

Measuring Academic Capacity: Research in Relationship

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Premise

Successful, sustainable initiatives in communities are community-centre, community-based, community-paced, and community-led. Culture is perhaps the *most important* protective factor in community.

Research Question

What is *our* role as academic partners in building capacity for community based participatory research (CBPR)?

Goal

To understand and build our capacity to contribute to community based participatory research with First Nations and Métis people.

Objectives

- To explore changes in our own capacity
- To explore our role in community capacity building

Methodology

Academic researchers working with six First Nations and one Métis Settlement gathered on two occasions to reflect on their own capacity and their contributions to community capacity.

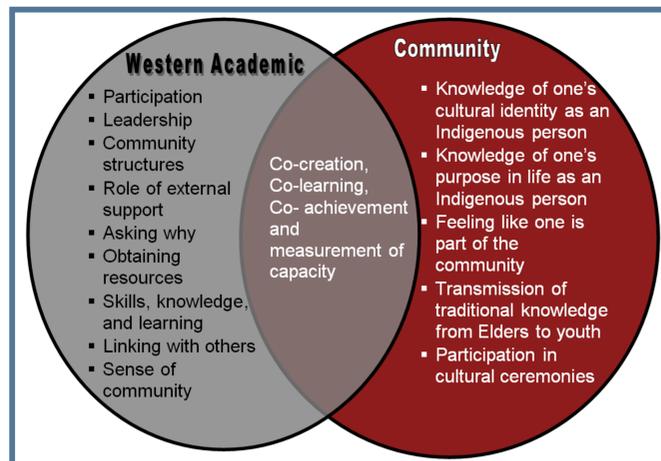
The Public Health Agency of Canada developed the Community Capacity Building Tool (CCBT); a planning tool to help build community capacity in health promotion projects. The tool consists of 9 features considered indicative of increased community capacity: Participation, Leadership, Community structures, Role of external support, Asking why, Obtaining resource, Skills, Knowledge, and learning, Linking with others, and Sense of community. This tool provided the framework for focus group discussion.¹

Analysis

As a focus group participant, the lived experience and thematic analysis of the focus groups transcript resulted in key insights into our own capacity and potential contributions to community capacity building in a number of areas. The interpretation and presentation of four key themes were validated through discussions with focus group participants.

Theme 1: Language and Measures

Existing literature and tools for measuring capacity (ie: CCBT) continue to define and explore capacity from a Western worldview, making it difficult to co-create concepts and measures of individual and community capacity.

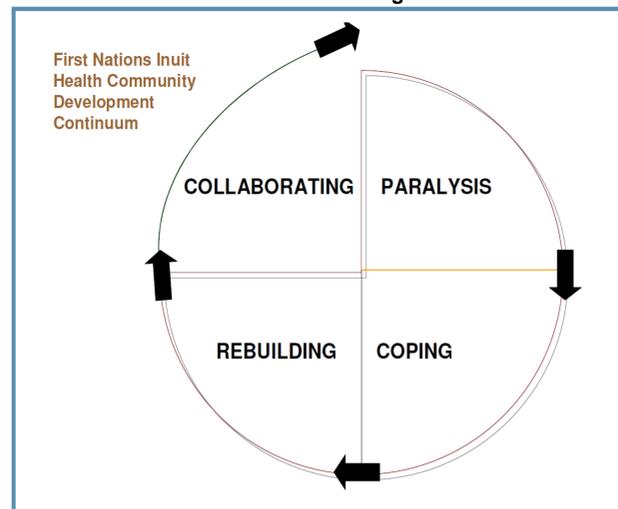


These circles depict a dichotomy of worldviews. In response to the need to measure and document capacity, we often overlook the importance of co-creating relevant and meaningful measures. It is in the act of co-creation, where worldviews overlap, that we contribute to each other's capacity (for research, sustainability and, ultimately, healthy community development).

Theme 2: Aligning Capacity and Community Development

In 2011, Health Canada presented a community development continuum for First Nations and Métis people.² This continuum proved valuable when considering community capacity in community based participatory research.

Communities in paralysis, for example, are reflected by ineffective or unavailable programs/services, lack of collaboration, financial management issues, little to no community consensus, risk of substance abuse and suicidality, and small clusters of individuals healing.



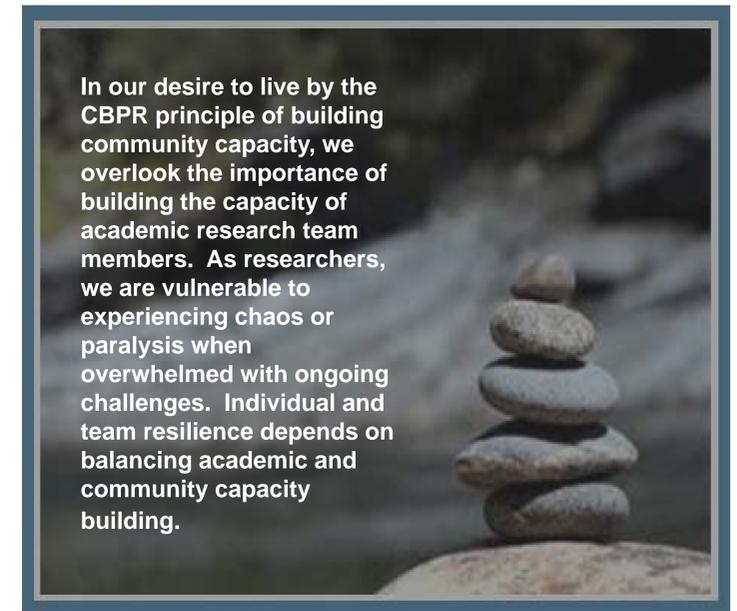
In contrast, as communities progress through the community development continuum, community capacity is reflected in innovative programming, access to resources, excellent management, cross-sector collaboration, support to and mentorship of other communities, potential national leaders, and stability in public health services.

These scenarios highlight the importance of considering capacity building, the need for capacity building, and our role in capacity building in light of community development. Knowing the stage of community development, we are more likely to align goals with existing capacity, be prepared for and anticipate or own capacity needs, and set realistic goals and timelines.

References:

1. Public Health Agency of Canada. (2007). Community Capacity Building Tool Retrieved from <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/canada/regions/ab-nwt-tno/downloads-eng.php>
2. Scones, R., Community Development and Community Capacity Building, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Health Canada. (2011, March). *Community Development Approach: Building Health Capacity in Communities*. Presented at the First Annual International Health Conference, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Theme 3: Balancing Capacity Building



Theme 4: Capacity Building; a Positive, but not Linear Trajectory

Capacity building is a very cyclical process and, if you stay involved with community, the building of the relationships and phase of the project are powerful determinants of capacity. When faced with challenges and transitions (participation, leadership, funding, priorities), our ability to respond requires increased capacity. Fortunately, our learning path follows a positive trajectory with 'ups' and 'downs'.

