

# **WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM OUR ELDERS**

## **A Discussion Paper**

**(Toward the Development of the  
Nunavut Economic Strategy)**

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the course of their history, in every stage of their development as a people, Inuit have always turned to their elders for direction and guidance. This has been particularly true when the people have faced crises or have entered into a period of significant change and adjustment.

The title of this discussion paper—*What We Have Learned from Our Elders*—indicates that history is repeating itself. It acknowledges that elders have knowledge and wisdom that can be helpful, and indeed is necessary, in developing a modern economy. But for many people unfamiliar with Inuit culture, the idea of consulting elders on economic matters will seem strange.

Modern economies are all about creating and accumulating wealth, capital development, investments, the production and distribution of goods and services, marketing, labour force analysis, the creation of jobs, the development of businesses, and so forth. But most of the elders come from a different era, when people still traveled on the land, when economies were home-based and concerned with the basic need for survival. For the most part, elders are unfamiliar with the realities of modern economies.

So why do Inuit turn to the elders for direction? And how can they take the knowledge elders share and turn it into practical guidance for creating a modern Nunavut economy? These are the two questions this paper will address.

The paper is divided into six parts.

*Part One* describes the consultation process itself

*Part Two* discusses the relevance of the elders' knowledge to the development of the Nunavut economy

*Part Three* reviews Inuit Qaujimaqatunnginnut—the Inuit traditional knowledge. It describes the primary relationships upon which the culture is based and spells out its guiding principles.

*Part Four* deals with the clash of economic cultures. It shows how modern economic systems are value-laden. They are part of a dominating culture. Taking what these new economies have to offer, without embracing those values that run contrary to Inuit traditional values—this is the challenge of developing a Nunavut economy.

*Part Five* provides some practical suggestions on how the principles of IQ can be applied to the development of a new Nunavut economy.

*Part Six* is a brief conclusion <sup>1</sup>

## 1. CONSULTING ELDERS: THE PROCESS

The process of consulting elders is deeply imbedded in the culture of all peoples. It is part of the human experience.

Children consult their parents, students consult their teachers, young hunters consult older more experienced hunters. New workers just starting out in a job often seek guidance from older workers who “know the ropes.” In the world of business or government, young people entering management positions will often seek out a mentor—a wise person who can provide guidance and help them direct their careers.

Because the process of consulting elders is so universal, most cultures have developed certain procedures or rituals that suggest how the process is to be carried out. These rituals involve: 1) Basic principles, 2) Asking the question, 3) Interpreting the Response, and 4) Application to one’s life or situation.

***Basic Principles.*** The process of consulting another is based upon two principles: respect and a willingness to listen. If I don’t respect a person, I’m not going to seek their advice. In like manner, if I’m not willing to listen to what the person says to me, and possibly act upon his or her advice, there is no reason for consulting in the first place.

Thus the consulting process is an agreement of sorts. The elder agrees to share her advice or experience because she believes that this advice and experience will be listened to and may be helpful. The young person seeking the advice agrees to listen carefully to what is being said and to at least consider acting upon that advice. Yet the consultation process does not imply an obligation to follow the advice.

The elder knows that the young person seeking her advice must live her own life, make her own decisions and follow her own best judgement in applying the advice. The elder asks only that the advice given be seriously considered.

Typically, one consults elders at significant or critical points in one’s life. A problem has arisen, a new challenge presents itself, one has come to the end of a road and a new direction must be chosen. The one seeking the advice tries to explain her situation as clearly as possible. The elder, in turn, listens carefully and tries to present advice that addresses the problem or situation that is presented.

***Asking the Question.*** Among most cultures there seem to be rituals guiding how to approach elders. In some cultures, people feel quite free to approach and consult, in others cases they first ask permission to seek advice, and so forth. Inevitably the consultation process comes down to asking the right question in the appropriate manner.

The questioner wants to get information that will be helpful to his or her particular situation. So the question is asked in a particular context that also explains the situation of the questioner. The context and situation is also important to the elder. Context helps

her understand the nature of the advice being requested: Is this a counseling situation? Is this a teaching situation? Is this a request for information? Understanding the questioner's situation helps her understand why the question is being asked and how she should structure the response.

***Interpreting The Response.*** The response will depend upon the elder's interpretation of the context and the situation. If the elder understands both the context and the situation, she will likely respond directly. If she does not understand them, she will ask questions until they become clear. The direct response seems characteristic of situations where the questioner is seeking advice in a counseling context. For example, the questioner may ask a question this way. "I'm having these problems with my husband. What do you think I should do?" In these cases, where the situation and context is quite clear, the elder would likely respond directly, suggesting various courses of action.

There are other situations where the context and situation are more complicated. The questions may relate more to a sharing of information, a passing on of knowledge, or simply situations where the questioner needs help figuring out the answer to his or her own question. In these situations the elder will often "conceal" the advice in a story. This story might be about the elders own life, something that happened in her younger years or in her marriage or with her children. It might be a story about particular places, animals, other people, or even cosmological/creation stories that have been passed down through many generations. Presented with the story, the questioner must wrestle with the meaning of the story and how to relate its meaning to her own life and situation. (This is not always easy and straightforward for stories always contain an element of mystery and have much that cannot be understood.) Then the questioner must decide whether and how she will act upon that advice. Thus, the advice is offered, but the responsibility for interpreting it and determining if and how to apply it shifts to the questioner.<sup>2</sup>

For those who have not grown up in an oral culture and have received most of their knowledge in a classroom setting—and this seems to be the case with almost all Qallunaat--the oral/story telling approach favoured by elders can be puzzling. They are used to receiving their information in discreet chunks, often with clear written instructions, well established methodologies, step by step manuals, and a large number of charts, graphs and other visual aids. They think it is the teacher's responsibility to explain things clearly—not the student's responsibility to try and figure out what the teacher is saying. Yet that is the way elders often pass on their knowledge and wisdom. It is an approach characteristic of many cultures and has a long tradition.<sup>3</sup>

***Application to One's Life Or Situation.*** Even though the questioner is not under a specific obligation to follow the advice of the elder, he or she may often feel strong pressure to do so—especially in a small community. This is especially true in a counselling situation. The questioner knows that failure to apply the advice may become apparent to the elder. There is often a concern that if advice is disregarded, the elder may disapprove and may not offer advice so freely in the future. But the person seeking the advice usually knows this "going in." He or she is willing to take the risk of not following the advice and suffering the consequences—rather than not having the advice in the first

place. Thus, depending upon the culture and the nature of the relationships between the person seeking the advice and the elder, the advice is often treated as more than just the elder's personal opinion. It may be interpreted as a specific instruction.

In other more general situations—and consulting elders on the development of the Nunavut economy seems to be one of them—the response may be both specific and general. At a conference on the economy that was part of this project, elders gave specific advice by indicating that funding grants for small business should be translated into Inuktitut for uni-lingual business people. They also stressed the need for elders to become more directly involved in the tourism sector as storytellers and people who could pass on knowledge of the past.<sup>4</sup>

But much of the economic advice that elders have given is more general and has more to do with preserving and sustaining a cultural context than it has to do with specific economic issues. Still, their message is straightforward: *“You have to fit the Nunavut economy into the Inuit Culture, not the Inuit Culture into the economy.”* It then becomes the responsibility of the questioners to figure out how this can be accomplished. This point will have more relevance in the fourth section of this paper where we see that economies are, by their very nature, cultural. They bring with them their own value system which tends to dominate other value systems. This is particularly true of the global, capitalist economy that tends to shape all cultures to meet its requirements.

## 2. THE RELEVANCE OF THE ELDERS' ADVICE.

Inuit traditional knowledge is relevant in its own right—relevant to the existence of a people, their culture, and way of life. It requires no outside justification, no need to “prove its relevance” to outsiders. But, when Inuit ask about the relevance of the elders' knowledge to the development of the modern Nunavut economy, they are asking about how they themselves can use this knowledge.

Inuit elders don't divide their knowledge into separate categories. They see their traditional knowledge as a single, whole reality. But if one examines the advice carefully, the knowledge elders share seems to fall into three categories: historical knowledge, practical knowledge and spiritual knowledge.

*Historical knowledge* is knowledge about who we are as a people. It is the foundation of the Inuit understanding of their culture and of themselves as a people. Contained within this knowledge is an understanding of Inuit cosmology (traditional stories about how the earth was created and how the Inuit people came into existence and continue to develop), knowledge of ancestors, knowledge of their relationships with their land and with the animals that inhabit it, knowledge of their relationships with other peoples, knowledge of the critical developments in their lives as a people. It also provides them with knowledge of their language and their traditional practices.

There would be no Nunavut economy without historical knowledge because there would be no Nunavut. Historical knowledge was the essential element in the Inuit ability to negotiate a land claim and create Nunavut. In many ways, the historical traditional knowledge of elders can take credit for the economic opportunities that flow from the land claim and the Nunavut government.

Traditional knowledge is also valued by non-Inuit—particularly Western scientists who want to know about migration routes of animals, weather patterns, mapping, mineral formations, and a variety of other areas. This combination of historical knowledge and Western science provides information critical to the development of future economic opportunities.

***Practical knowledge*** is *the knowledge about how to survive on the land*. It is the knowledge about understanding the physical environment, making tools, the techniques of hunting and navigation, preparing land, building snow houses, making traditional clothing—all those skills that are needed for survival. Unlike historical knowledge, practical knowledge is highly susceptible to changing technologies. It continually adapts itself to new situations. Thus, knowledge about the use of bows and arrows gives way to knowledge of how to shoot rifles, knowledge about dog teams gives way to knowledge about snow machines, knowledge about how to make and use kayaks gives way to knowledge about the use of modern boats and engine maintenance. Practical knowledge is also highly susceptible to changes in lifestyle. This is nowhere more apparent than in the changes from a land based economy to the wage economy of settlement life.

In recent years Inuit have found that their practical skills are not only useful to themselves, they are “marketable” to others. Tourists have an interest in traditional ways of life and the skills that were needed to sustain them. There is a keen interest in Inuit arts and crafts. Those who wish to travel on the land—big game hunters, the military, resource companies in search of minerals—all recognize the need for the practical survival skills of the Inuit, and they are willing to pay for them.

***Spiritual knowledge*** is *knowledge about how we should live our lives*. It is knowledge about values, ethical behaviour, respectful relationships with others and with the land, responsibilities for the family and community. It’s about the core of the culture: child rearing, learning and education, respect for parents and elders, the development of the individual, caring for those in need of help. Of the three types of knowledge, spiritual knowledge is the most enduring, for it emerges out of the soul of the culture, transcends changes in lifestyle and technology and is always relevant.

In terms of the development of the economy, spiritual knowledge and the practices and discipline that flow from it are essential ingredients. For there can be no healthy economy without healthy individuals, healthy families and healthy communities.<sup>5</sup>

To summarize: the historical, practical and spiritual knowledge of the elders creates a cultural context. It is this context that Inuit have used down through the ages to evaluate

the validity of changes that have entered into their lives. It is this context that must guide the development of the Nunavut economy.

The fullest expression of the elders' knowledge is their traditional knowledge—Inuit Qaujimaqatuqanginnut.

### 3 INUIT QAUJIMAJATUQANGINNUT (IQ)

Though we tend to think of Inuit Qaujimaqatuqanginnut almost exclusively as traditional knowledge, it is more properly defined as is “*The Inuit way of doing things: the past, present and future knowledge, experience and values of Inuit society*. This definition makes clear that it is the combining of the traditional knowledge, experience and values of Inuit society, along with the present Inuit knowledge, experience and values that prepare the way for future knowledge, experience and values.

In its current expression, IQ is founded upon four basic relationships. These relationships manifest themselves in six principles. At the risk of oversimplifying things, we can link the relationships to the guiding principles in the following manner.

#### ***1. The Relationship with the Land.***

In many respects this is the *primordial* relationship (the first relationship and the one from which the others flow). It is the thousands of years of living and surviving on the land that is the foundation of the Inuit culture.

Inuit Cosmology stresses an intimate relationship between people and animals. The Inuit concept of the relationships of people to the land and its species seems to closely parallel the belief of other aboriginal peoples that people and animals form a single community. This idea is best summed up in the traditional North American aboriginal definition of community “*An intimate relationship with all living things, both animate and inanimate.*”<sup>6</sup>

It is the Inuit experience with the land that is the source of Inuit learning, healing, nourishment, propagation and child rearing. It is the respectful relationship with the land and its species that is the core of traditional Inuit spirituality

#### ***Principles***

- *Avatittinnik Kamattiarniq* is the concept of “environmental stewardship.” But the concept goes well beyond the modern concept of environmental protection or land and wildlife management. Deep within the concept is the idea that the land and its animals have “rights” that must be respected.

- ***Qanuqtuurniq*** is the concept of being resourceful to solve problems. It is the ability to survive on the land by improvising with what is at hand. This is the source of all fulfillment and self-realization. It is what makes an Inuk an Inuk.

## ***2. The Relationship with One's Family.***

The family kinship model is fundamental to Inuit Culture. The family provides the environment within which children grow and develop, families prosper, marriages take place, elders are cared for, communities and coalitions are formed so the group can survive. In all respects, the family comes first.

### ***Principle***

- ***Pijitsirnjik*** is the concept of serving and providing for. It expresses the obligation and responsibility to the family and its survival—and by extension to other members of the community. It is one of the fundamental characteristics of the leader in Inuit society.

## ***3. The Relationship with One's Own Inner Spirit***

As the child grows into an adult in the family context, he or she must develop a strong sense of inner worth and personal identity. Part of this discovery of “who I am” brings with it an awareness that “I must have a purpose or direction in my life.” Along with this sense of purpose comes an awareness of responsibility.

### ***Principle***

- ***Pilnimmaksarniq*** is the passing on of knowledge and skills through observation, doing and practice. Because of the lifestyle on the land in harsh conditions, the child must be able to adapt to continually changing situations, learn the art of discipline, and become prepared to take his or her rightful role in the family and community. The concept of skill development and knowledge acquisition (what we would call today, “capacity building,”) strengthens the sense of personal identity and worth.

## ***4. The Relationship with One's Own Social Grouping (the community or organization) and Between Social Groupings.***

As the child grows, he or she must be able to relate to others outside the immediate family. The development of relationships with others—social grouping and organization within and outside the community—helps ensure the survival of the group. These relationships are critical for the survival of the family and the community. And they are more than a practical necessity. They are firmly rooted in the culture, they are an expression of the culture. One of the traditional teachings of many aboriginal elders is

that the community and its organizations will only be as strong as the culture; and the culture will only be as strong as the community and its organizations.

### *Principles*

- *Piliriqatigiingiq* is the concept of collaborative working relationships-- working together for a common goal.
- *Aajiiqatigiingniq* is the Inuit way of decision-making. The term refers to comparing views or taking counsel or the concept of consensus decision-making. Though these two principles are essential to many aspects of Inuit Culture, they seem to have a special significance to leadership.<sup>7</sup>

Before we begin the final task of determining how the traditional knowledge of the elders might be used to help shape and form the Nunavut economy, we must pause for a moment to gain some historical perspective.

Developing a new economy is only one of a number of major challenges that Inuit have faced in recent years. Each challenge has involved coming to grips with new systems, propelled forward by the dominant Qallunaat Culture. Each new system has been loaded down with its own cultural context: its own value system, institutions and practices. So, too, with the economic systems. They are systems wrapped in a culture. They are a package deal: “cultural economies.” The values surrounding these economies are very different from many traditional Inuit values. The result—the clash of cultural economies.

## **4. THE CLASH OF CULTURAL ECONOMIES**

We might describe the Inuit Culture with its land-based economy as a deep, flowing river. Starting from its own headwaters far back beyond human memory, it has flowed down through the ages, carrying with it those values that provide physical and spiritual nourishment and guidance for its people. Then, quite recently, the river encounters another river, much larger, much stronger, that sweeps in from the side. It, too, is a culture with its own very different value systems. There is a sudden violent turbulence as the two waters clash together, each one trying to retain its own identity. At first the new river completely dominates the smaller river. But gradually, over a period of time, the smaller river succeeds in infiltrating the larger river. Finally, many miles downstream, after a long period of turbulence, the chaos begins to subside, the waters and value systems mix together and the two rivers become one river.

Modern Inuit history has its origins in the 50s and 60s when the people moved off the land into settlements. They experienced a violent clash of cultures borne in upon them with new systems. Their traditional ways of teaching their children gave way to the school-based education system and residential schools. Their restorative justice system

based upon the principles of healing and community decision-making was replaced by the Qallunaat system of courts, police, legal sanctions and punishment. Their traditional forms of self-government were replaced by new legally-based forms of governance. Their land-based economy was dominated by the new wage-based economy. The role of traditional leaders was replaced by elected officials. The dominant role of the elders was replaced by bureaucrats and program specialists—and the elders lost standing and were often forced underground.

The clash of cultures created upheavals, conflicts and social disruption with which we are all familiar. But it also brought many benefits. Recognizing these benefits and faced with having to adapt to the realities of a changing world, Inuit have been doing what they have always done in the past: learning about these new realities, using them and adapting them to their own needs.

In recent years we have seen Inuit gain control of their school systems and work to replace Qallunaat teachers with their own Inuktitut-speaking teachers. Frustrations with the Criminal Justice System have given rise to a system of community justice committees based upon the principles of healing and restoration. Concerted efforts are underway to restore the use of Inuktitut, especially in the workplace. Most significant of all, Inuit have settled their land claims and created their own government. They now control a wide range of provincial-type government services.

The gains on the economic front have been significant. Inuit have embraced the wage economy. Decentralization has moved government jobs to a number of communities. And Inuit have created many businesses and development corporations. Meanwhile, a large majority of Inuit have retained their land skills and depend upon the land for food and part of their livelihood. But major challenges still remain.

During the same period that Inuit have struggled to incorporate new systems into their culture, the “outside economy” has become a global economy. It is dominated by very large, very powerful multinational corporations with annual revenues that are sometimes larger than the whole economies of some countries.

All fledgling economies—like the Nunavut economy—have come to realize that they must become part of the global economy. It is “the only game in town.” But the global economy is an economy wrapped in the cultural values of Capitalism and the Free Enterprise System. It promotes “wealth creation” as its fundamental objective, acquisition of resources, competition, individualism, the constant struggle to gain market share, the development of big business, the controls of the market place and minimal intervention and involvement of government. In many respects these values run contrary to traditional Inuit values and to the present realities of economic development in Nunavut.

Today, Inuit find themselves confronting the same challenge that other fledgling economies—many of them the economies of indigenous people—now face. How do a people become part of the global economy without losing their souls? How do Inuit

incorporate the positive benefits of the global economy into their culture without having their culture get sucked into, and be destroyed by, the global cultural economy?

This is the question we will now try to address in the final part of this paper.

## **5. RELATING “WHAT THE ELDERS HAVE TOLD US” TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NUNAVUT ECONOMY.**

During World War II, the Allies developed an information gathering technique called *content analysis*. They would examine the speeches, reports and newspaper articles of the German and Japanese leaders and pick out key words and themes that would appear time and time again. They knew that these words and themes would give them an indication of the intentions of the enemy. Since the speeches would change according to the developments in the war, it was also possible to detect changes and modifications in thinking and priorities. In the years following the war the technique was refined. Today it is used in a wide variety of settings by researchers who want to discover the priorities and intentions of various groups

Over the past several decades Inuit elders have spoken out on a wide variety of issues and subjects. They have participated in numerous conferences at the local, regional and territorial level. Their words and ideas have been captured in numerous reports. In addition there are transcripts from interviews with elders. Some of these transcripts have made their way into book form.

As we review these reports, transcripts and books, we can pick out a number of themes. These are consistent over time, but they change slightly to reflect changing circumstances and situations. Some of these relate directly to the development of the economy, either the traditional economy or the new wage-based economy. Most relate indirectly.

In the final section of this paper we will consider some of these dominant themes and relate them to the development of the Nunavut Economy.

### **The Theme of Survival**

The most prominent theme, the one that appears time and time again, is the theme of survival. Most of the historical and practical knowledge of the elders seems to echo this theme. The elders are proud of their ability to have survived and they pay constant tribute to their parents, ancestors and leaders who have helped them survive. Their accounts of their history are filled with details about how they managed to survive: through hunting, planning for hunts and the making of tools; through the ability to work with dog teams; through the making of clothing, the preparation of foods, and the building of snow houses and sod houses; through the development of survival skills in children; through the roles of family members and the critical role of leaders in helping to ensure the survival of the people. Survival, then, was the dominant theme of their

existence. As the elders at the Rankin Inlet Conference noted, “As long as there was food and heat, you could hear the laughter of children.”<sup>8</sup> As elders look to the future they continue to talk about survival—not only individual survival but cultural survival. They frequently express concerns about what is happening to the land, to the family structure, to maintaining the practices of being on the land, to the proper development of youth. We can get a better handle on these concerns by examining the four basic relationships and six principles upon which the culture is based.

### **The Primary Relationship and Six Principles**

As I noted in Part Three of this paper, Inuit Culture rests upon four primary relationships and six principles. Taken together, they provide the basic cultural context within which all economic development projects must fit. They also serve as a sort of Ten Commandments for evaluating projects. Those that strengthen these relationships and incorporate these principles are good. Those that don’t, aren’t.

In what follows, I will list the kinds of projects, programs and initiatives that would seem to be consistent with the thinking of the elders. Some of them have been mentioned specifically at different conferences and workshops. Others are implied—they seem to follow logically from other things that elders have said. Some relate directly to economic development (e.g. the development of local businesses). Others have an indirect relationship (e.g. the teaching of Inuktitut) and relate more to the cultural context.

Finally, through it is possible to list potential areas for development, the merits of each project must be judged on its own merits.<sup>9</sup>

*THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LAND.* For elders the land is the *Primary Economy* not only because it has provided for the people since time immemorial (the traditional economy) but because all developments of the land (the secondary economy) depend upon a healthy environment. Elders would seem to support any projects and initiatives that protect the land, increase Inuit use and knowledge of the land, and foster awareness of the land as the source of Inuit culture. This would include:

- hunter and trapper assistance programs
- on-the-land survival skills programs
- inter-community trade in land foods
- food processing
- sport hunting and fishing
- commercial fishing
- mining and resource development projects that directly benefit Nunavummiut
- production and sale of traditional clothing
- cultural awareness programs—employment for elders
- environmental protection, management and education
- geo-science projects

### *THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FAMILY,*

Today, as in the past, survival of the family is of paramount importance in Inuit Culture. But today the threat is not starvation—it is social breakdown and loss of culture and identity. Because of the direct link between economic development and the health of the family, the elders would seem to support the creation, maintenance and improvement of the family support service economy that has emerged in local communities.

- housing and housing maintenance
- municipal services
- schools
- family literacy programs
- Inuktitut language programs
- child day care
- family literacy programs
- healing programs—especially land-based healing programs
- addiction and crisis intervention services
- community justice committees and other alternatives to the Criminal Justice System
- health care and home care services
- family counselling—especially counselling that involves elders
- social assistance
- science camps and seasonal on-the-land programs
- elders' programs and centres with space for traditional crafts and equipment repair
- recreational facilities and programs
- services for those with disabilities and special needs

### *THE RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE'S OWN INNER SPIRIT.*

Elders are concerned about what is happening to youth—especially the problems of addictions, suicides and confrontations with the Justice System. They recognize that young people today are growing up in a very different world than the one they grew up in. Nevertheless, there is still a struggle for survival. Young people need a strong sense of personal and cultural identity, an appropriate set of skills that will enable them to “make it “ in the modern world, and a strong sense of commitment to their family and community. There is also need to ensure that young adults have the skills required to secure jobs and work opportunities that might be available in government and the private sector.

Elders would seem to support programs and projects that would prepare young people for work in the wage economy while ensuring at the same time that they have the skills needed on the land to provide for their families. These would include:

- improving the school system to ensure the quality of education, especially in high schools
- Ensure that schools reflect and promote Inuit culture; continue to develop Inuit teachers
- Ensure that classroom learning is complemented by learning on-the-land and in the community
- Ensure that Inuit teachers continue to promote Inuit Culture by hiring and training more Inuit to serve as teachers
- Provide literacy education in both languages for non-literate Inuit
- Provide post-secondary opportunities for Nunavummiut to pursue professions.
- Provide technical training in the trades
- Provide management training for Inuit in government
- Provide support for the development of small business;
- Provide job creation programs through government and the private sector
- Ensure access to funding for business development at the community level; ensure that funding support is provided to unilingual Inuit.

*THE RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE'S OWN SOCIAL GROUPING (THE COMMUNITY AND ITS ORGANIZATIONS) AND BETWEEN SOCIAL GROUPINGS.*

Life on the land was lived primarily in small family units. Elders seem to have had limited exposure to other groups or organizations. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, contact with others increased—traders, whalers, the RCMP, the clergy—but it was still quite limited until they moved into settlements.

With the new way of life there was significant contact with other social groupings and with other organizations. In public meetings elders seem to have always recognized and promoted cooperation among diverse groups. They have participated widely on committees and seem to have a particular concern with leadership development.

Elders would seem to support the following kinds of efforts:

- increased coordination among community organizations and committees
- simplification of policies, procedures and organizational structures
- leadership training for boards and committees
- Increased use of Inuktitut in the workplace.
- increased cooperation and coordination between community organizations and the Nunavut government
- improved communications between the Nunavut government and communities; the use of plain language documents
- increased decentralization of authority and resources to local communities
- cooperation and trade among communities
- work to change federal policies that do not meet the needs of the new territory, particularly when it comes to providing economic opportunities.

## The Six Principles

The four primary relationships are the “glue” that hold the cultural context together. They provide the context for economic development.

The six principles function more as internal guidelines or processes. They describe how various projects and processes should be carried out, how decisions should be made, how policies should be developed, and so forth.

Thus all projects, programs and initiatives, must be developed...

1. with full awareness of the responsibility to respect and manage the land, its species and the environment-- *Avatittinnik Kamattiarniq*,
2. with an attitude of service to individuals, families and the community as a whole-- *Pijitsirniq*.
3. according to the Inuit way of decision-making, with full consultation of others, especially those most immediately affected --*Ajjiqatigiingni*.
4. in a manner that promotes collaboration with others-- *Piliriqatigiingniq*.
5. by passing on knowledge and skills through observation, doing and practice-- *Pilnimmaksarniq*.
6. and uses available resources in the most effective and efficient way possible— *Qanuqtuurniq*<sup>10</sup>

## 6. CONCLUSION

This discussion paper began with a question: Why do we consult Inuit elders about the development of the Nunavut economy? From there we moved on to discuss the process of consulting elders and the relevance of their knowledge. Next came a review of the fullest expression of the wisdom of the elders—Inuit Qaujimagatuqanginnut. In the Fourth section we noted that all cultures are “cultural economies,” and that the challenge for Nunavut is to become part of the global economy while retaining the distinctive characteristics of the Inuit culture. We concluded by describing, in practical terms, how we might apply the wisdom of the elders to the development of the Nunavut economy.

As we move into the future, there will be a growing need for a new group of leaders within the Inuit culture—a group that has already begun to emerge. They will be bridge builders. They will know and respect the wisdom of their elders. But they will also know and understand complex systems and structures of the new economy. Their

primary task will be to help the knowledge and wisdom of the elders cross over the bridge and take root in the new Nunavut economy.

As was noted above, IQ is *The Inuit way of doing things: the past, present and future knowledge, experience and values of Inuit society*. The manner in which the Nunavut Government and the present generation of Inuit respond to and accept the challenge of their elders in developing the new economy will become the ***Inuit Qaujimajatuqanginnut*** for future generations.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Before proceeding, a note about myself. I am not an Inuk and I don't speak Inuktitut. My knowledge about the thinking of elders is, therefore, "second hand." This presents a limitation in writing a paper about "What We Have Learned From Our Elders." I lived and worked for three years in the Baffin region in the early 80s and met frequently with elders to discuss community issues and concerns. Since then I have worked in Nunavut on many occasions, often to facilitate groups that included elders. Within the last several

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years, I have worked with groups of elders serving on community justice committees in all the communities of the Kivalliq region. Within the past year I have also worked with the Elders' Task Force on IQ and helped them prepare their first annual report. As part of this process to develop the Nunavut economy, I have facilitated sessions in Rankin Inlet and in Gjoa Haven in which elders participated or their views were reflected. Having said all of this I wish to make the following point.

It is not my intention to interpret Inuit Culture to Inuit. It is my intention to reflect *my understanding* of what Inuit elders are saying about the development of the Nunavut Economy by way of a discussion paper. It is my hope that the discussion that might flow from this paper will stimulate others to explore the knowledge of Inuit elders and its application to developing a Nunavut economy more deeply.

<sup>2</sup> For an insightful discussion of the use of story as a learning tool see Brody, p 14-15.

<sup>3</sup> This process of posing the question, receiving an answer, interpreting the meaning of the answer and applying the answer to one's life is characteristics of many cultures. In the Hebrew Culture of the New Testament for example, someone asks Jesus a question based upon a current situation, Jesus replies with a parable that ends, "go and do likewise." The questioner must then interpret the parable and apply it to his or her life. Modern biblical scholars tell us that the same process applies to much of the New Testament and our interpretation of what is written down. In many instances the text is not a recording of the actual words of Jesus but, rather a reflection of questions raised by the early church of their elders who were alive at the time of Jesus or had strong memories of his words that were passed on to them. This process of question, answer, application is referred to as the Hermeneutic (a word meaning "interpretation") Circle.

<sup>4</sup> *Report on the Community Economic Development Workshop, Rankin Inlet, Nunavut June 12-14, 2002, Summer 2002.*

<sup>5</sup> A recent example of the three kinds of knowledge can be seen in the Elders' Conference that was part of this project and was held in Rankin Inlet in March, 2002. The elders discussed at great length the importance of their legends. They provided a detailed listing of the mens,' womens' and childrens' possessions that one would find in sod houses and they discussed the uses of various animals. They considered economic opportunities for elders based upon their traditional knowledge. This was part of their *historical knowledge*. They also discussed how to make clothing from animal skins in great detail—along with the building of sod houses, snow houses, arts and crafts, job training and support for Inuit starting their own businesses. This was part of their *practical knowledge*. Finally, elders spoke about the importance of self-reliance, the sharing of meat, the passing on of knowledge to the younger generation, the various rituals that were to be respected, and so forth. This was part of their *spiritual knowledge*

<sup>6</sup> "Inuit emphasize that the core of the relationship between human and animals is human recognition that an equity exists with animals as participating members of a shared

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environment... Through a life that unified the land, the animals and the community past and present, the Inuk hunter acquires, reconstructs and lives out of a world-image which provides both security in his own identity and direction for his behaviour. He does not hunt only to eat, but also to structure his community and ultimately to build a cognitive model of the world by which by which he is defined and directed. To be *inummarik* (the process of becoming a genuine person), is to be actively engaged in lifelong cycles of interaction with, and cognitive interpretation of, the human and non-human environment.” Stairs, Arlene and Wenzel, George, 1992 p.4 and 6.

<sup>7</sup> In linking these principles of IQ to essential relationships, we wish to note that our divisions may be somewhat arbitrary. Both the relationships and the principles are integral to the culture as a whole. Together they form the bedrock foundation and the context for Inuit Culture and for IQ.

<sup>8</sup> Therese Tungilik, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Example: though elders may generally be in favour of sport hunting, they might, for particular reasons, oppose the hunting of a particular species in a particular location.

<sup>10</sup> The translation and meaning of these terms has been provided by Arnakak, Jaypeetee 2000.