as off-reserve (National Aboriginal Capital Corporation Association [NACCA], 2005), and there is an inherent reduction in land value in having no legal title to property, creating the most obvious disadvantage for those people inhabiting it (NACCA 2005).

### **2.2 First Nations Housing in Canada**

The need for adequate housing for Canadian First Nations peoples is considered by many to be one of the country’s greatest concerns (Spicer, 2008). It has been referred to in terms of Third World quality, and as of 1996, 14% of First Nations people’s homes did not have indoor plumbing (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

According to the First Nation Information Project (2011):

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On-reserve housing is among the worst in Canada. In some First Nations communities, poor housing conditions threaten the health and safety of residents. The lack of adequate, affordable housing contributes to health and social problems. The need to deal with the problems of on-reserve housing has been well documented; First Nations leaders have said adequate, safe housing is a top priority. Of the approximately 76,000 houses on reserve, more than half are considered to be substandard due to structural, plumbing, heating or electrical deficiencies. It is estimated that more than 36,300 existing houses need to be rehabilitated and another 5,275 replaced.

Government statistics have also demonstrated that Aboriginal peoples in Canada are almost four times as likely as non-aboriginal people to live in a crowded dwelling, and three times as likely to live in a home in need of repair (Statistics Canada, 2008). In contrast, Canadians living off reserve are more than twice as likely to be homeowners (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2009), and have the advantage of owning actual title to the property, an option not afforded on reserve, and a key determinant to the generational creation of wealth. People living in on-reserve homes have increased chances of health and social related issues, including mould-related asthma, AIDS, tuberculosis and suicide. Conditions on many First Nations reservations have been classified as 3<sup>rd</sup> world (Spicer, 2008).

On reserve lands, First Nation Chiefs and their Counsels are dealing with a finite amount of dedicated land on which they can provide housing for their people. Aboriginal people in Canada represent the fastest growing segment of the Canadian populace, increasing at a rate approximately 6 times faster than the non-native populace (INAC, 2009). First Nation individuals forfeit most of the benefits granted to them through treaty if they move off reserve lands, including their tax exempt status, medical, and daycare benefits. These issues combine to create a Catch-22, or circular logic situation, as government regulations penalize individuals for moving off reserve, yet do not allow for

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equity gain through home ownership which is afforded to other Canadians. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders who have operated and have experience in First Nations housing development believe that the long term provision of adequate housing for their exploding population using the existing methodologies is failing in the present, and unsustainable in the future (First Nation Information Project, 2011).

There may be a temptation to ask “why stay in these conditions?” but the reason is simple; the First Nation individuals who leave their reserves lose most of their treaty rights upon doing so (Gardner-O'Toole, 1992). Adding to the parity discrepancy between First Nations home owners and non-First Nations homes is the fact that those who do choose to stay on reserve and own their own homes (often with what is called a section 10 mortgage), do not realize the same benefits afforded those owning land off-reserve; that is, they can never have legal title to their land, and are thus unable to sell their property, realize profit on the equity of their homes and build familial wealth as most Canadians can (NACCA, 2005). These factors, amongst others, have culminated in a self-perpetuating problem of inadequate housing. This trend may worsen, given that our First Nation population is growing at over 4 times the rate of the rest of Canada and is the ONLY segment of the Canadian population which is actually getting younger (Statistics Canada, 2006). The First Nations growth statistic stated above (4 times factor) is different from the Aboriginal factor noted previously (6 times factor), due presumably because Aboriginal members for this type of study would include Metis and Inuit individuals, where the First Nations study would not.



### **2.3 First Nation Considerations**

The skills of the managers involved with First Nation organizations must be versatile, in that to be effective, they must often be able to operate in two distinctly different organizational cultures (Newhouse, 1991). Traditionally, this has been done primarily with non-Native joint venture partners and organizations. The primary difference between a Native and a non-Native organization - and the source of many of the smaller, related differences at the “organizational relationship” level - is in the more collectivist orientation of Aboriginal organizations. It is a widely held Aboriginal value that the rights of the group must come before the rights of the individual (Shoalts, 1991). Organizational behaviour for Aboriginal peoples often uses as guidance the four fundamental individual values of kindness, honesty, sharing, and strength, as well as the four levels of traditional culture: the individual, the family, the clan, and the nation (Chapman, McCaskill & Newhouse, 1998). These values are not especially indicative of a regimented, highly institutional environment, and in fact are often seen as counter-intuitive to the market driven, capitalistic worldview traditionally held by corporate (North) America.

### **2.4 Construction Industry Considerations**

The construction industry in Canada is often viewed as having a highly institutionalized environment. Its institutionalized approach has long been viewed as a key reason for its performance and success in emerging and competitive environments (Oliver, 1997). It is often relied on to “move progress forward,” which was especially

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true in the mid 2000's, with the economic and housing boom in the greater Edmonton area (Alberta Finance, 2007). As such, it is not surprising that items like planning, order and a regimented methodology must prevail in this industry if goals are to be met. This is further made explicit by the many formalized processes and governing bodies involved in the construction industry, from inspectors to consultants and engineers, to Occupational Health and Safety. In other words the industry is highly regulated and professionalized (Province of Alberta, 2012). In light of the institutional and cultural differences between the First Nations and the construction industry, we should expect inevitable behavioural challenges, as well as a great potential of exposure to new behaviour, on both individual and organizational levels.

### **2.5 Case Study Background: The Millennium Housing Project**

In order to set the stage for the current research project which is the focus of this dissertation, a past project, the Millenium Housing Project needs to be outlined. It was this project which spawned the basis for the research reported on in this dissertation and, as such, is critical to understanding the context within which the research occurred. The Millennium Housing Project- launched by the Enoch Cree Nation in response to their experience relating to the extreme First Nation housing shortage in Canada- was designed in the model of an ongoing, mutually beneficial Aboriginal joint venture model as outlined by Ferrazi (1989). Such a venture allows the Aboriginal partner to bridge resource gaps, forge links with mainstream partners, and attain benefits such as achieving greater local employment, transferring of managerial and technical skills, and attaining

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total or partial control over the pace and conditions of a project. As such, the Millennium Housing Project was championed by Chief Ronald Morin of the Enoch Cree First Nation reserve (with an on-reserve population of approximately 1800 members, and sharing a municipal border with Edmonton, Alberta) who partnered with Sky rider Developments, a mainstream construction company located in the Edmonton area.

As Smircich (1983) would predict, the context of the relationship between the Nation and the developer was critical to the isomorphic activity which occurred. Indeed, the relationship itself, showed its own signs of isomorphism, or similarity in structures or processes which can occur (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983)<sup>1</sup>. Because of the nature of how the joint venture was set up, the developer, rather than acting as an outside contractor or consultant, was used as the Senior Project Manager, and was tasked to work “from the inside,” and on the nation’s behalf with outside entities like Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). In addition, the developer took on more of an operational role, as compared to one based on a more commonly used fixed price contract relationship. Because the developer was seen to be acting on the Nation’s behalf, interaction between the stakeholders (developer and Nation) and the subsequent project-related activity were viewed as a unified front to outside contractors. This type of relationship, essentially an Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal joint venture, represented a greater degree of interaction, reliability, and trust as compared to a traditional mainstream contractor/owner relationship (Ferrazi, 1989).

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<sup>1</sup> Isomorphism is more fully explained in Chapter 4

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At the time of the project's implementation (in 2004), a total of 375 new home dwelling units were targeted to be built to answer what the Nation referred to as its housing crisis. These new homes would be a combination of single and multi-family homes, located on the Nation's lands immediately west of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Over a period of nearly five years, the Millennium Housing Project developed a working infrastructure and consequently constructed nearly 200 new homes on the Nation's reserve lands.

One of the project's primary goals was to implement a "hire and train local" policy whereby Nation members would be hired by subcontractors involved in the project, and trained accordingly. Through the implementation of this policy, local band members earned over \$3 million during the course of the project, and gained many valuable skills which they could use in the future (Prue & Devine, 2012). Several members went on to achieve journeyman status in trades in mechanical (plumbing), framing and electrical disciplines, while others started and maintain their own companies. This level of interaction between the developer and the First Nation reserve, over a meaningful period of time, made a retrospective case analysis possible, as many actions and outcomes were replicated, thus creating recognizable patterns. As well, observed processes and activities, for example, the creation of committees and boards, allowed for longitudinal observation and analysis.

Several important stakeholder groups were involved in the Millennium project, including the First Nation, members of the Nation who came to be employed, the

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companies who employed them, the developer, and the Government of Canada, acting through INAC. Additionally, and in terms of the homogenization of organizational behaviour, it is important to note that there came to be *new* stakeholder groups, made up of members of two or more of the organizations noted above, including the Nation's first Community Development Board, the developer's subsequent formalization of an Aboriginal branch of its corporation, as well as the project's contract review subcommittee. It is important to understand that the examination of the isomorphic changes has been documented retrospectively by myself. The changes did not occur through a conscious effort to promote change, but rather through the natural sequence of events and organizational interactions which took place. Further, the behaviour which is noted herein is not the *only* behaviour observed, but rather that most significant and responsible for the observed changes.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) make the distinction between institutional (social and political influence) and competitive isomorphism (resources and customers). Within the Millennium Housing Project the pressures toward homogeneity and the related changes arose from the need for the Nation to provide a sustainable framework under which to operate and for its people to exist safely, rather than to create or sustain a competitive advantage. Market competition or niche considerations did not seem to be motivating factors. Further, First Nation communities are less susceptible to competitive pressures because they operate in a system which is in many ways separate from the rest of Canada. This is due in part to the reliance upon government involvement, and the lack of fee simple property, which would be a precondition to meaningfully compete with

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non-nation entities. This would be especially true for the provision of homes on a reserve, which could not be mortgaged or sold in a conventional manner, as explained in an earlier section. As such, the observations documented are institutional rather than competitive in nature.

With the intention of clarity, and to illustrate how the behavioural homogeneity was present at different levels, and experienced by the primary organizational bodies, the next section is divided into an explanation of isomorphic properties, respectively, which were experienced by the First Nation group of individuals and organizations, and the construction/development group of individuals and organizations.

### **2.5.a First Nation Isomorphism**

The Millennium Housing Project grew from the Chief and Council's visionary concept. The catalyst moving this vision toward formal implementation was the creation of the Nation's first Community Development Board. This board was formed based on the consultation and effective interaction between the Nation and its outside development partner, who became the managing partner for the project, and was given a seat on this newly created Board. This board was made up of the managing partner's President, the CEO of the Nation's Economic Development board, and a Councillor for the Nation (the latter 2 of these 3 were Band members). The Community Development Board found that the First Nation was lacking in formal policy which would allow it to experience long term sustainable growth.

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One of the board's first recommendations was to conduct an impact study of the projected mid-to-long term population and economic growth for the Nation, and to adopt an area structure plan which could assist the Nation in decision making and strategizing for its growth in the future. To that point, and unlike most conventional municipalities, the Nation had no formal land-use bylaws such as, growth management, infrastructure strategies, or land designation (zoning). It was determined and passed by resolution through the Nation's government to implement the plan as proposed, inclusive of the municipally normative features as outlined.

The move to create a Community Development Board and subsequently implement the strategic plan it proposed formalized many generally recognized and accepted forms of organizational behaviours. This represented clear examples of mimetic (by copying standard municipal practices) and normative (ideal practices for municipalities to plan and manage growth) isomorphic change. Like most municipalities, the Nation now has clear guidelines on where development can happen, and how future development is to take place. It outlines not only *what* is able to exist on Nation land and *where*, but also *how* any future development is to be governed. Additionally, it imposes its own regulatory mechanisms, including levies and fines, to ensure the policy will be upheld, which indicates a coercive element of isomorphism. The Nation has since formed its own utility services company, and has created a comprehensive housing policy, which strongly indicates that the Nation is satisfied with the isomorphic-related homogeneity, and will continue this trend into the future.

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One of the most significant isomorphic examples involved the concept of time and employment expectations. One of the first managerial decisions of the Millennium Project was a "hire and train local" policy whereby those trades interested and committed to hiring and training local community members would be given preference in the tendering process. This policy was timely in an economic context, as there was a serious shortage of skilled labour in the greater Edmonton area, as well as a built-in workforce of able bodied Nation men and women who wanted to work.

It became evident early in this program that there would be some challenges. Part of the policy was that there be no special treatment for Nation hires, yet there were problems with the Nation members to conform to some common industry standards, specifically with regard to the concept and significance placed on time. Although the new workers were extremely diligent once they arrived to the worksite, they were often late in the mornings and/or after breaks. Several complaints were made by the site foremen as well as the individual trades who had hired the Nation members, and upon interviewing several Nation members, it was clear that the concept of time had a culturally different meaning to them.

The Nation members, many of whom had never had an "off-reserve" job before, truly did not understand why the foremen were upset, as they were used to things happening "at their own speed," or "when the Creator intended." They knew that they needed to be at work at 8:00 am, but used that start time as more of a guideline. Further,



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many Nation workers used break time to run errands to help fellow Nation members, and thought that this was an acceptable excuse for tardiness, as this act (helping the less fortunate) was, in their culture, more important than being back on time. These values are consistent and explained within the framework outlined by Chapman et al., (1998), which highlights the Aboriginal values of kindness, sharing, and family. Many workers were honestly surprised when the foremen took the tardiness personally, because they had never experienced this response to it before. These workers actually began to feel as if they were being singled out or picked on, which further inflamed the situation

As a result of these schedule discordances, a short immersion session was implemented for the foremen of the hiring sub-contractors, where the cultural reasons for problems were explained. The cultural value differences were explained to them as well as the conceptual differences in time. It was observed that once the foremen understood the culturally related reasons they verbalized less animosity to the general contractor over the issue. The cultural differences and expectations from a non-Native perspective were then explained to the Nation members. Once they found that it was viewed as disrespectful to the foreman, the company hiring them, and other non-Native workers when they constantly arrived late, the problems stopped almost immediately. Once the cultural differences were explained and appreciated by both parties, the problem dissipated almost immediately, and it was found that the non-Native and Native workers subsequently got along better. This change was far reaching, and had elements of coercive (reward/punishment based), and normative isomorphism, as the immersion and related processes became standardized.

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Although culture as an institutional form operates on a subconscious level due to the fact that it is often taken for granted (Cameron & Freeman, 1991), this example shows that once made conscious, the views imbedded can be altered. Certainly, a utopian workplace was not created; however, it is important to note that whereas problems with the Nation members were once disproportionately high, they became no different than non-Nation members on a per-worker basis, after the changes were made.

The isomorphic change for those First Nation members involved with the project can be seen by behaviour which was subsequently more aligned with the outside construction organizations. This has had continued positive effects for the members of the First Nation community, and has affected their membership in many different organizational areas. Several of the project's graduates have taken their newfound skills into the local workforce, are members of band administration, and even leadership (two Millennium Project graduates are now Councillors).

Over the project's four year period, the Nation reported to band members at community meetings that project employees earned over \$3M, and many became skilled tradesmen, including plumbers, electricians, and carpenters. There are at least three active Nation-member owned companies which came to existence through this process. Many Nation members who did have experience in the trades before the Millennium project would not have received the level of formal training necessary for a trade ticket, and would work directly for the band or "under the table," rather than register a formal

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business. The shift toward this formalization is indicative of the pressures of isomorphic processes as well.

### **2.5.b Construction Industry Isomorphism**

The isomorphic pressures evident in the Millennium Housing Project were not only at work with regard to First Nation behavioural homogenization. There are several construction industry examples as well. As already described, there was a (coercive) isomorphic process wherein individual construction and trades companies were given priority if they committed to hire and train local members. Some of the companies which were successful in receiving tender contracts through the Millennium Project actively pursued other Aboriginal communities with their own variation of the project implementation, by making it a part of their policy to hire and train locally within these communities, and thus gained a competitive advantage due to the homogenization of their behaviour (Prue & Devine, 2012).

Many of these (and other) Millennium Project construction companies adapted their behaviour in other ways, in order to exist in better harmony with the First Nation members and their communities, or to adapt to create a more effective business environment. One such example is where one company, knowing that transportation is difficult or prohibitive for many Aboriginal community members, provided a shuttle service to and from various Aboriginal communities. Members from these communities were seen to be very loyal and effective employees by the contracted companies'

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management. Another example of the behaviour change can be seen in another construction industry member's treatment of time for its Aboriginal workers. This company, further to the Millennium Project's "time-related" lessons, allowed its Aboriginal members to choose their own work hours, or paid them by the amount of work completed, rather than by the hour. This flexibility was appreciated by these workers, and they expressed their increased job satisfaction through improved efficiency and a more positive attitude (Prue & Devine, 2012). Moreover, this new "work-time" treatment was effectively extended to the company's non-Aboriginal workers, who understand and appreciate the benefits, as well. The organizational culture of these construction related companies has thus changed, due to the isomorphic processes which were, and continue to be, active at the organizational level.

The development company who worked closely with the Enoch Cree First Nation experienced a great deal of isomorphic activity as well. Over the years of acting with and for the First Nation, such as on the Community Development Board, the company has increased its knowledge base for Aboriginal organizational behaviour, and now has its own "Aboriginal Concepts" division. It has evolved the "hire and train local" policy and effectively implements it in various Aboriginal communities. Further, it now acts as an expert consultant for various Aboriginal-related joint ventures. One such example is in its role as facilitator to try to bridge the gap between Habitat for Humanity (HFH), the giant non-profit organization which mandates itself to create home ownership opportunity around the world, and Aboriginal communities in need of housing. The development organization continues to shift its behaviour based on its interactions with Aboriginal

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community members, leaders, and organizations. It has also joined and is active in several formal Aboriginal based organizations, such as the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. This type of homogeneity is consistent with the Aboriginal value system of contributing back, as well as in being involved with, and committed to, the community at a greater level.

### **2.6 New Terminology**

I feel that the gap in available literature, as will be discussed in the next chapter, as well as the overall need for clarity with regard to two specific concepts in this study necessitates the creation of two new terms. The first has to do with the idea of isomorphism which goes “in both directions,” that is, behavior is adopted by multiple parties of the other(s), rather than just one group adopting the behavior of the other, which is the traditional understanding of isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). As such, I will refer to “non-linear isomorphism” when I want to state that behaviors were being adopted by groups in a way which is non-linear and non-power dominant. This is important in the Aboriginal context, where power and dominance are often issues of importance and relevance.

The second term will be that of “conscious” isomorphism. To my knowledge, there has not been an explicit distinction between isomorphism which is planned versus that which happens organically. Typically, the use of isomorphism considers the process to be organic (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). It is of paramount importance to make this distinction in an Aboriginal setting, and with regard to this study in general, in that we intend to examine whether isomorphism can be planned and used to predict and affect

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behaviour in various settings. This isomorphism will be termed as “conscious isomorphism” from this point on.

## **Chapter III: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This section intends to focus on the literary, “knowledge” aspect of the two overarching research questions posed in Chapter 1, and will be made up of four sub-sections. First, we will examine how the vast majority of Canadian-based literature with respect to the area of Aboriginal housing comes from two sources, governmental and Native-based organizations. This section will provide a detailed examination of both sources, through a review of an example indicative of the respective bodies of literature. Second, we will discuss the recent trend of reliance upon non-Canadian research in the area. Third, we will discuss the general absence of literature specific to on-reserve housing program delivery and finally, we will discuss the potential obsolescence of some of the seminal works. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of how these deficiencies combine to form a literary body which is incapable of offering meaningful solutions for a problem which is arguably one of Canada’s greatest concerns.

### **3.2 Aboriginal Related Literature Sources and Availability**

Although the problem of First Nations housing in our country is a large one, there is surprisingly little academic literature in the area. Much of the literature in the area is based in the US (Cornell and Kalt, 1998) and that which originates in Canada seems to be strongly biased to either First Nations or non-First Nations points of view (NAACA, 2005; Flanagan, 2000). To date, I have been unable to find any academic article which

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speaks specifically to the gap in First Nation housing program delivery in Canada. Much of the available First Nation housing-specific literature to be found is governmental, like CMHC and INAC reports (INAC, 2008; CMHC, 2009), or alternatively, published by First Nation or Aboriginal-related associations or advocates (International Housing Coalition, 2006; Assembly of First Nations, 2008).

Because of the two distinct bodies of literature noted above, the review which is to follow will be organized as follows; we will look at Canadian government-related literature, review an important work in the area, and discuss overall trends noted by the body of literature. We will then look at Aboriginal-based publications and likewise review a literary example, and examine any trends inherent in that overall body of literature.

### **3.3 Federal Canadian Government Based Literature Example**

For the governmental literary example, I chose the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), (1996) which is a Canadian Royal Commission established in 1991 to formally address the many Aboriginal issues which had remained prevalent in Canadian society, and had recently been brought to the forefront of the media and political consciousness through events like the Oka crisis and the Meech Lake accord. The commission had a 16-point mandate, and the final draft was over 4000 pages long, encompassing 5 volumes, setting out a 20 year agenda for change implementation. It is one of, if not the most cited piece of literature with regard to Aboriginal housing in Canada.



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Although the scope of the commission is well beyond this paper's research area of study, it is very important, as it covers two key aspects, which are the social interactions and significance between native and non-native peoples, as well as housing. The commission is also significant in that it is widely cited by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups in a wide range of areas, including housing and culture, and utilized by both groups in terms of points of reference.

As stated, the commission is a very comprehensive document covering virtually all aspects of Aboriginal existence in Canada. The commission was significant in that it stressed a renewal of a relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals, communities and businesses. There was a theme running throughout the commission that Aboriginal cultural values need not be lost as Canada continues to grow and change. It also suggested that both Native and non-Native organizations should work together in ways which allow for integration of both types of government for program and action item implementation, all of which suggest an institutional approach.

The housing section of the commission is found in volume 3, and is 63 pages in length. It begins with an introduction followed by a number of statistics showing that aboriginal housing is in a "bad state." As there are several quantitative examples already mentioned, and which will follow in this paper, I will not include these here. There is a stated goal to work jointly (First Nations with Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada) to meet the needs for adequate housing for First Nations within 10 years. Several action

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items are proposed, including capital contributions, subsidies for purchase and rent, and incentives for First Nation's individuals to become home owners.

The RCAP is a very reliable and valid document. The seven members of the commission were made up of well-respected Native and non-Native individuals. Many of its findings were consistent with traditional research done in the area, such as joint ventures and non-native partnerships (Ferrazi, 1989), and the tendency for Aboriginal communities and individuals to place the rights of the group before the individual (Shoalts, 1991).

The document itself took over five years to create, and was the culmination of both an extensive historical review, as well as current discursive and empirical analyses. Some of the initiatives included: 178 days of public hearings, the personal visitation to and forums in 96 communities across Canada, and the inclusion and consultation of dozens of experts in various fields of study. There were also dozens of research studies commissioned as part of the overarching commission. The degree to which the document has been and continues to be cited with regard to the current and past state of Aboriginal existence in Canada is also a testament to the Commission report's reliability and validity. We now know that the action plan to provide adequate housing within a 10 year period fell far short, but the document continues to be an important reference point in relation to the problem of First Nations housing in general.

### **Summary of Government-Based Literature**

The Royal Commission is indicative of much of the government-produced First Nations housing Canadian literature in many ways. The problems with regard to on-reserve housing are often “lumped in” with other problem areas like health and education. Even when there is a literary focus on housing, there is often not a separation between on-reserve and off-reserve housing, or specifically to First Nation individuals, with many pertaining to all Aboriginal persons. Although we can read about how bad the problems are, and how they relate to one another, there is rarely anything written about the actual processes related to the provision of the homes. Indeed most government-produced literature with regard to the housing problem is focused ONLY on the statistics and reporting on the overall poor conditions (CMHC, 2009), and perhaps on the effects these conditions may have on a broader scale, but rarely do we see any suggestions as to HOW to improve the delivery of these homes in terms of processes, timing, quality, pricing, or other matters.

Much of the government-produced literature is created without the consultation or involvement of Aboriginal people or organizations (CMHC, 2009). This may be part of the reason that many studies and literature available are not utilized or considered by First Nation governments. The Royal Commission is important in that it had Aboriginal involvement throughout the process, and this has most likely been a factor in the Commission Reports high level of acceptance to both Native and non-Native people and organizations.

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Probably the most important key commonality in the government-produced literature as it pertains to on-reserve housing is in the solutions which are recommended. As noted above, it is often the problem itself the literature is focused on, and often (mostly) there are no recommendations at all. When there are, however, they are almost always concerned with allocating more financial resources for the problem. The Commission is an excellent example of this, with each action item concerned with how to access financial resources to tackle the problem, including government subsidies, mortgage facilitation for Aboriginals, and capital contribution.

When the only solutions brought forward in the literature are financially related (NAACA, 2005; RCAP, 1996) it appears that the governmental consensus is that the availability to more capital is the only solution. The gap in the literature as to how to effectively manage that capital throughout the process and the process of the housing delivery itself, coupled with the fact that the problem continues to worsen despite continued resource allocation, would indicate that it may be wise to examine the processes and related inter-organizational relationships involved in the provision of on-reserve housing, to see what flaws may exist, and where improvement could be made. Likewise, examining the non-financial aspects of the processes may be of significance. Research in areas like employment creation and training, cultural factors, and community consultation and involvement, as they relate to on-reserve housing provision may yield interesting and useful insight, as these have shown to be of overall economic development benefit to Native communities in other areas (Cornell and Kalt, 1998).

### 3.4 Aboriginal Based Literature Example

An Aboriginal-based literary example is “The Role of Housing in an Economy”, a policy paper created by the National Aboriginal Capital Corporation Association (NACCA) in 2005. The paper concerns itself primarily with the economic role of housing in general, and the impact to First Nations specifically. It begins with a description of the current and historical states of First Nation housing in Canada. Outlined are some of the more unequal demographic housing statistics with regard to on-reserve housing, including the fact that 60% of First Nation homes experienced “temporary or insecure tenure”, and that the average number of occupants for First Nation homes was over twice that of the Canadian norm. The paper then questions the housing program methods to date, stating that although many billions of dollars have been spent to confront the problem, “these billions were leaked from the economies with impressive efficiency, and served, at best, a transitory role in aboriginal economies” (NACCA, 2005, p 5). Once the paper establishes that the problem is significant and that the current delivery method is ineffective, there is a comprehensive section on the economics of housing in general, and on-reserve housing specifically. This section culminates in the main point that without fee simple designation available on First Nation reserves, First Nation individuals are at a disadvantage in many ways, including the absence of pride of ownership and the inability to build equity and wealth in the same manner as those individuals living off- reserve.

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The paper goes on to provide an argument that it is nearly impossible for a proper comparison of economies and the related economic potential between First Nation and non-First Nation communities. The primary argument for this point is that the inalienability of First Nations lands has been such a suppressing factor that it has affected almost every facet of First Nation life and quality of life, including the obvious effects on housing availability and wealth building, to the availability of entrepreneurial and employment opportunities, as well as the not so obvious components of physical and psychological disadvantages and community loss. The paper argues that the differences in housing availability, the average housing state, and the individual/social opportunities inherent in home ownership are so different between First Nation and non-First Nation communities, that it makes comparison impossible.

Once the economics are dissected on the levels noted above, the NACCA (2005) paper goes on to recommend that a loan system be tailor-made for on-reserve housing. It is argued that such a system could help promote economic growth, a greater level of prosperity, and a higher standard of living. The paper suggested that by providing more homeowners on-reserve, every major variable in the economy could be positively affected, and the product of such a program would have the ability to transform entire economies and communities.

Basically in the NACCA (2005) paper, we read observations pertaining to how bad the situation is, a fact that is common knowledge, and then at how home ownership has many benefits for economies, also a fact that is well known. The paper then goes on

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to say that a new loan system providing for more on-reserve ownership is required, but no indication is given as to how that system should, or even could, happen. Many caveats stated as potential obstacles which would impede this ambiguous loan system to work even if it could be established are also included. These include “a variety of other economic factors” (p. 20), access to capital, current economic climate, community wealth, a credible and trusted financial institution and a broad development policy where economic preconditions do not exist.

### **Summary of Aboriginal-Based Literature**

This example is indicative of much of the Aboriginal-based literature in the area, in that it comes by way of organizations that are dedicated to the advancement of Aboriginal quality of life such as the Assembly of First Nations and the National Aboriginal Capital Corporation Association. Like the governmental body of literature, Aboriginal literature with regard to the problem of housing is largely concerned with the problem itself (IHC, 2006; AFN, 2008). Reasons as to why housing conditions are so poor, the statistical data related to the problem, and the broader effects the problem has on other areas of Aboriginal life are well documented. There is a great absence in the literature with regard to potential solutions, and those solutions outlined have to do with various types of resource allocation which would be significant enough to cover the housing needs for Aboriginal people. There is little to no on-reserve housing delivery process-based research in the body of literature. Again, we read about how bad the state

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of on-reserve housing is in Canada, with little to no real world recommendations with regard to action planning.

The Aboriginal-based literature does provide some important insight into the Aboriginal community-based aspects of the housing problem. One example of this is in the problems associated with the high level of “temporary and insecure tenure” (NACCA, 2005, p.3) and in the lower levels of pride of ownership, because there are far less owners on-reserve than off. There is very little linkage in any literature between Aboriginal culture and housing provision. A broad understanding of Native government, culture and tradition, and how these could be used to enhance on-reserve housing, could be beneficial. As well, research into the potential synergy in the requirement for the skilled and unskilled employment necessary to build new homes and the “built-in” workforce on many reserves could yield interesting and exciting results.

### **3.5 Canadian Literature Regarding Housing Provision Processes**

As we have seen through the government and Aboriginal-based research examples in the preceding sections, published information with regard to housing located on-reserve is very limited, and that which is available follows some common trends. The available literature is primarily based on the problems and/or related statistical data with regard to housing on-reserve. The literature concerns itself with the problem at hand and the reasons for its existence, rather than with solutions. The only solution found with



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regard to potential housing provision to the standards and volume necessary to negate the problem has to do only with increased capital (First Nation Information Project, 2011).

As a recent illustration of the absence of housing literature, I reviewed all available published articles in the Journal of Native Studies. Of all the articles, only one had indirect ties to on-reserve housing, having to do with community planning (Copet, 2010). This is indicative of the comprehensive literature review conducted by this author, in that a very small amount of published (and probably written) material with regard to Aboriginal life addresses the housing problem.

Throughout the review of available literature in the area, this author has been unable to find any published research or information speaking to the actual processes of new home delivery for on-reserve housing. This is alarming in that streamlining the efficiency of new home development could have a net effect of providing more homes, in a shorter period of time, for less capital outlay. Further, this absence of literature suggests that there is little information sharing between First Nation reserves or Métis settlements as to what has worked in the past. The sharing of successes would help to streamline the process as well, and cut costs by avoiding the same problems experienced by others (Tulk, 2013). Research into what has worked with regard to the processes of housing provision, and the dissemination of this knowledge is therefore an important initiative. This would include initiatives involving local labour, quality control, training initiatives with regard to issues such as on-reserve housing, reporting, scheduling, and tendering policies. These no doubt exist and have been/are being implemented on-reserve and

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settlement in our country. Research into these types of processes represents a clear path to reduced costs and improved efficiency, and should therefore be treated with a high degree of importance.

Another deficiency in the available literature published with regard to on-reserve housing is in the publishing date of many of the most referenced “seminal” works. The most notable is the RCAP work already referenced herein, which despite being published in 1996, continues to be cited in almost every housing-related article, in terms of statistics and housing need evaluation. The work has been cited no less than 110 times (Google Scholar, 2011). The RCAP commission set out an action plan which aimed for an end to the problem within 10 years. The problem instead has worsened (CMHC, 2009), and yet there has been no inquiry into the failures of the RCAP 10 year plan to abolish the on-reserve housing crisis, which begs the question, “do we still care?” Perhaps after several decades, and after billions of dollars spent (Milke, 2013), and after watching the problem snowball instead of vanishing, we have simply given up.

What makes the overall absence of literature and related outdated trends, as well as the question of “who cares” more concerning is the recent absence of housing from notable publications speaking to important go-forward Canadian Aboriginal initiatives. *The Globe and Mail* reported that housing seemed to be off the radar with regard to level of governmental importance (*Globe and Mail*, 2011). As well, the Indian and Northern Affairs action plan, (2011) left housing out as one of its four top priority initiatives. This

is despite the fact that funding had been cut in half in the prior three years, and the need had increased (INAC 2008; INAC, 2011).

### **3.6 American Based Literature Example**

With the absence of an abundance of academic housing (and other) related Aboriginal academic literary content in Canada, there has been an increasing trend of “cross-over” acceptance of related American content (Simeone, 2007). One such example is The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development which was founded in 1987 at the JFK School of Government at Harvard University. The Harvard Project has been the catalyst for much Aboriginal academic inquiry, through its study of social and economic development on American Aboriginal reservations, as well as by offering awards and support for research done relating to Aboriginal Economic Development. We will look at this example in terms of its potential answers to housing problems (amongst others) through the “nation building” efforts it supports. We will also look at the validity of the project in terms of its relevance to Canadian Aboriginal groups, and examine the limitations of the work.

The examination which is to follow is based on an excerpt (pp.187-214) of a book which speaks to the housing problem and program delivery in terms of economic development, titled “Sovereignty and Nation-Building: The Development Challenge in Indian Country Today” (Cornell, Curtis & Jorgensen, 2003). This book is published in part by the Harvard Project, and cited at least 110 times according to Google Scholar. We will now examine the work, in terms of how it speaks to the housing (and other)

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problems faced by Aboriginal people, through the building of on-reserve economic growth.

The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development was founded by Professors Stephen Cornell and Joseph P. Kalt at Harvard University in 1987. The project's goals were to understand and encourage sustainable economic development using a self-governing framework in American Indian nations. The project's main endeavours were to conduct research, provide advisory services and provide executive level education. A related body, the Native Nations Institute for Leadership, Management, and Policy (NNI) provides research as well as policy analysis and executive education services to Aboriginal organizations around the world. Much of NNI's research builds upon that originating within The Harvard Project. These two groups collaborate with each other and share resources to undertake their research goals.

The Cornell et al., (2003) book introduces the authors' focus on nation-building as a view that American Indian Nations have a rare opportunity due to their political and organizational structure, to effectively grow and prosper using a nation-building methodology. They state this opportunity has been created over the past 20 years, due in large part to the failure of the government to effectively govern the American Indian policies and act as a decision-maker. They also point to changing relations between individual Nations and Government, which started with the 1960's Indian political movement. The authors state that US federal policy has shifted toward self-governance since the 1970's, partly because Aboriginals themselves have begun to demand self-

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determination. The Nations have begun to govern their own affairs in practice, generating positive results, though still constrained with the legal system and Congress. Recent calls linking the success for Aboriginals to self-reliance (Baptiste, 2008) suggests some similarities to Canadian mentality and attitudes.

The authors suggest that the Aboriginal Nations' progress is being detrimentally affected due to decisions made by the US Supreme Court - which have been increasingly aggressive in pulling back self-governing policies made by the Nations. They use as examples the disagreements over gaming and other issues in California, New Mexico and Arizona. They state that the tribes must build viable nations before the opportunity is potentially lost due to increased government activity, and must effectively implement sovereignty rather than just assert it. One of the major recommendations of the book is that sovereignty is the key to addressing reservation poverty and that sovereignty, nation building, and economic development "go hand in hand" (Baptiste, 2008, p. 206). Without sovereignty and nation building, successful economic development is an elusive endeavour.

### **Reservation Development**

The Harvard Project, as outlined in Cornell et al., (2003) outlined several similarities between US and Canadian on-reserve conditions. Poor housing conditions, along with high unemployment, health problems and poverty, are identified as undeniable indicators of the poor quality of life on American Native reservations. The authors cited that although a handful of tribes have generated revenue through gaming, it is not the

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ultimate answer for sovereignty, and examples are given of tribes who have actually moved away from gaming as their primary revenue stream and source of employment. They then go on to provide examples using four tribes who are regional (non-gaming) market forces; Mississippi Choctaws as one of the largest employers in their state, the Arizona White Mountain Apaches as a major player in the regional economy where many non-Indians depend on them, the Montana Salish and Kootenai tribes, who have built a successful economy as well as a tribal college which attracts non-Indian applicants due to the high quality of the education provided, and the Pueblo in New Mexico who have an unemployment rate in the single digits.

Based on their study of these successful Native communities, the authors noted that a common characteristic of these successful Indian tribes is that they do not conform to typical economic development concepts. They stated that the commonly held positive traits like the presence of natural resources, educational opportunities and the access to financial capital were not themselves indicative of community economic development success. These findings beg the question, “what indicators can explain why some tribes succeed and others do not?” This question is the main focus of the Harvard Project’s goals for research.

### **Two Approaches to Economic Development**

Two distinct economic development approaches were noted in the authors’ research (Cornell et al., 2003). The “Jobs and Income” approach recognizes an employment and revenue problem and attempts to combat the equity shortage by

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facilitating business creation, grant application, and the attraction of investors. The authors stated this approach rarely works and seldom produces lasting business activity, primarily due to counterproductive tribal council (band government) involvement.

The other approach is what the authors called “nation-building.” It recognizes the same problems as the jobs and income approach and realizes the need to address these problems. The difference is that the nation-building approach takes a more macro and interactive course, and is therefore considered to be more ambitious and comprehensive. Its goal is to create an environment which attracts investment and promotes long term success for Aboriginal community people businesses. Their view on investment and investor characteristics is to look for opportunities and investment partners in a way that promotes long term sustainable growth.

The authors felt that the creation of an effective nation-building approach lies in the design of the Nation itself. Their research consistently finds that the “jobs and income” (Cornell & Kalt, 2003, p. 191) approach does not produce a sustainable economy. The nation-building approach has the potential of producing more beneficial, longer term outcomes. While it does not guarantee success, the authors posit that it vastly improves the probability of long term sustainable economic growth.

### **The Components of Nation Building**

The self-determination policy for US Aboriginals formally began in 1975, and American tribes delineated two major action items to effectively move forward in terms of economic development and overall prosperity (Cornell, Curtis, & Jorgensen, 2003).

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The first was to assert their sovereignty and subsequently exercise that sovereignty. The second was to demonstrate their ability to govern effectively. The general assumption is that assertions of sovereignty will have little impact without effective governing.

Cornell et al., (2003) state that through their research, they recognize three distinct building blocks with regard to the creation of sovereignty and sustainable economic growth. These are the implementation of effective institutions, the formation of a strategic direction, and the ability to act on informed decisions. They also feel that cultural elements must be present throughout and within successful implements. Cornell, Curtis & Jorgensen use their research with US tribes to delineate the characteristics of effective self-governance. Although there is a wide range of tribal sizes, geographic location, skill sets, and education among those located across the US, the authors recognize common preconditions of Nations who successfully implement sovereignty through sustainable economic development, those being:

- Stable institutions and policies
- Fair dispute resolution
- Separation of politics from business and management
- Competent bureaucracy
- Cultural match

Although a detailed description of each of these is probably unnecessary for those with an understanding of general business terms, a brief look at what is meant by “Cultural Match” may be prudent, as it is the vehicle through which the other four characteristics are implemented. In looking at cultural match, the authors take a strong institutional theoretical approach, citing that the success is found in Aboriginal



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communities where “governing institutions match with the prevailing ideas in the community about how authority should be organized and exercised” (p.201). It also refers to aligning and interweaving traditional culture and values into the governing system. To effectively achieve this, successful communities ask questions like “what form should partner and internal organizational bodies take,” “how should they be created and governed,” and “when and how should these organizations and their activities be outsourced?” By aligning themselves in a way which is understood and respected by their own people as well as non-native communities, the Aboriginal organizations, both governmental and business related, have a greater chance of support and success. Alternatively, the authors note that in Aboriginal communities with less cultural match, the related organizations have lesser degrees of respect and interaction with non-native communities, and have a reduced chance of effectively exercising their sovereignty and enjoying the economic development opportunities than those with effective cultural matching.

The authors make an effective argument for cultural matching through a case study comparing two very similar Native communities in terms of organizational structure. The White Mountain apaches of Arizona and the Oglala Sioux of the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota both have tribal governments organized under the IRA (Indian Reorganization Act), where power is centralized, with CEOs that have extensive power, no independent judiciary, and executive oversight of business operations. The institutions of governance are largely the same on both reservations.

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Despite these similarities, the authors go on to show that due to the implementation of the governance preconditions noted above, and primarily through effective and ineffective cultural matching, the two tribes perform dramatically different from one another. The White Mountain Apache are considered one of the most successful Indian nations in the country, whereas Pine Ridge is statistically the poorest nation in the country. Although they essentially share the same governance structure, the Apaches have a much closer match with their Apache traditions with respect to governance, as well as to their non-native business partners, in terms of economic development activity and interaction. The Sioux have a very low level of cultural match. Because of their effective alignment of internal and external cultures, the Apache tribe enjoys a high level of commitment and support from its own people, as well as from its external business and community partners. Copet (2010) speaks to using a more culturally sensitive and interactionary approach with regard to Aboriginal community planning, suggesting congruence on a Canadian level.

According to Cornell et al., (2003), the importance of this first “building block,” the implementation of effective institutions, is paramount. Once the structure is created and accepted, the other “blocks,” strategic direction and the ability to act on those directions, can be undertaken. Strategic direction and planning may include undertakings like a community needs assessment, area structure planning, and creation of bodies like a community development board. They also view “action” as a necessary final building block. This is important in that the authors found that many ideas and strategies failed to

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be properly implemented due to a lack of an action plan, or champion(s) to see the strategy through.

I have focused on the first of the three “building blocks,” the implementation of effective institutions for three reasons. First, it is a necessary precursor to the other two; second, the other two blocks (strategic direction and action) are community specific and therefore more difficult to summarize; and third, actual strategic direction and action implementations may differ significantly in Canada, with regard to on-reserve housing, due to the differences in land use designation, as well as the makeup of government (both on and off reserve) and housing programs which are available. The implementation of effective institutions however, seems to transcend these differences, and therefore is significant to my research area.

### **The Argument for Sovereignty**

Overall, Cornell et al., (2003) make a strong case for sovereignty, especially since the successes they have found show that the sovereignty actually works better when the Aboriginal communities do so in harmony with surrounding communities and their organizations. In this way, the authors argue that tribal sovereignty works for non-Natives as well. Economically successful Aboriginal nations are often becoming key to their regional economies; there is evidence to support this in reservations with high levels of economic development, through ancillary benefits like job creation and business opportunities for non-Natives and organizations. This idea of win-win between the

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Native and non-Native communities is evident in the example given whereby the White Mountain tribe's resource economy was threatened by federal endangered species policies, and the non-Native communities around them organized in support of the Tribes' assertions of self-rule.

According to Cornell and Kalt (1998), sovereignty is the ultimate goal for long term sustainable growth for Aboriginal communities, and economic development is an important part of that success. Based on their research in many Aboriginal communities, the authors delineate several characteristics inherent in Aboriginal communities where there has been success. Part of this solution is in the institutionalization of some aspects of their business organization, and is consistent with recent Canadian work linking First Nation institutionalization with positive economic growth (Prue & Devine, 2012).

The use of US research with regard to Aboriginal people has been gaining momentum in Canada, the Harvard Project being the most notable. There has been some recent criticism about the crossover into potential Canadian widespread acceptance, including the use of old data, a flawed analytical framework, and warnings that an endorsement of the Harvard Project may be used to transfer responsibility for solving problems to unprepared Aboriginal communities (Mowbray, 2005; Simeone, 2007).

Although there is some useful and important work being done through US research like the Harvard Project, it would appear that there is a need for Canadian based and focused research, or at least, further work linking the Harvard Project's foundations to Canadian policy and process. This is supported by the fact that this review notes

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deficiencies in effectively implementing the findings into Canadian Aboriginal policy, due to differences in government (Native and non-Native), land use, and history.

Additionally, the criticisms as outlined herein would provide further caution for a universal acceptance of the US based research, and suggest a need for a Canadian based or integrated approach.

### **3.7 Summary**

The review of the literature with regard to on-reserve housing and its provision in Canada is overall very limited. What is available largely falls into two categories, government-based and Aboriginal-based. The governmental literature most often takes the form of reports from different government-related agencies like INAC or CMHC. The Aboriginal based literature likewise comes from various Aboriginal groups like the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), or NACCA, and potential solutions to the housing problem from both sides always seem to focus only on resource allocation. There is a very limited body of literature which speaks to on-reserve housing in Canada which does not fall into one of these two groups. This lack of “independent” research in the area is a limiting factor for meaningful problem-area discovery and assessment.

This researcher’s literature review was unable to find any research which deals specifically to the process of on-reserve housing delivery in Canada, from concept or application, through to construction and possession. This process is of paramount importance in the private sector in terms of measuring success by quantitatively measuring things like home quality, pricing, value, and construction timing. As well,

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there are several qualitative processes worth researching. It is imperative that we look at these processes like employment creation and training, cultural factors, and community consultation and involvement, as they relate to on-reserve housing provision. The third recommendation is thus a call for research initiatives into these processes of on-reserve home provision. By researching and reporting on what has and has not worked for various Aboriginal communities in our country with regard to this problem, we will be able to better understand the problem, and begin to form a framework by looking at commonalities between and across Aboriginal communities.

This literature review has also shown how much of the literature that is available is potentially outdated, especially with regard to statistical data. Many of these papers are still being referred to in current literature, despite the fact that in many ways they have failed to perform (as in the RCAP 10 year plan), and have not been properly assessed in a retrospective context.

This author feels that this literature review largely supports the dissertation research questions, in that there appears to be a need for further research work in this area. The provision of adequate on-reserve housing in Canada is well known and well documented in both Aboriginal and government-based literature (IHC, 2006; RCAP, 1996). What is not well documented is the “why” and the “how”, as they relate to the problem.

### **Chapter IV THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **4.1 Institutional Theory and Isomorphism**

Institutional theory focuses on how the institutional environment influences the formation and legitimization of organizational structures and processes. As such, organizational rules, myths, beliefs, and processes all contribute to the social meaning and values within the organization (Oliver, 1991). It has also been used to explain the nature and types of institutional processes that develop over time, and the influence these have on organizational characteristics and change (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996).

One dominant perspective within institutional theory seeks to explain how and why organizations become similar to one another, due to internal and external pressures that influence formal structures and institutional customs. This institutional homogeneity, or “isomorphism,” occurs due to three types of pressures: coercive, mimetic and normative (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Coercive pressures arise from the need for compliance to institutional mandates, such as legal, governmental or organization-imposed regulations. Consequently, they can result in a reward (punishment) for adhering to (rebellious against) institutional norms. An example of coercive isomorphism would be bylaws and the fines/punishment for non-compliance. Mimetic processes occur when organizations mimic others, and are common during times of uncertainty. By adopting successful practices of other firms, homogeneity for organizational outcomes is more likely in a chaotic environment (Kondra & Hinings, 1998). For example, one company may adopt the organizational hiring policy behaviour

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of a competitor in order to better compete or to become more efficient or profitable.

Normative processes deal with professionalism and standardization, where institutional behaviour shifts toward the “norm,” such as the creation of a professional designation. Generally, institutional isomorphism is more likely to increase when an organization is highly dependent upon an institutional environment in a time of uncertainty, and when professional standards need to be adhered to. An example of this would be the creation of a community development board or a subdivision approval board.

Although isomorphism is largely concerned with a “natural” tendency for organizations to resist change, it is also about the homogenization of organizations. This means that one organization, in order to become “more like” another, *must* change. Hence it is an excellent catalyst for change (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996), and can result in shifting organizational behaviours and culture (Kondra & Hurst, 2009). This research measures organizational behaviour change within an Aboriginal context, and explains it through the lens of institutional isomorphism.

### **4.2 Organizational Culture**

Organizational culture is a system of shared meaning that governs how an organization’s members behave, and is perpetuated through the beliefs and values of individuals and groups within an organization (Schein, 2010). Due to the broad range of study that this area encompasses, there is no commonly shared definition of



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organizational culture across theoretical disciplines (Martin & Frost, 1999). However, most theorists agree that a strong culture is good for an organization as it creates predictability and behavioural consistency. Additionally, it constrains what managers can and cannot do, even though there are no explicit, written rules and regulations. Organizational culture is typically created through the visions and values of the founders of an organization, but can evolve, or shift over time (Mallak, 2001). The proposed research will detail if and how organizational actions and context influence cultural “shifting” through isomorphic pressures.

### **4.3 Research Specific Theoretical Sensitivities**

The isomorphism observed in the past and which is the subject of this dissertation was implemented purposefully for the project with the intention to research and measure findings. It involves the adaptation of behaviours and attitudes of each group of people toward the other. The non-linear isomorphism which occurs is viewed as culturally neutral, in that it is experienced by members of all groups, not just one. This is important in the Aboriginal setting, where the ideas of power and dominance often have increased sensitivities (Blum, Fields & Goodman, 1994). As such, a brief section on the concepts of accommodation, assimilation and power will now ensue.

### **4.4 Accommodation**

There is evidence that group and individual norms/differences are important factors in explaining variances in group performance (Goodman, Ravlin & Schminke, 1987). Goodman, et al., surmise that changing the cohesiveness of the group changes the nature of the group's output. Groschl (2003) speaks to accommodation in the Aboriginal setting, when he provides insights into this under-researched area by exploring the development and sophistication of HR related practices and processes that influence the employment and integration of Aboriginal peoples within Canada. His case study shows that employing disadvantaged groups such as Aboriginal peoples cannot be achieved by setting quotas and targets. Instead it is about developing an accommodating culture and developing a company commitment towards disadvantaged groups that goes beyond the workplace. Isomorphism could be an effective way to show this commitment, and for culture to not only be accommodated, but meshed together.

### **4.5 Assimilation**

Many leading corporations have been effective in hiring women and minorities but they have been less successful in retaining and promoting those hired (Blum, et al., 1994). Tsui and Gutek (1999) summarized consistent findings that show higher demographic similarity between supervisors and subordinates on age, race or gender correlates with HR outcomes such as higher ratings on performance, organizational citizenship, and lower role ambiguity and conflict. Leck, Onge and LaLancette (1995)

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found that Canadian organizations with a higher representation of managerial women also have the most rapidly decreasing wage gap; however, the wage gap was widening for visible minorities, Aboriginals and disabled women. Overall, increasing workforce diversity seems to be associated with more favourable attitudes toward diversity and better performance ratings and wages. The effects of diversity on individuals are often intertwined with effects on groups. Researchers recognize the importance of measuring the tenure of members on the team; as individuals get to know each other better, the negative effects of diversity often subside (Watson, Kamalesh & Michaelsen, 1993).

Workplace diversity generally impacts organizational-level outcomes indirectly through effects that begin at the individual level (Rynes & Rosen, 1995). Diversity training is the most prevalent individual-level intervention (SHRM Diversity Surveys, 1998, 2000, 2002). Ford and Fisher's (1996) review states that training programs aim to change employees' attitudes (affective and cognitive) and behaviours to 'value diversity' and reduce subtle forms of discrimination and exclusion that hinder effective working relationships. They note three main types of training objectives. Programs fostering assimilation provide education about the norms and goals of the dominant culture and might target minorities. Programs focused on accommodation emphasize adjustment of the majority to the changing workforce. Programs emphasizing multiculturalism (where members of two or more cultures are allowed to retain key aspects of their cultures) involve a bilateral process jointly focused on the majority and minorities. Obviously, the organizations' training bi-laterally of socially diverse work groups- whether it be

assimilating or accommodating, plays a key role in the effectiveness of group performance.

### **4.6 Power**

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is viewed as an effective way to deal with issues of power in the research environment (Gaventa, 1988). Action researchers agree that objective knowledge is impossible since the researcher is always a part of the world they study (Hall, Gillette & Tandon, 1982). Delpit (1995) asserts that the inherent issues of race, culture and class involve power. “Those with power are frequently least aware of – or at least willing to acknowledge – its existence, while members of subordinate groups are acutely conscious of the disparities” (p.26). Scheurich (1993; see also Maher & Tetreault, 1997) observes that the longer one group is dominant, the more effectively “the styles of thinking, acting, speaking, and behaving of the dominant group have become the socially correct or privileged ways of thinking, acting, speaking, and behaving (p. 7).” Reason & Bradbury (2005 p.6) also emphasize the “intimate relationship” between knowledge and power, i.e. how knowledge making supported by various cultural and political forms creates a reality which favours those who hold power. Similarly, action researchers agree that objective knowledge is impossible since the researcher is always a part of the world they live in and points out that knowledge making cannot be neutral and disinterested but is a political process in the service of particular purposes, and one which has been institutionalized in favour of the privileged (Hall et al., 1982). One of the greatest obstacles to creating a more just world is the power of the dominant hegemony, the ideological oppression which shapes the way people think. Selener (1997)

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emphasizes that a major goal of participatory research is to solve practical problems in a community, which exist due to unequal power relationships. Another goal is the creation of shifts in the balance of power in favour of poor and marginalized groups in society and as Greenwood and Levin assert, action research contributes “actively and directly to processes of democratic social change” (2006: 3)

This section has examined the theoretical underpinnings upon which the research is examined. This includes a summary of institutional and culture theory, and why they are important lenses by which to examine isomorphic activity. The chapter also examined several power and dominance related areas. This was conducted because of the sensitivity to these areas found by Aboriginal persons and minorities in the workforce and in general.

### **4.7 Assimilation vs. Isomorphism:**

As we have seen earlier in this section, assimilation is primarily focused on the norms and goals of the dominant culture. Assimilation based projects make sure that new minority culture members, indeed all new members, understand what the “culture” of the organization is. As such, there are implicit and explicit expectation and goals, and often specific ways of acting. Often, there are punishments related to non-conforming to the power-dominant culture.

Isomorphism suggests an approach that is less authoritarian and more organic and interactive in nature. Members of all groups, whether dominant or non-dominant, can be

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a part of the isomorphic process, and the end result is that all parties can adapt and change over the course of the organizational relationship. Based on the fundamental nature of the research between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups, isomorphism was a clear choice. It was decided that research which was non-power dominant and therefore sensitive and empowering to all groups including the Aboriginal group was a goal which isomorphism, rather than assimilation, could better achieve.

## **Chapter V: METHODS**

### **5.1 Purpose of study**

The purpose of the research is to create and measure a conscious isomorphic activity and its effects within a specific construction project. As such, this conscious isomorphism will first speak to whether there is isomorphism present within the project, and to what degree it is experienced. If it is determined that there are isomorphic properties present, it will be important to look at what they are, including their characteristics. Ultimately, the goal is to determine whether the isomorphism can be designed and whether it possesses qualities which are meaningful to the project in general, and participants and groups, specifically.

On a more general scale isomorphism will be examined in the context of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal housing provisions, and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships. As well, the process of attracting, retaining, and satisfying potential hires in new work settings will be examined.

Another purpose is to determine if isomorphism can be experienced in “both” ways, i.e. by both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups and individuals. If so, what can be extrapolated by examining this non-linear isomorphism? Overall, there is an

intention to determine whether this study offers practical support for the linkage between institutional theory and culture perspectives.

### **5.2 Research Methods**

The primary research method used to examine the questions of interest was participatory action research (PAR). As stated previously, PAR is appropriate because of its collaborative and reflective nature, as well as its focus on collective inquiry and reproducibility of findings. Given this method, the various activities that were engaged in will be outlined.

#### **5.2. a Participatory Action Research**

This study involved conducting a designed isomorphic event in a similar model of a past isomorphic event which was unplanned. There were several different individuals and groups interacting with one another, and researcher interaction with members of these groups and individuals throughout the research period. Additionally, the researcher adjusted his behaviour based on activity from the various participants. This inherently reflexive nature of the study made it hard for this author to conceive of conducting as rich a research program with anything other than a qualitative style (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008). Indeed, there appear to be characteristics within this research study which exhibit traits of all four of Tesch's (1990) approaches to qualitative study, in that language, the discovery of regularities, discerning meaning, and reflection all seem present.



The participatory action methodology is a widely accepted way for researchers to understand various interactions within a single setting (Flvbjerg, 2006), and to study real life situations effectively where there is a “full variety of evidence” (Yin, 2008). Since we are also using a pluralistic approach and dealing with the understanding and interactions between and among members of different cultures, thick description (Geertz, 1973) and an interpretive, ethnographic approach are viewed as valuable.

Participatory Action research (PAR) practitioners make a concerted effort to integrate three basic aspects of their work: participation (life in society and democracy), action (engagement with experience and history), and research (soundness in thought and the growth of knowledge) (Chevalier and Buckles, 2013). "Action unites, organically, with research and collective processes of self-investigation” (Rahman, 2007, p. 49). The way each component is actually understood and the relative emphasis it receives varies nonetheless from one PAR theory and practice to another. This means that PAR is not a monolithic body of ideas and methods but rather a pluralistic orientation to knowledge making and social change (Chambers, 2008)

There is also research which supports the use of PAR with Aboriginal groups and individuals (Hoare, Levy & Robinson, 1993). The paper notes that if knowledge is fundamental to understanding, interpreting and establishing values within a society, then control over its production becomes an integral component of cultural survival. Jackson,

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McCaskill & Hall (1982) acknowledge the strategic link between knowledge production and cultural survival:

Knowledge is fast becoming the single most important basis of power and control. Control over knowledge is, therefore, critical to success of the Native movement (Jackson *et al.*, 1982:6)

Popular participation in the social production of knowledge enhances democratic participation, particularly when community members assist in defining problems, setting research priorities and establishing the manner in which the research is to be used. (Hoare *et al.*, 1993: 46)

Gaventa (1988) further states that for native communities to gain full participation in non-native society, research should be more in tune with cultural values. He finds it important to differentiate between western and indigenous knowledge to develop an argument in support of culturally appropriate research methodologies. Johnson and Ruttan (1991) explain that western science and related research are based on rational and analytic reasoning whereas indigenous knowledge and meaning are steeped in mythology and intuitive wisdom (Hoare *et al.*, 1993).

Hoare advocates for the use of PAR as a key tool for collecting Indigenous knowledge and promoting social change in Native communities. PAR methodology is preferred over others because it integrates especially well with Native culture, it meets criteria regarding validity and reliability, and it offers a pragmatic means of recording oral history before much of it is lost. PAR is an alternative investigation method to scientific research that also provides a means for cultural repatriation. PAR is an integrated approach involving the participation of community members to investigate social reality, build local skills and capacity for the purpose of increasing community

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autonomy through a process of praxis (Hall, 1981; Tandon, 1988). It relies on the experience of the people, it values the culture and it builds human capacity within the community.

PAR's techniques are consistent with Native values. Colorado (1989) sets out the characteristics of PAR that demonstrate it as a particularly adept methodology for Native people. In Colorado's view, PAR is collaborative, endogenous, heuristic and experiential and as such it is predisposed Participatory Action Research to accepting the idea of an alternative knowledge base and a process oriented, communally-based Indigenous methodology. By stressing participation, PAR provides cross-cultural opportunities for collaboration, cooperation and communication. In contrast, conventional research approaches to Native issues have met with remarkably little success when measured by the ability of that research to substantively strengthen the cultural and economic well-being of the target population (Chambers, 1983; Ryan and Robinson, 1990)

Over the past twenty years, variations of PAR have been carried out as part of land use and occupancy studies and ethnographic research. There are few documented applications of PAR methods in Native Canadian communities, but Ryan and Robinson (1990) speculate that many practitioners have introduced similar techniques without realizing the link to PAR methodology. The use of PAR methods has focused on two types of projects: those relating to investigation, and those relating to program development. Program development projects often focused on economic development, education, health and social service delivery. Investigation projects have mostly

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researched oral history, cultural traditions, land use and occupancy patterns, and ecological and environmental management. (Hoare et al., 1993).

Since there are members of different cultures involved in this research, and because of various Aboriginal culture values, the research proposes to use ethnographic and narrative approaches within the participatory action framework. The ethnographic approach pays close attention to language and the importance of cultural meaning (Van Maanen, 1988; Atkinson, 1990). It is hoped that ethnographic observation will assist in gaining meaning during the isomorphic process, as well as to provide guidance for the ongoing isomorphic meetings. The ethnographic interview style (Rooke, Seymour & Fellows, 2004) also provides an interview style that is based on an open ended narrative, in the traditional Aboriginal style. Likewise, the narrative style is aligned with the storytelling tradition of Aboriginal people (Sinclair, 2003), and by implementing a storytelling style interview, the research hopes to answer calls to add validity and usefulness to Aboriginal peoples through scholarly research (Gilchrist, 1997; Deloria, 1991; Trimble & Medicine, 1976).

### **5.2. b            PAR Immersion**

Initially, for this research, there were two separate introductory meetings, which were referred to as “immersion meetings” with the two different groups involved in this study: the Aboriginal workforce, and the contractor representatives. During these meetings, the idea of isomorphism was explained and a brief project explanation was given with regard to the project. Each group was informed of the values and expectations

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held by the other group. These immersion meetings were meant to deliberately facilitate the isomorphic process by creating an atmosphere of sharing and understanding.

A question and answer session concluded all meetings where participants were given the opportunity to ask questions, make comments, and add anything they would like clarification about. There was no instructions or suggestions to behave a certain way so as not to bias action, rather there was a simple explanation of how the other groups' values, expectations and behavior may be different than theirs.

After these initial introductory sessions, monthly meetings with each group were held, where project steering was facilitated, information was shared, and informal dialogue was encouraged. The levels and types of isomorphism that developed throughout the project were observed and recorded. Once the research period was over, members of each group were interviewed and the interview data were transcribed, and analyzed.

The isomorphic process, due to its power neutrality within the research context, assists in avoiding bias and stereotyping. The narrative and ethnographic approaches are also sensitive to Aboriginal culture, and these sensitivities we carried by researchers throughout the observations, processes and interactions. Finally, researcher(s) were a Aboriginal themselves and had significant experience, knowledge and sensitivity to both the Aboriginal and construction workforce groups.

### 5.3 Sample

The prospective sample included all members of both sample groups who were involved in the project. An open request was issued to members of each group verbally and in writing, as well as with jobsite posters, and those who responded favorably were accepted. As such, the final sample consisted of members of each of these groups.

In the Aboriginal workforce group, there were approximately fifteen eligible participants. Of these, eight (5 male and 3 female) agreed to formally take part in the study, and thus the immersion interviews. Six of these individuals also completed an exit interview, four male, and two female. One male and one female were no longer available once the project was completed, as one was let go, and another moved to a different job opportunity.

The construction industry group was larger (30) and exclusively male. The immersion meetings were done in larger groups, with three meetings of ten to twelve participants. The turnover rate for these participants was greater, in that some trades were no longer involved once the project was nearing completion. The company had multiple projects so individuals were moved to other projects. It was found that the foremen were the most easily accessible persons for the exit interviews. There were seven total exit interviews, all male, and of these five were of foremen or higher status, and 2 were labourers.

### 5.4 Data Gathering

Once the original introductory meetings had taken place and research participants were familiar with isomorphism and the purpose of the study, the researcher periodically observed and recorded in written notes the interactions between the various members of the two groups. Notes were transcribed as soon as was reasonable and were focused on the behavioral adaptation, or non-adaptation of each group to the other. The notes were then copied and stored in a secure location prior to analysis. The researcher took an ethnographic approach, and was conscious and respectful of members of each group involved. An 'emic' perspective was undertaken for a textural understanding, facilitating the observation of more subtle nuances which may be present when adopting new behavior patterns

Upon project completion, a series of semi-structured, open ended interviews were conducted with members of each group who agreed to being interviewed. A narrative, storytelling approach was encouraged, allowing for greater cultural awareness and significance (Elliot, 2005) as well as providing a more meaningful dialogue than close ended questions or a questionnaire (Fontana & Fey, 1994). Allowing the interview to take its own shape and differ from the traditional highly structured model allows for a greater expression of feeling and ease for the participant, which this researcher believes is important, particularly with the Aboriginal members being interviewed.

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Each immersion and exit interview lasted approximately 45 minutes in length, although some were relatively shorter. These interviews took place in a neutral area on the jobsite (in a vacant show suite). The interviews were recorded and later transcribed with the participant's consent. A sample interview protocol is included in Appendix A, but issues explored in each interview included primarily open ended questions and comments, with a focus to facilitate a free flow, storytelling narrative conversation in the Aboriginal context.

### **5.5 Data Analysis**

Upon completion of the data collection phase, i.e. observations and interviews, a narrative format was used to best capture the data, with the intention of maintaining consistency with the research itself. The primary intention was to provide the opportunity to offer a thick description of the research itself (Shank 2002) as well as to offer a clear and sequential detail of the events.

The interviews were then analyzed for phrases, ideas and themes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) based on an individual's comments relative to satisfaction with the project, thoughts about isomorphic activity and overall acceptance of isomorphic activity, including the potential of future isomorphic implementation. Upon review and observation of all of the interview and observational notes, as well as reflection on the project and personal observations, themes began to become apparent. The data were reviewed again, and each theme was recorded as it emerged in the analysis, and this way,



it was observed that the themes were present throughout the project and across the experiences of several participants from both subject groups.

### **5.6 Ethical Considerations**

There are some Aboriginal based considerations that the research was sensitive to. Noting that Aboriginal culture may view the non-Aboriginal group as power dominant, it was deemed important to appreciate this. As such, extra care was taken as to ensure that the Aboriginal group participants knew that this was a completely voluntary process, and that there would be no punishment or negativity associated with not taking part in the research. As well, during the interview settings, it was important to make the participants feel welcome and empowered. This was done by opening the narrative, storytelling interview style, and by thanking the participants for taking part, citing how important and appreciated their participation was.

Additionally, all participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, and had the ability to leave the study at any time throughout the process. Only the researcher and transcriptionist had access to data, and care was taken to protect the identity of all who participated.

### **Chapter VI: RESULTS**

From a general construction project standpoint, the approximately ten million dollar condominium project ran smoothly in terms of there being no major challenges, and was constructed within a reasonable two year timeframe, as well as within budget. From a research standpoint, there were significant, important data which were observed, noted, and transcribed as the research progressed. Over time, four major themes emerged, and these themes appear to act in a cyclical manner. This will now be reviewed in greater detail.

#### **6.1 Themes**

Upon review and analysis of the observations, notes, and transcribed interview data, there became evident four major themes which were consistent across both subject data sets. These themes are a) Understanding/Appreciation/Acceptance, b) New Skills/New Behavior, c) Satisfaction/Repeatability, and d) Confidence/Empowerment. When reviewing notes and transcribed data, and reflecting upon observations and interactions throughout the research period, these four recurring themes were noted through the discourse and attitudes of those involved in the project, as well as in the behaviors of the individuals, groups and organizations involved in the research. It is noteworthy that each of the themes has more than one individual component to it. It was determined that each of these “groupings” was preferable, in that the individual areas within each group are closely related to one another. The balance of this results section will look at each theme twice. First, I will explain each theme in order to properly define

and provide context for it, and explain why the groupings are relevant to that theme. Next, I will look at each individual theme in terms of the specific support that theme garnered in the research, including attitudes, behavior, and discourse, as well as organizational processes and implementations.

### **6.1. a Understanding/Appreciation/Acceptance**

The first theme which had a common thread throughout the research analysis has to do with the understanding, appreciation, and ultimately, the acceptance of different groups, namely the Aboriginal workforce (individually and collectively) and the construction industry members involved. The process of understanding was initiated through the project immersion sessions prior to the start of construction.

To understand the differences between individuals and culture, whether that culture is race related, corporate, or otherwise is a first step towards appreciation and ultimately, acceptance. (Cox and Blake, 1991). Understanding is when we see examples of individuals and groups within one of the participant groups realizing the differences of the other and becoming cognizant of them. Appreciation and acceptance are determined when we find examples of how members of one group speaks or acts favourably toward the other.

Acceptance of one group toward the other is also made explicit and measurable when there are actual behavior changes made to accommodate the other, as well as in the

adoption of behaviors from each group to the other. This is the very foundation and definition of isomorphism as viewed in this research, and will be examined further in the next section. Acceptance is also exemplified when one group expresses that they would continue into the future at their own volition with the other. This repeatability shows that acceptance of the other group has happened to the extent that they wish to further the relationship.

### **6.1. b New Skills/New Behavior**

The understanding, acceptance and appreciation of one group to another leads to the breakdown of anxiety and tentativeness, and a willingness to learn and change (Schein, 2010). As such, new skills are more willingly learned and new behavior is adopted if there is understanding and acceptance of the other group. There were many new skills and behaviors which were observed throughout and within the body of research. Behaviors and skills are closely related in that many times, the new skills that are being acquired directly result, and sometimes are, the new adopted behavior. The behavior itself, in many cases, is isomorphic in nature, and as such is the end result of the conscious isomorphism project. An example of this is when a member of the Aboriginal workforce group adopted the behavior of the general industry group which helped him/her to feel more familiar with the standard practices of a new work environment, i.e. time management, order of job operations, etc. As we will examine in greater detail, it is also the beginning of the next cycle of the dynamic isomorphic relationship. As well, the behavior is non-linear, in that members of both groups in the project experienced

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isomorphic change as related to the other group present in the project. Individuals and groups in both the Aboriginal and construction research data sets experienced and portrayed new skills and behavior which appeared to be directly related to their interaction with one another.

### **6.1.c Confidence/Empowerment**

A third theme that became evident when analyzing the research data was confidence/empowerment. This was primarily evident in the Aboriginal workforce, who gained confidence and felt empowered on individual levels throughout the project. This was largely a result of the new skills which were attained by the Aboriginal individuals, and evidenced by the new behaviors they exhibited. There was confidence shown by the construction industry as well, although this was not as explicit. The contractors over time became confident in their Aboriginal workforce workers. They also became confident in the isomorphic process itself. Some adopted new policies and procedure with respect to their current and future Aboriginal workforce. Many would argue that this policy and procedure evolution would be empowering to the company making the changes, as well as to the workforce itself.

### **6.1.d Satisfaction/Repeatability**

The final theme which became evident through the observations and data analyses of the project was that of satisfaction, and the related concept of repeatability. Members

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of both the Aboriginal workforce and the non-Aboriginal construction groups expressed explicitly their satisfaction of the planned isomorphic interaction. Many also stated explicitly that they would enter into a similar project in the future, which speaks to its success. There are also several implicit forms of support for satisfaction and repeatability found in the general discourse and behaviors observed throughout the project. This satisfaction seemed to be the result of the evolution of the confidence and empowerment. The fact that members of all groups involved expressed that they would be interested in either continuing the project dynamics into the next phase of construction in an isomorphic manner, or enter into a new project similar in nature with conscious isomorphic processes, is a direct argument for repeatability.

### **6.2 Support**

We will now look at specific examples of support for each theme area, including data from both the observations of behavior and the interviews. Examples will be illustrated with excerpts from the interviews with the participants.

#### **6.2.a Understanding/Appreciation/Acceptance Support**

The support for understanding, appreciation, and acceptance is found throughout the body of research. There is evidence of it shortly into the conscious isomorphic process in this project, when the immersion interview transcripts were reviewed and analyzed. This understanding developed into appreciation and acceptance over the course of the project, as evidenced when the interview data gathered at the conclusion of the

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project were analyzed. The ability to compare the behaviors and discourse before and after each individual's participation in the project offers an excellent way to measure all areas of this theme. I initially observed a very low level of understanding of each other's culture and values by members of both groups during the immersion meetings held at the beginning of the research project. For example, there was a very low level of comprehension by the construction members that many Aboriginal people's concept of time and being on time is different than theirs. Likewise, the Aboriginal workforce members had little knowledge as to the expectations which would be inherent in their new employment setting. Many of these individuals had little to no experience working for non-Nation entities, where the rules and expectations are less aligned to their Aboriginal culture and lifestyle.

Evidence of the construction industry's initial understanding, as well as the Aboriginal workforce's point of view was supported by individual comments made during the immersion sessions. Comparing these initial observations to data collected during the interviews at the end of the project reveals the evolution into appreciation and acceptance over time. Related observations of individuals and groups over time, as outlined in the next section, also support this first theme area.

### **6.2.a.i. Understanding/Appreciation/Acceptance Evidence in Aboriginal Population**

As noted previously, the initial immersion settings were meant to foster or "kick start" the understanding process. By outlining ways in which Aboriginal culture and

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construction workforces were different, as well as the expectations held by each group, it was intended that there would be an earlier, greater amount of understanding. This early understanding also was intended to serve as a way to avoid potential conflict rising from non-knowledge or misunderstanding between the construction industry and the Aboriginal workforce. Throughout these first immersion meetings, I saw several examples of initial understanding from members of the soon-to-be Aboriginal workforce group. We can observe an example of this in the following immersion meeting excerpt from an Aboriginal worker, which was made after the idea of a three strike policy related to timeliness and observance of rules:

“So, you mean, like, if I am late 3 times or whatever, I can be just let go, just like that? Are all outside companies like that?”

This worker is going through an initial understanding experience here, with respect to the expectations of the “outside” non-Aboriginal construction organizations. This understanding of the other group’s behavior and cultural differences is a major underpinning of the conscious isomorphic process, leading to acceptance and appreciation. Further, there were several other examples of the theme found throughout the project interview transcripts. Some other examples follow:

### **Aboriginal workforce member:**

“I understand both ways and it’s good you have both ways, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learning with each other.”

### **Aboriginal workforce member:**

“We all get along because we now know each other.”



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There are several examples of actions and discourse showing acceptance by the Aboriginal workers within the research. The fact that new behavior was adopted is evidence of acceptance. For example, in a particular interview, a member of the Aboriginal workforce commented:

“Well, I pretty much see them on a daily basis doing what they do and I just picked it up by just walking by and seeing what they’re doing. All the different tools they use and what not.”

The Aboriginal workforce members also showed a level of surprise and sometimes even concern for the new environments that they were about to enter into. They were not aware of some of the expectations held by “outside” organizations, for example three strike policies. Interestingly, the greater Aboriginal community which the workers belong to also had shown an acceptance and appreciation of the process in that it worked on an organizational level to facilitate new employee recruitment, and now continues to work with some of the same contactor groups to continue the process.

### **6.2a.i.i Understanding/Appreciation/Acceptance Evidence in Industry Population**

When the members of the construction workforce were given their immersion sessions, there were also some initial examples of understanding of Aboriginal culture. At times, questions were asked, and comments like “interesting” were made, showing that there were new understandings. There was also an element of surprise when certain elements of Aboriginal culture were explained in the context of the new employment

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setting. We can see these types of discourse from the following excerpt from these initial interviews:

**Interviewer:**

... for example, many, if not most of the new workers from this community will not have their driver's license

**Contractor:**

Oh wow!... Really?...Wow, I had no idea...

Also present in another interview setting with another contractor was the concept of time:

**Interviewer:**

Something else we have seen in the past is that members of the Aboriginal workforce often have a different concept about time than what you are used to. They will not typically be used to being punished for being late, and timeframes for starting the day, breaks, etc., are often viewed culturally as more of a guideline than a hard and fast "concrete" item..

**Contractor 1:**

really? I can see that being an issue especially with our current workers

**Contractor 2:**

Yeah, we will have to be really clear I guess

These expressions of surprise clearly show that this was new territory for these contractor groups, and this early understanding of differences was one of the primary goals of a planned isomorphic project.

Later into the project, we see examples for acceptance and appreciation from the construction group toward the Aboriginal workforce via behavior and discourse observation, as well as exit interviews. It was observed that members of the construction

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group appreciated that the new workers were able to operate effectively given their situation. In the following exit interview excerpt, we see evidence of this, as well as the fact that the contractor has befriended the Aboriginal workforce member, or at least taken the time to learn much about his personal situation:

**Contractor:**

I mean, (Individual Name), he lives with 8 other people on the reserve, has 4 young kids, takes care of his grandparents even, it's amazing and impressive that he is going this route to better his and his family's life in the future"

The theme of understanding, appreciation and acceptance all lead to the next "step" in the cycle, which are new skills and behaviors which support these areas of understanding.

### **6.2.b New Skills/ Behavior Support**

It is in this theme category that we see the most explicit examples of isomorphism found in the project. The support for new skills and behavior was found throughout the body of research. With respect to skill attainment and development, we see several examples of new skills being honed by the Aboriginal workforce. Many of these workers had never been in a construction environment before, and new skill development came by way of learning how to use a new tool or the "ways" of a certain trade. Some also learned interpersonal and communication skills. Other "soft" skills like personnel management, inventory control and timesheet preparation were also developed, and

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assisted some as they moved up the ranks into a supervisory role. These new skills sometimes led to the adoption of new behavior. In other instances, the new behavior was observed to happen more organically, over the course of the project. The construction industry members also picked up some new skills which could be classified as behaviors. Many of these new skills/behaviors had to do with facilitating the workplace environment to better attract and retain their new Aboriginal workers. Specific examples of this theme follow in the next two sections.

### **6.2.b.i New Skills/Behavior Evidence in Aboriginal Population**

There were many new skills and behaviors which were attained by members of the Aboriginal members who participated in this research. The easiest of these to observe and measure were the physical skills and related behavior learned by these individuals. Members of the workforce were placed into several different trade areas, and were observed to learn specific skills in areas including plumbing, sheet metal, mechanical, electrical, general labor, framing, carpentry, roofing, siding, excavating, surveying, finishing, painting, and landscaping. Many of these individuals elected to join the company and /or trade area in which they worked and then entered into formal journeyman training. At least one of the individuals was planning on forming her own business at the project's conclusion. Here are two examples of Aboriginal workforce members speaking in the exit interview regarding new skills which were attained within the project parameters:

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### **Aboriginal Workforce Member:**

I've learned a lot about most of the stuff like plumbing and drywall... also flooring

### **Interviewer:**

so you felt like the habits and skills were improved?

### **Aboriginal Workforce Member:**

Ya, people got more used to like, instead of like going to ask a supervisor. Like they kinda know a lot more than when we started. They were all like going to you or a supervisor to go see what to do, but now they just kinda pick it up....

There were also several observed examples of behavior and skills which were related to interpersonal relations involved in new construction and the more formal industry setting. This included several examples of the Aboriginal workforce members attaining and adopting more formal behavior, as well as skills and behavior which allowed them to manage others.

A specific example of this is found in the following exit interview, where a new workforce member explains the new skillset he learned which allowed him to become a manager.

### **Aboriginal workforce member:**

Like I have to know what I am doing, like the (management) task that I am supposed to do... working with the other trades and them having the stuff they need, I am also on top of that now, I have to make sure the other guys are working too...

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Likewise, this example of an Aboriginal worker who speaks about having the new confidence to interact with members of the construction industry in a different discipline:

### **Aboriginal workforce member:**

I guess it has to be about the attitude and which way you talk to them or like getting to know them...

We also saw the behavioral shift toward industry norms like getting to work in a timely manner, as well as an adoption of a more hierarchical perspective in the work environment, as seen when the Aboriginal workforce members learned the “chain of command” for the company they started working for, i.e. floor supervisor, foreman, superintendent.

### **6.2. b.ii. New Skills/Behavior Evidence in Industry Population**

The new skills and behavior observed throughout this research were certainly not limited to the Aboriginal workforce members. The construction industry members made up of individual contractors and project managers also exhibited an abundance of isomorphic behavior throughout.

Shortly after the immersion setting, several contractors implemented their own orientation for the Aboriginal workforce members they were hiring for the project, which is not the typical practice with other construction projects. This gesture toward acknowledging and supporting the cultural differences was a large step toward improving

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the future relationship between the groups, and was in itself an example of isomorphic behavior. The contractors soon learned that several members would have a hard time finding and maintaining a reliable means to commute to and from the reserve or from home to the jobsite. This struggle to find a reliable means of transport to and from work can be seen from the following interview excerpts:

**Aboriginal workforce member:**

Rides are always hard to get... lots of people don't have a car or license, everybody always shares rides...

**Aboriginal workforce member:**

Ya... rides are hard to get.

A rideshare system was set up in the case of some contractor companies. In others, workers who drove others were compensated. In still other cases, workers themselves made arrangements to ensure that they were able to arrive to work in a reliable and timely manner. Each of these examples is indicative of an isomorphic behavioral shift. We also see the multidirectional isomorphic nature of this project in this specific example.

**Contractor:**

The rideshare program definitely made a difference for the workers and the job. Ensuring guys make it to work on time is huge...

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Another specific example of isomorphism observed through new behaviors in the industry members of the project research was in the adoption of weekend and evening shifts for the Aboriginal workforce. Many of the healthy members of the Aboriginal community are expected to drive for others, oftentimes for elders who needed medical assistance, to go to the hospital or doctor appointments. Most of these types of errands and assistance were needed during “regular” business hours. At least two of the contractor groups altered their corporate policy to extend to the Aboriginal members the ability to swap their “normal” daytime hours with weekend or evening shifts. This behavioral shift was important because it showed cultural sensitivity, and at the same time allowed the contractors the availability of their workforce to complete their contractual requirements. As a result, some non-Aboriginal workforce members also took advantage of the new corporate policy and benefitted because the flexibility allowed them to meet other personal and family goals without having to suffer financially.

Other skills and behavior observed within the contractor data set of this research were the implementation of an Aboriginal handbook for a contractor, new recruiting and marketing initiatives aimed at recruiting and retaining Aboriginal workers, new policies for grieving which were cognizant of Aboriginal culture, and the inclusion of Aboriginally sensitive language in corporate material.

### **6.2.c Confidence/Empowerment Support**

A third theme that is evident within the research relates to the areas of confidence and empowerment. Although more implicit, this theme area is no less important than the



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more explicit and measurable areas of new skills and behavior. The attainment and incremental increase of confidence and the related empowerment of individuals and groups/organizations are related and often follow the new skills and behaviors that were experienced and observed. The confidence and empowerment of the Aboriginal workforce members were largely evidenced through the observed behavior of individuals in the work setting over time. The construction industry confidence was observed by way of increased confidence in the workforce members as well as in the process itself. The confidence is also measurable for this industry group in terms of the retention and satisfaction of the workers involved with and/or employed by them. Both groups portrayed empowerment in that their behavior was such that the members of one group supported the other and wished to foster an environment to move the isomorphic relationship forward, evolving into future interactions.

### **6.2.c.i Confidence/Empowerment Evidence in Aboriginal Population**

The confidence within the Aboriginal workforce was evidenced in the discourse and the behavioral observations within the research project. Although not as explicit as in the new skills and behavior observed in this group, the confidence and empowerment theme is a powerful example of isomorphic activity, and has far reaching implications, as we will examine in later sections.

A major indicator in the confidence felt by the Aboriginal workforce group was in the frequency of certain discourse. Specifically, it was observed that members of the

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Aboriginal workforce spent more time speaking about the project, as the project progressed, over time. For example, the Aboriginal workforce were observed speaking about the job and its goals and specific experiences they were having during their lunch breaks more often as the project progressed. At first there was little to no discourse of this nature during breaks. In addition, members of this workforce group spent more time speaking about their project-related opinions and sharing them with others within their own group as well as the contractor group, as the project progressed. This is significant in Aboriginal culture, where power often has a negative connotation (Smith, 2007). The move toward more leadership-oriented discourse is a significant example of isomorphism within this research project whereby the Aboriginal workforce began to adopt more of the behavior of their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

This concept of leadership and confidence was supported by many explicit examples of increased responsibility for members of the Aboriginal workforce within the project. This responsibility was observed by the added duties which were prescribed to members of the Aboriginal workers, which included managing others, as well as making spending and resource allocation decisions. It was further exemplified by the multiple promotions which were granted to this group, including multiple management positions. Of the six Aboriginal workforce participants who completed the exit interviews, four were promoted to a higher position. Other members of the Aboriginal workforce who did not participate in the research also received promotions as well. We see some important discourse as to the importance (and surprise) of the leadership and management within this research in the following excerpts from the interview transcriptions:

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### **Interviewer:**

So, you are now a manager on this project?

### **Aboriginal workforce member:**

Yes, I never thought I could be a boss out here. I was just looking for good work, but now I have five or six (workers) under me...

And

### **Aboriginal workforce member:**

Now I am in charge of way more things, like timecards and where people go, working with all the trades, bosses even.

Other examples of the theme components of confidence and empowerment experienced and observed with regard to the Aboriginal workforce members of this research project are the explicit promotional titles granted to these individuals (i.e. project manager, construction manager, team leader), and the explicit monetary amounts attached to these promotions as well as the new titles granted to them. As well, there was a measurable increase in the number of individuals “under” their supervisory control and responsibility, which increased over time and over the course of the project.

The empowerment experienced by these individuals who gained increased levels of responsibility, title, or salary is more implicit, but certainly observable within the project. There were increased levels of pride and satisfaction felt by these individuals, evidenced by the discourse and in observed actions, such as the way that workplace tools and overall cleanliness became more of a priority as the project went on. Further, the fact that these individuals were more likely to continue on with their respective new

employers, or to enter into another similar situation, suggests confidence and empowerment in the process and isomorphic environment.

### **6.2.c.ii Confidence/Empowerment Evidence in Industry Population**

Some of the confidence and empowerment examples exuded by the construction industry research population have already been alluded to in the previous section. The fact that there were so many promotions, raises, and increases in responsibility for the Aboriginal workforce members is a clear indication that there was confidence felt by the construction industry members themselves toward the new workers, based on their productivity, behavior, and potential. An example of the confidence felt by the members of industry can be seen on the following excerpt, where the contractor member speaks of a recent promotion:

#### **Contractor member:**

We feel really good about being able to promote (Name). She has worked as hard as anyone, and really catches on. We are looking at having her apprenticed.

In addition to the confidence shown above relating to the measurable areas of salary, title, and promotions of the Aboriginal workforce by the member construction industry members, there were other examples of confidence and empowerment observed. Another example is in the overall acceptance and confidence in the process, in other words, the isomorphic type of process which was taking place. Members of the construction industry introduced new policy, procedure and processes as they related to

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the recruitment and retention of new employees (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal). This acceptance and fostering of change is a strong indicator of confidence of the process, encouragement that the process is working and that positive change is being experienced.

Some of the members of the construction industry shared their successes with other industry members who were looking for new ways to expand their workforce. In at least one case, one trade company involved in the project told another company that they were having success with this project, and put them in touch with myself to help them recruit from the Aboriginal workforce pool. As well, at least one of these trades companies spoke of its successes relative to recruitment and relations with their Aboriginal “partners” in a public setting which was in a public Aboriginal employment and recruitment setting. This is a strong indication that the workforce member experienced confidence and empowerment in the isomorphic process.

### **6.2.d Satisfaction/Repeatability Support**

The final theme that was observed within the project research was that of satisfaction, and the related concept of repeatability. There is an implied causality between satisfaction and repeatability. If one is satisfied with a project, job, worker, there is a greater chance that one would want to enter into another similar situation, or continue with the current one. Likewise, it is reasonable to believe that when a certain course of action or project is repeated, that satisfaction is present. There were several examples of

both implied and specified satisfaction experienced by both the Aboriginal and industry project members. The concept of repeatability was also observed in both groups.

### **6.2di Satisfaction/Repeatability Evidence in Aboriginal Population**

The strongest examples to observe and measure with respect to the satisfaction theme are found within the transcripts from the exit interview sessions. There are several examples of the Aboriginal workforce members stating varying levels of satisfaction. This satisfaction came in many forms, including the satisfaction felt by learning new trade knowledge, gaining the respect of their peers and members of the construction group, as well as the satisfaction that comes from obtaining incentive-type goals like salary increase and promotions. It is interesting that some aspects of the other themes were actually explicitly stated by members of the Aboriginal group as being the cause for their satisfaction. These included feeling accepted and understood by members of the other group, as well as learning new skills and feeling empowered. The following excerpts offer some clear examples of this:

#### **Aboriginal workforce member:**

Next time I would just do what I knew the boss wanted. I would know what I needed to do without being told... yes, I would do a program like this again

#### **Aboriginal workforce member:**

...I would like to be a part of it...I'd say I had the experience I wanted... how I act at work, like I, three or four months ago if it was the same me, like I would have been an alcoholic

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In examining notes from observational evidence, it was also evident that the level of satisfaction increased over time. Members of the Aboriginal workforce were observed to be more content and happy in their work as the project progressed. The types of discourse were less stressful and more “playful” as the project went on, demonstrating that they felt more comfortable and empowered in the work setting.

The related theme of repeatability is also clearly observed by the Aboriginal workforce. In the exit interviews, there was an almost unanimous consensus when the individuals were asked separately whether they would engage into a similar situation. We see examples of their affirmation of this in the following:

**Aboriginal workforce member:**

It's a really good experience...I think you guys are doing a good job and more or less that, like the whole thing basically. Even what you're doing practically and stuff like that and I don't know if you're trying to find solutions or better working environment between First Nations and non-First Nations people, it's positive, it's a positive outcome.

**Aboriginal workforce member:**

I'm pretty pleased with it. I'm going to keep working with this company.

Indeed, by the time the exit interviews were being conducted, many of the workers and their respective employers had agreed to continue their relationship into the future, and many of these individuals are still employed by the contractors who originally entered into the isomorphic process with them. Of the six members who completed the exit interviews, four were continuing on with their companies, one in an apprentice

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capacity. Many other Aboriginal workforce members not taking part in the interviews were also retained by their companies, as I was informed by those companies in verbal discussions. The concept of satisfaction and repeatability can also be observed and measured when we see examples of the Aboriginal workforce members recruiting others into the isomorphic process, and being advocates of it. This happened several times throughout the project, as workers would bring another recruit onto the jobsite for an interview, or pass along a number of someone that they had spoken to about the opportunity.

### **6.2.d.ii. Satisfaction/Repeatability Support in Industry Population**

The satisfaction and repeatability concepts were also observed within the industry population throughout the project. Similar statements were made by members of the contractor group during the exit interviews regarding the willingness and intention to continue with similar workforce relationships with Aboriginal persons into the future. Examples of this are:

#### **Contractor:**

We plan on keeping some of these guys on for sure! In fact a couple of the boys have already put time in on our other jobsite in town..... Making sure our guys as well as them understand the differences in the way you explained them originally makes it easier for sure...

It is important to note that this contractor also asked if there was a “handout or handbook” available.



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### **Interviewer:**

Would you be interested in being involved in this type of project again, where Aboriginal workers are made available and the relationships are fostered in the same way?

### **Contractor:**

Oh, for sure! In fact we are continuing our “rideshare” program for them, as well as recruiting directly with their band for other employees for other jobs”

The fact that many of the contractor companies were planning on keeping many of the Aboriginal workforce members employed is a great argument for satisfaction and repeatability. The inclusion of Aboriginal content in corporate handbooks, implementing Aboriginal friendly processes and codes of conduct, recruitment initiatives and praise for the overall process and outcomes are all strong support for the repeatability and satisfaction felt by this construction industry group.

### **Summary**

The conscious isomorphic project that was undertaken was initiated by immersion interviews with both the Aboriginal workforce and contractor groups. After this point, specific isomorphism was observed, as related above. This isomorphism appeared to evolve over the course of the project into specific themes which appeared to follow one another in a cyclical fashion, as will be outlined in the next chapter. In this section, each of these themes has been discussed in detail, and supported by specific examples as well as specific excerpts taken from exit interview data taken at the end of the project.

### **Chapter VII: DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

#### **7.1 Discussion Overview**

In the previous section we examined several themes which emerged from the data collected from this designed isomorphic event, and which were exhibited by individual members of both research group sets, as well as by the groups themselves. We found that members of both groups experienced understanding, appreciation and acceptance by and for the other group. We found that new skills and behavior were observed by each group, that each group experienced confidence and empowerment as a result of the projects, and that members of both groups expressed levels of satisfaction with respect to the project and its isomorphic design. Finally, we found that many members of both groups would enter into a similar setting, and indeed, that some already had. This repeatability was a second component of the last theme, along with satisfaction.

In terms of this research, the interaction between members of both groups could help facilitate the growth of the on-reserve housing sector by bringing more expertise into the community through strategic partnerships and the accumulation of trades and construction knowledge for on-reserve members. It could serve to increase the value and efficiency of the housing provision with this “sharing of ways”. As well, it can create a means of economic benefit and sustainability, whereby those Aboriginal individuals gaining knowledge and expertise can use their newfound talent, create businesses of their own, and ultimately share their own knowledge.

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These four themes, when considered individually show strong evidence for positive outcomes in designed isomorphic projects. They show strong support for work already done in this area linking institutional and culture theories (Kondra & Hurst, 2009), and to previous work in the area of project-specific isomorphism with positive outcomes (Prue & Devine, 2012). When considered cumulatively, there appear to be potential relationships between all of the themes observed, and to a potentially self-perpetuating process in terms of Aboriginal workers and non-Aboriginal employers working together. Further, this is a trend which may have the ability to be larger than the sum of its parts, as will be discussed in the following section. It appears that each theme provides a base foundation for the next, and once completed, the cycle maintains enough momentum to begin again.

The balance of this section will consist of a discussion of the theme and cycle process noted above. This will be followed by an implications section taking a macro view as to previous and current research in the areas of the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal workplace, and new employee retention, theme and cycle related implications, and theoretical underpinnings.

### **7.1.a Theme and Cycle Related Discussion**

Upon examination, review, and reflection of the four common themes which became evident throughout this research project, a very interesting revelation took place. Each one of the four themes not only appeared related and interdependent, but each of the

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themes seemed to serve as a foundation, or basis of the next. The initial immersion settings, which are a distinct and inherent part of this designed isomorphic research appear to act as the catalyst of the first theme area(s) of understanding, appreciation and acceptance, thus laying the foundation for the other themes. The new behaviors and skills which were learned, as well as the confidence and empowerment of individuals involved in the research project appear to follow the initial acceptance of the other group as well as the new situation. Those members of the Aboriginal workforce who did not experience the understanding and acceptance of the other group were observed to be less likely to move to these new theme areas. One of the two Aboriginal workforce members who did not make it to the exit interview was constantly late and did not evolve to the new skills/behavior level.

Once there was distinct “traditional” isomorphic activity taking place, namely the shifting of attitudes and behaviors from one group to the other (second theme area), there seemed to be an increased sense of confidence and empowerment. This confidence was experienced not only on individual levels, but also in the process itself, as (describe an instance where more confidence was exhibited in the process). As the process moved forward, this confidence and empowerment, mixed with the ongoing isomorphism and acceptance, culminated into an overall project view which was perceived as being satisfactory, and which members of each group would repeat.

Along with the “foundational” concept explained above, where each theme area seems to prepare and provide support for the next, or at least assist it in its development,

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there also appears to be a “circular” nature to the process. It appears that the cycle itself is somewhat self-perpetuating, in that the cycle begins again after the repeatability/satisfaction process has been experienced. In other words, individuals and groups experience something that they wish to be ongoing, and thus a new level of acceptance and understanding is experienced, along with other new potential skills, behaviors and attitudes. Further, the cycle appears not only to be self-perpetuating, but also one that grows larger in scope as the cycle continues. For example, in the next “cycle,” along with the new and greater level of skills and behavior, more people and companies can potentially be involved in the process, i.e. a snowball effect. In this specific project, we observed a very high level of retention (75%) for the individual Aboriginal workforce as compared to a retention rate of under 50%, as experienced by myself in previous projects involving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups.

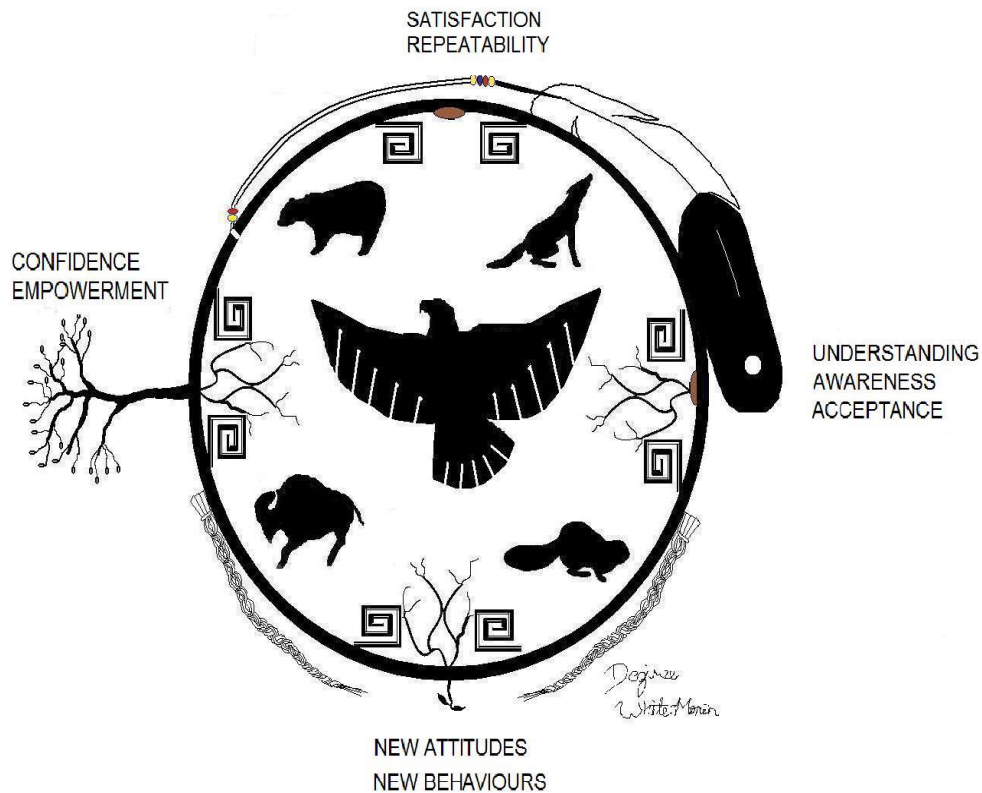
It is noteworthy that the retention levels were increasing over time, due to workforce members speaking favorably and assisting in recruiting others. Likewise, the construction industry groups were also increasing their recruitment of Aboriginal workers, as well as bringing other construction industry members into the “cycle”. This was happening primarily when the construction industry members spoke favourably of their experiences and let others know that this type of process was working well for them in terms of worker attainment, retention, and satisfaction.

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Measuring the movements and interaction between theme areas was not part of the scope of this research, but important knowledge could be garnered from future research examining the inter-dynamics of these areas in a similar study.

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## 7.1.b Aboriginally Directed Pictorial Cyclical Representation



### DESCRIPTION OF EACH SYMBOL

	Satisfaction/Repeatability -Seed is planted (represents idea)		-Wolves live within a Society with each individual contributing to a whole
	Understanding, Awareness and Acceptance -Idea grows roots		-Beavers are diligent and adapt their environment for optimal results
	New Attitudes and New Behaviors -Continues to grow/sprouts		-Buffalo are confident and courageous creatures; they represent abundance
	Confidence/Empowerment -Grows into a Tree (working system)		-Bears represent strength, wisdom and leadership
			-Eagles are symbolic for vision and achievement
	Symbol of continuity		

\*\* The Sweetgrass braids are balanced and signify the strength in unity of people, ideas, etc

\*\*\*The feather is symbolic of celebration of success/victory

### **7.1.c Discussion Relative to Previous Research**

Isomorphism can be defined as the adoption of attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of one group from another. Historically, the focus of these changes has been of the less dominant group changing to be more like the more dominant group (institutional theory). In the retrospective research “parent” study done in the area of Aboriginal workforce and construction industry members (Prue and Devine, 2012), it was found that the isomorphism observed was non-dominant in that members of both groups experienced isomorphism. The term “non-linear isomorphism” was coined to explain this phenomenon.

For the current research, another term was created to explain isomorphism which was planned and intended to help facilitate the positive isomorphic process, the term being “conscious isomorphism.” The current conscious isomorphic research project demonstrated that non-linear isomorphism was again present, and likely more prevalent in the consciously prepared isomorphic case. In fact, there were examples of isomorphism in both primary research groups, the Aboriginal workforce and the construction trades, in each of the four themes which were observed. The previous section examined these in detail.

In much of the literature on isomorphism, there are three types which are often delineated; coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism (Mizruchi & Fein, 1999). This



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body of research does not focus on each of these in detail, but it is important to note that there were examples of all three of these types of isomorphism felt by both groups, which is another strong argument for the existence of the more non-dominant non-linear isomorphism. We will now look at a brief example of each within the research.

### Mimetic:

Mimetic Isomorphism is when members of one group mimic the attitudes and behaviors of the other. In this research, we observed individuals from the Aboriginal workforce group act in a manner similar to the construction industry members when they observed how the industry members acted in terms of how they managed their time during the days with respect to where they went for lunch, times of breaks, and how to deal with management. Members of the industry exhibited mimetic isomorphism when they aligned their recruiting policies with those in place within the Aboriginal community.

### Normative:

Normative isomorphism occurs when members of one group adapt their behavior and/or attitudes to align with those more common in their new situation. Aboriginal workers did this when they adopted the workday and policies in place within their new environment. Industry member's normative examples included when they adjusted their

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policy to align with more “normal” Aboriginal standards and values, i.e. when they allowed for work hours which were normally outside of their historical parameters.

Coercive:

Coercive isomorphism is experienced when changes are made due to rewards and/or punishments associated with the behavior modifications. Aboriginal workforce examples of this are adhering to a three-strike policy and management opportunities related to performance. An industry example was when they joined the “hire and train local” program in order to gain an advantage for project contracts.

Previous research in the area of isomorphism was supportive of the pluralism of institutional and culture theories. The retrospective case study (Prue and Devine, 2012) was supportive of this in that isomorphism was shown to be present. The current study extends this research, in that isomorphism was designed, observed and measured in detail herein.

Another finding in the previous research (Prue and Devine, 2012) was that isomorphic projects could be an effective and non-dominant method in which aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups could work together to create housing for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in project settings, and in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

communication, interactions and relationships in general. There is strong evidence found in the current research to support this.

Finally, in the retrospective isomorphic study (Prue and Devine, 2012), it was posited that isomorphism could be a means by which to facilitate workers into a new workforce environment. Within this current research project there appears to be clear evidence that using a conscious, designed isomorphic approach can be an effective way to attract, retain, and satisfy minority workers in a new and unfamiliar environment. In fact, there is evidence that this approach can be helpful not only for the non-dominant new worker, but for the dominant culture (corporate customer) as well.

### **7.2 Implications of the Research**

The implications of this research cover quite a large range of interest areas. What started as a focused topic area (Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships in a housing construction environment) has evolved into a much more general and far-reaching study. Implications range from the individual to group and organizational dynamics, as well as across different general research areas not contemplated within the original scope of study. The research findings show an implied support for previous theoretical linkages between institutional and culture theory, evidenced by cross-cultural shared isomorphic experiences by members of the construction trades and Aboriginal groups and members.

We will now look at specific topic areas affected by this research study.

### **7.2.a Implications to Isomorphism in General**

The primary implication of the research with respect to the concept of isomorphism and the isomorphic process is that it contains evidence that the process can be consciously designed and implemented, a term that has been named conscious isomorphism. If this process can be shown as repeatable and reliable, there are other implications related to this research, as we will examine below. There could be other potential implications as well in other disciplines where the fostering of alignments and relationships between different groups and individuals is a common goal shared by all parties.

Another important implication of the isomorphic process within the research is in its power neutrality. Similar to the case study upon which this research was based, members of all groups involved took on attitudes and behaviors which were alike, or at least sensitive, to the needs and values of the other. This concept has been termed non-linear isomorphism. This concept and potential implementations of it may be important, in that it may be well suited for environments and projects where there is a sensitivity to power, and where it is a goal for the relationship between groups to be non-dominant or power neutral. Examples of this may be where there is a minority group involved, or when there are other outstanding power or dominant issues, or perhaps where there has been a power related wrongdoing which is being attended to, and reparation is being sought.

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Another isomorphism related implication is that the design can be effective; that isomorphism can be planned. As has been documented, there was an abundance of isomorphism examples observed within this project, which implies that isomorphism as a term and a process is valid. Consequently, there may be much more to learn about and explore in the arena.

### **7.2.b Implications Regarding New Theme and Cycle Findings**

One implication with regard to these new concepts is that if they are shown to be inherent and repeatable components of conscious isomorphism, support may be offered to the process in that there are actual measurable isomorphic “steps” with each supportive of another. This would lend strength to the conscious and nonlinear concepts of isomorphism specifically as well as offering a meaningful way in which to measure and explain future work.

These newly “uncovered”, explicitly stated themes and the related cycle could be a means by which to explain, implement, and measure the perhaps more traditional, isomorphism process. Observation and interaction between theme areas and the cycle they create were not part of the scope of this research, but important knowledge could be garnered from examining the inter-dynamics of these areas in other research studies. We have been able to not only observe isomorphism in both groups (non-linear), but the isomorphism appears to be “expanding” within this cyclic process.

### **7.2.c Implications for Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Groups**

There is evidence that the conscious isomorphic model can be used for Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships in a construction setting. The fact that non-linear isomorphism was observed and reported by members of the Aboriginal workforce in addition to members of the construction group is important when we use a perspective that intends to be non-dominant, and sensitive to Aboriginal culture. A major implication of the research is that conscious isomorphism may be an effective means by which to foster Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships in other settings, such as in political, negotiation, and educational settings. A further and more general implication may be to extend the process and its sensitivity based perspective to other minority and non-dominant groups.

### **7.2.d Implications for Employee-Employer Relationships**

There is evidence that this model could be used to attract, satisfy, motivate and retain perspective employees. This has far-reaching implications in an environment where organizations are continually striving to meet their workforce needs (McCuiston, Woolridge & Pierce, 2004). It also represents a win-win scenario, where positive outcomes can be experienced by both employers and their prospective future employees. The non-linearity of this isomorphic process represents a non-dominant sensitivity which could be attractive to new employees who may be anxious in new work environments where different cultural and corporate norms are presented. It could also offer employers

a competitive advantage when recruiting. Most importantly, members of both groups can be enriched through the process of understanding and positively adapting to accommodate the other while at the same time benefitting themselves.

### **7.3 Limitations of the Research**

As with all research, there are limitations in this study that are outlined below. First, how do we know that these types of themes would not happen in a non-designed isomorphic study? Or to a lesser-or greater extent? Future work could entail a comparison of two similar projects, one using conscious isomorphism and the other acting as a control. Second, we make the assumption that isomorphism is good in that it is sensitive to the Aboriginal culture and takes a mostly non-dominant form when it is multi-directional, but can or should this be quantified?

Additional limitations include:

- The retrospective case study from the past project noted in this proposal - observations and noted isomorphic activity were all derived from memory thus hampering the ability to verify the results.
- The scope of the retrospective case study and plans for the current study are both small data samples.
- This paper relies upon previous work that links institutional processes at an intra-organizational level (Kondra & Hurst, 2009), whereas the retrospective case study and current research deals with institutional processes at an inter-organizational level. The

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assumption is that isomorphic processes will behave similarly whether they are within one organization or between different organizations.

- The Halo effect draws on writings in psychology, sociology and organizational behavior to develop a conceptual framework that specifies how positive emotion helps employees obtain favorable outcomes at work. Both feeling and expressing positive emotions on the job have favorable consequences on: (1) employees, independent of their relationships with others (e.g., greater persistence), (2) reactions of others to employees (e.g., “halo,” or overgeneralization to other desirable traits), and (3) reactions of employees to others (e.g., helping others). These three sets of intervening processes are proposed, in turn, to lead to work achievement, job enrichment and a higher quality social context. It is possible that a halo effect occurred in the present research.

In my retrospective case study I proposed the query – “What if the Millennium Project had started out by having the ‘cultural differentiation’ meetings at the outset?” I hypothesized that homogenization would likely happen faster which would translate into a more efficient project overall. What seemed to be a hindrance in my previous case study research, I could now conceivably execute in the proposed research outlined in this paper. However, factoring in the issues of power implications also carries weight against fully objective findings. Therefore, potential researcher bias will be important to acknowledge and mitigate.



### **Chapter VIII: CONCLUSIONS**

#### **8.1 Summary**

This research body of work incorporated a conscious isomorphic project event, observing and analyzing its effects in the context of previous research done in the area which was both theoretical (Kondra & Hurst, 2009) and practical (Prue & Devine, 2012). The previous work examined isomorphism as a way to link institutional and culture theories, and provided evidence that isomorphism was effectively taking place in a housing construction environment where there were members of an Aboriginal workforce working with members of the construction industry. This isomorphism was retrospectively observed to have some potentially meaningful implications. Some of these implications were that isomorphism may be a way to facilitate positive Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships, offer a way to effectively attract, manage, maintain, and satisfy new workers in an unfamiliar environment, and that isomorphism may offer a way to achieve these goals in a non-dominant (non-linear) manner, which is significant when dealing with minority and/or sensitive environments.

This current research intended to expand on the case study noted above by creating a conscious isomorphic event (project), where the isomorphic process was facilitated by explaining the differences between groups in terms of culture, expectations, and potential challenges and opportunities to one another in immersion meetings at the projects outset. It was hypothesized that this would help create an environment where

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individuals and groups could learn about and from one another, and thus facilitate the isomorphic process.

Research subjects were accepted on a voluntary basis. The participants were observed throughout the project in terms of their behavior and discourse, and notes were taken throughout the project. In addition, there were exit interviews with all available participants. These notes and interviews were transcribed and examined. Upon examination of these data and analysis of the project, four recurring themes became evident. These themes were recognized after observing several different examples of discourse, behavior, and attitudes which fell into each category. Each theme category also held examples from both data set groups, i.e. Aboriginal workforce and construction industry. The four theme areas are: 1) Understanding/Acceptance/Appreciation, 2) New Skills/Behavior, 3) Confidence/Empowerment, and 4) Satisfaction/Repeatability. It was observed that there was non-linear isomorphic activity within each of these theme areas.

After examination and reflection of the four themes, it became evident that in addition to the individual themes, the themes themselves were interrelated. They had an effect upon one another, and in fact, are cyclical in nature, each one acting as a foundation to the next. In addition, the cycle is not closed, but has a perpetual nature to it, with a tendency to start over again. Finally, the “isomorphic cycle” appears not only to be perpetual in nature, but also to enlarge with each cycle, creating a snowball effect. An Aboriginally significant depiction of this cycle has been created in order to offer a visual depiction of the process.

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There are several implications which were highlighted upon observing the behavior and discourse over the course of the project, as well as from examining the themes and cycles noted above. There appears to be support that conscious isomorphism can be effectively implemented to facilitate a non-dominant relationship and mutually beneficial relationship between different individuals and groups within a new setting, thus addressing power relationships that may be present.

There are also many implications as we look at ways in which this conscious isomorphism can be both general and specific. Specifically, there is support for the enhanced relationships between Aboriginal and industry groups working together in a residential housing construction setting. This can likely be generalized to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships in other settings, from political to Aboriginal based governmental initiatives like land claims and reparation. Also there may be the ability to generalize to minority groups when dealing with new and unfamiliar groups and/or settings. The conscious isomorphic process noted herein may also be generalized to Aboriginal individuals going into any type of new situation where their culture may not fully be understood or appreciated. Perhaps the most general (and far reaching) implication of this research is that conscious isomorphism could be a means to attract, motivate, retain and satisfy employees in a manner which benefits both the new individuals as well as the employer in a sensitive, non-dominant fashion.

A final implication arising from the newly discovered themes and cyclical behaviors is that they may provide a new and effective way to measure and explain isomorphism which may be present in other situations.

### **8.2 Potential Future Research Directions**

There are several potential research directions which could be undertaken when reviewing and reflecting upon this consciously designed and administered isomorphic approach. Over the course of the research process, the scope of the outcomes broadened significantly, as we have seen. Not only was there a broadening in the original topic area of the isomorphic relationships between the Aboriginal workforce and the Industry participants, there was also a broadening of actual topic areas when we think about calls for future research. Within the realm of isomorphism, the broadening of the scope is related to the “uncovering” of the theme and cycle concepts within the conscious isomorphic process. We will look at the potential of future research in areas that are isomorphism related, conscious isomorphic project related, and new concepts, i.e. theme/cycle related. There was also a broadening of scope with respect to the participant groups themselves, as the research may be meaningful to a broader and different scope of participants and environments. We will look at the potential of future research for widening of the groups and environments. The research also may have implications on the new (but related) topic of employee/employer relationships. Finally, we will look at future research which may be important with respect to creating a framework and standardization for this new process which may make conscious isomorphism more effective, measurable, and repeatable.

### **Isomorphism Related**

The research and reporting within this dissertation are based largely on the concept of isomorphism, which in general terms is the adoption of behaviors and attitudes from individuals or groups from one data set of another, and/or vice versa (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Most of the isomorphic processes and examples which exist in past academic literature focus on the adoption of behavior and attitudes of the non-dominant, new, and/or “weaker” group in an environment. This current research is supportive of a previous case study (Prue & Devine, 2012), in that isomorphism can and does occur by both the dominant and non-dominant groups simultaneously. This is important if there is a requirement, intent, or wish for sensitivity in a new setting. The term for this type of non-dominant isomorphism which is occurring in “both” ways, i.e. from each group to the other, has been coined as “non-linear isomorphism”. Future work in this area could be meaningful when and where the sensitivities noted above are deemed important.

Existing research and discourse in the area of isomorphism has been largely theoretical and observational. This author has been unable to find significant literature explaining or empirically analyzing isomorphic processes which are designed or planned. As such, the term “conscious isomorphism” is used to describe an event where the isomorphic process can be consciously planned, administered, observed, and quantitatively measured. If it is found that the isomorphic process can be controlled and is effective, there may be some far-reaching implications, as we have reviewed. Future

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research in this area could be important in measuring the repeatability and support for the current findings.

### **Conscious Isomorphic Project Related**

Within the area of actual consciously prepared isomorphic events or projects, future research could be meaningful for a number of reasons. First, it would show the support or lack thereof for the current research and thus provide some much-needed repeatability, or reliability benchmarking. There is no explicitly conscious isomorphic academic reporting to date, so adding to this body of knowledge will be important. Next, there are some far reaching implications of the present research. Future research may offer a means by which to measure and compare conscious isomorphic events across disciplines and research areas. Finally, it will offer a means by which to evolve and offer support or non-support for the new and expanded subject areas posited within the research. As well, there are completely different and new settings in which consciously designed isomorphism could be administered (e.g. educational, governmental), which could certainly yield some interesting results in terms of this research and reporting.

### **New Concepts**

This consciously administered isomorphic project yielded some new concepts. One of these is that there appear to be certain themes that were present in both groups within the research and isomorphic process. Additionally, it appears that these themes are

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related to one another, and foundational to one another. Further, it appears that the themes are cyclical in nature.

Further research conducting conscious isomorphic events may show whether these themes are common and repeatable. Likewise, there could be valuable insight garnered by future research that examines whether the themes act in the same way, in that they are foundational, interrelated, and cyclical in nature. A recurring isomorphic process that can not only be designed and implemented, but also follow a measurable process, could be meaningful and useful in various environments where different groups are present. Likewise, research showing that these themes are not common or repeatable would be important. We do not know whether this project is an anomaly. It would also be significant to look at the themes noted herein and compare them against previous examples of isomorphism to determine whether the same themes/cycle appear to have taken place.

### **Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal Relationships**

This current body of isomorphic-based research demonstrates that there are benefits to both the Aboriginal workforce and the non-Aboriginal construction groups when there are isomorphic changes experienced by both groups. This non-linear, shared experience is supportive and sensitive in both non-dominant and minority situations. As such, it would be meaningful to continue isomorphic research for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups in settings similar and different to the one herein, such as in educational or health endeavors. There could be far reaching implications if it was shown

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that conscious isomorphism could assist in a manner which was sensitive in the areas of both culture and power. This concept could perhaps also be broadened to all minority and/or non-power dominant groups in general.

### **Employee/Employer Relationships**

This dissertation focuses on Aboriginal workers entering into a new work environment. It was shown that isomorphism could effectively be used to attract, retain, and motivate these new workers. Arguably, most, if not all new employees entering into a new work environment will be experiencing this work relationship as the non-dominant entity. This may be particularly the case for larger, more impersonal organizations. This may be further compounded if there are other non-dominant elements in play, like cultural background, language barriers, gender, or race. Future research work in the area of conscious isomorphism in new employee settings could yield interesting information as a means for effective employee-employer relationships on every level, from attracting and retaining new employees, to the evolution of organizational policy and process, to overall employee and organizational satisfaction, as well as the near and long term financial health of organizations which might increase effectiveness in all the above Human Resource related areas.



### **Conscious Isomorphism Formalization**

We have looked at several different potential research directions which could offer important support for the findings of this current research. Along with a call for these new and ongoing research efforts, it could be very helpful and important if there was a formalization and/or standardization of the consciously administered isomorphic process. An immersion and exit interview process may not always be possible.

Continuity between different groups of researchers conducting isomorphic projects could provide a frame of reference across these different environments. A “conscious isomorphic project” framework, handbook, or policy may be useful for future research continuity. Proven, repeatable theme and cycle related processes, and the means to measure their effectiveness and consistency would be very useful if we start to look at isomorphic projects across various subjects and subject groups.

The first recommendation of this paper is thus a call for action for research and dissemination into the issue of on-reserve housing, and the related processes and successes from sources non-affiliated with formal or governmental bodies. Examining the non-financial aspects of these processes in an unbiased manner would offer new and ground-breaking insight into the area of on-reserve housing provision.

There is some independent American based literature which speaks to the topic, which has been gaining momentum recently in Canada, but there are valid criticisms to universal acceptance into Canadian implementation, as well as potential gaps in program

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delivery noted in this review. There is however some evidence contained within this paper regarding shared cross-border efforts which parallel what is being researched and practiced, specifically with regard to institutional and cultural elements (Prue & Devine, 2012; Copet, 2010). The second recommendation then, is that there be future work done to build on these and other areas, which will help to add validity for the similarities, as well as define the differences between US and Canadian literature with regard to housing. This research will also raise the overall awareness within the area of interest as well as potentially increase the legitimacy of US work being done, like the Harvard Project.

This leads to this paper's final recommendation, which is an immediate call to action for all those who care about the current and future state of Aboriginal on-reserve and on-settlement housing. Those who understand the breadth of the problem and have the ability need to, true to Aboriginal tradition, share stories about what works with regard to the process of housing provision for our Aboriginal peoples, and show that we do care, that we have not given up. Let us bring current the body of literature, and help make clear the path to healthy, modern, sustainable houses for our on-reserve Aboriginal people.

This dissertation set out to administer a consciously isomorphic project and measure whether non-linear isomorphism was present and if so, to what meaningful extent. The research has shown not only that isomorphism can be planned and experienced in a non-power dominant fashion, but also that there appears to be a natural step by step order (themes) that isomorphism uses to evolve, and even self-perpetuate.

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These findings open up a number of possibilities for future research as well as implications in many areas including Aboriginal-non Aboriginal relationships, minority relationships in general, as well as employee attraction, retention, and satisfaction.

### **Retrospective; Current Canadian Climate:**

It has been shown that the research conducted, and the findings as explained herein have a number of implications. Additionally, there are many directions that future research and potential isomorphism and the theme-related usages can take. When we look at the current social climate in Canada with respect to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations and relationships, the research and the findings come at an extremely important and relevant time. We are now in an historic time of an acknowledged reparative period, which will lead to healing as a Nation.

We have examined how the isomorphic process can be designed and consciously implemented. More importantly in terms of reparation for the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, we have seen how non-linear isomorphism can be experienced in a manner that creates confidence and empowers all groups, and the individuals within those groups, in an organizational setting. Further, we have seen how the stages, or themes, making up this isomorphic process can be predicted, and to some extent, measured. These themes can also be explained in a way that is culturally significant to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.

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As such, I would suggest that isomorphism as experienced and explained within this body of research could be an effective way for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups to interact in reparation-based settings, such as negotiations, partnerships, focus groups, governmental, etc. It is shown to be a culturally significant, empowering and sensitive way for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships to occur. This could also have implications for economic reparation, as the project in which this research occurred was a business, for-profit venture. As such, isomorphic projects like it could be an effective for members of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups to be involved together, as a means toward economic reparation, and reparation as a whole.

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**Appendix A: Athabasca University Research Ethics Approval**



MEMORANDUM

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**DATE:** September 30, 2013

**TO:** Derek Prue

**COPY:** Dr. Kay Devine (Research Supervisor)  
Alice Tieulié, Acting Secretary, Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

**FROM:** Dr. Vive Kumar, Chair, Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

**SUBJECT:** **Ethics Proposal #13-16C "Planned Isomorphism within an Aboriginal Housing Initiative"**

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As per the APPROVAL TO PROCEED memo dated August 25, 2013 & addendum memo dated August 30, 2013, prior to starting the research, the AU REB requested that you submit a revised application showing the required changes and additional information as noted in these two memos.

Thank you for submitting the 2<sup>nd</sup> revised application (received September 30, 2013), which addressed the changes and additional information.

I am pleased to advise that the above-noted project has now been awarded **FULL APPROVAL**. **You may begin your research immediately.**

This approval of your application will be reported to the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (AU REB) at their next monthly meeting. The AU REB retains the right to request further information, or to revoke the approval, at any time.

**The approval for the study "as presented" is valid for a period of one year from the date of this memo.** If required, an extension must be sought in writing prior to the expiry of the existing approval.

**A Final Report is to be submitted when the research project is completed.** The reporting form is available online at <http://www.athabascau.ca/research/ethics/>.

As implementation of the proposal progresses, if you need to make any significant changes or modifications, please forward this information immediately to the AU Research Ethics Office at [rebsec@athabascau.ca](mailto:rebsec@athabascau.ca) for further review.

If you have any questions, please contact the AU Research Ethics Board Chair via the Research Ethics Office at [rebsec@athabascau.ca](mailto:rebsec@athabascau.ca)

**Appendix B: Consent Form**

**Research Project Title:   Planned Isomorphism within an Aboriginal Housing Initiative**

Study Team

This research is being conducted by a research team comprised of Derek Prue from the Doctorate of Business Administration program at the University of Athabasca under the direction of Dr. Kay Devine, David Newhouse and Tracy Lindberg. Dr. Devine can be reached at the Faculty of Business, Athabasca University. #301 Grandin Park Plaza, 22 Sir Winston Churchill Ave, St. Albert, AB T8N 1B4 Tel: (780) 418-7534 and Fax: (780) 459-2093. Mr. Newhouse is an Associate Professor Business Administration Chair, Indigenous Studies at Trent University. Ms. Lindberg is the Director, Indigenous Education and Associate Professor, Indigenous Studies at Athabasca University.

**You are being asked to participate in a research study. Please take your time to review this consent form and discuss any questions you may have, or words you do not clearly understand, with the research study team. You may take your time to make your decision about participating in this study and you may discuss it with your friends or family before you make your decision.**

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore institutional and organizational culture within



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an Aboriginal community, through the perspective of three different groups – 1)

Non-Aboriginal organizations providing services to the community, 2) Aboriginal workers employed by the non-Aboriginal organization, and 3) the Aboriginal communities elected representatives. This research intends to identify and analyze the isomorphic activity taking place between the groups as they work together in a construction employment setting- with the intent to create a better understanding and framework for Non-Aboriginal organizations to successfully integrate an Aboriginal workforce into its organizational culture as well as to successfully adopt Aboriginal cultural norms into its organization for increased chances of success at Aboriginal employee retention.

### Study Procedures

This study involves the interviewing as well as narrative “storytelling” of individuals. We will be meeting with individuals, on a one- on-one basis, and asking questions about how they feel about working for or with non-Aboriginal organizations as well as transcribing and analyzing their narratives. The organizations themselves, we will choose one or more representatives whom are decision-makers within their organization, and will be asking questions about how they feel about employing Aboriginal workers and again transcribing and analyzing their narratives. All information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used to create a general picture of what your opinions and experiences are within these employment settings.

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We will also ask if you would be willing to be contacted at a later date in case we need to clarify any of the responses given in the interview. This would involve providing your name, address, and phone number, and the name of another contact person in case you move or your phone number changes. All personal information you provide will be kept strictly confidential, separate from the interview data and kept on file for the duration of the study (July 2013 to May 2014). At the conclusion of this research project we will destroy all computer and paper records containing your identifying information.

Access to personal information will be restricted to the research team only and will be secured electronically and physically in a locked office away from public access. No staff from First Nation organizations or communities will have direct access to your personal information. The same confidentiality will apply if university students and other researchers later use the data for a research project.

The interview will be approximately one hour long. You can stop participating at any time. However, if you decide to stop participating in the study, we encourage you to talk to the research study staff first.

### Risks and Discomforts

We will make every effort to make certain that there will be no way that people can identify you in the study. However, we cannot guarantee you absolute confidentiality.

### Costs

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The study procedures are conducted at no cost to you.

### Benefits

There may or may not be direct benefit to you from participating in this study.

When the research is completed, it will help the researchers to understand how organizations can successfully retain Aboriginal employees.

### Payments for Participation

Participants may receive transportation help, to aid them in attending the interviews if required. However, participants will not be paid for their participation in the interviews.

### Confidentiality

Information gathered in this research study may be published or presented in public forums; however, your name or other identifying information will not be used or revealed. Also, your personal information may be disclosed if required by law.

Athabasca University Research Ethics Board may review records related to the study for quality assurance purposes.

### Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal from the Study

Your decision to take part in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or

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you may withdraw from the study at any time. If the research study team and staff feel that it is in your best interest to withdraw you from the study, they will remove you without your consent. We will also tell you about any new information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to stay in this study.

### Questions

You are free to ask any questions that you may have about your rights as a research participant. If any questions come up during or after the study, contact the researcher or his assistant: Derek Prue (Tel: 780-905-0447) or (Fax: 780-455-4522) and Amy Morin (Tel: 780-231-9942) or (Email: [amy@sky-rider.ca](mailto:amy@sky-rider.ca)). Or you may call the Research Supervisor as listed above in this consent form.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Athabasca University Research Ethics Board at (780)-675-6718 or email to [rebsec@athabascau.ca](mailto:rebsec@athabascau.ca).

Do not sign this consent form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers to all of your questions.

### Statement of Consent

#### **Participant:**

I have read this consent form. I have had the opportunity to discuss this research study

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with a staff member or investigator of the research study team. I have had my questions answered by them in a language I understand. The risk and benefits have been explained to me. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form after signing it. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw at any time. I freely agree to participate in this research study. I understand that information regarding my personal identity will be kept confidential, but that confidentiality is not guaranteed.

I (check) ☐ consent to participate in the research study “Planned Isomorphism within an Aboriginal Housing Initiative”.

I authorize the inspection of any of my records that relate to this study by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board for quality assurance purposes.

By signing this consent form, I have not waived any of the legal rights that I have as a participant in a research study.

Participant Signature:

Participant Printed Name:

Address:

Telephone & Email:

**Researcher**

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I, the undersigned, have fully explained the relevant details of this research study to the participant named above and believed that the participant has understood and has knowingly given their consent.

Printed Name:

Date:

Signature: