Episode 41: "Behavioural Insights & Reconciliation"

with Stephanie Papik, the Moose Hide Campaign Society's Director for the Public Service.

Stephanie Papik is currently working on a temporary assignment with the Moose Hide Campaign Development Society as Director for the BC Public Service. Stephanie and I discuss how BI can help us understand some of the barriers to Reconciliation, like blindspots and difficult emotions. We also discuss how BI can contribute to Reconciliation via strategies such as disrupting habits and providing calls to action, like the Indigenous Relations Behavioural Competencies. We close by thinking about how Indigenous Knowledge and Behavioural Insights can be mutually supporting.

Transcript:

KIRSTIN APPELT, HOST: Welcome to this edition of Calling DIBS. I'm your host, Kirstin Appelt, Research Director with UBC Decision Insights for Business and Society, or DIBS for short. Today, we're once again calling DIBS on Stephanie Papik.

Stephanie's usual position is the Director of Strategic Integration of Indigenous Knowledge, Cultural Safety and Humility, Strategic Partnerships at Emergency Management BC. But right now, Stephanie is on a temporary assignment with the Moose Hide Campaign Development Society as Director for the BC Public Service. Another hat Stephanie wears is that she is on our BIG Difference Advisory Board, one of her many, many hats. And as with every time I get a chance to talk to Stephanie, I'm thrilled to have an opportunity to listen and learn. So welcome back to the podcast, Stephanie.

STEPHANIE PAPIK, GUEST: Good morning, Kirstin. I'm so grateful and happy to be here. I'm calling in from Whosaykum, which translates to place of clay, also known as James Bay, here in Lekwungen Territory.

APPELT: And thanks for joining us. And I'll note that I'm joining from the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations and thrilled to be on these beautiful lands. Many of our listeners might know you from our previous episode, but some may not. So would you mind by just telling us a little bit about yourself to get started?

PAPIK: Yeah, thank you so much. So I'm Inuk on my dad's side and on my mom's side I'm Irish ancestry with a little bit of Spanish. I guess there was a shipwreck back in the day and I have been a visitor here to Lekwungen Territory for most of my life. So coming into my urban identity as being Inuk. And my pronouns are she/her they/them and I'm a mama of two young adults. And yeah, I think that's where I'll leave it today, thank you.

APPELT: And referencing this last time you were on the podcast, last time we had the chance to talk about how traditional Indigenous traditional knowledge and behavioural insights have similarities and differences. And for me, one of the takeaways on that episode was how both approaches have the shared use of external cues to encourage certain behaviours.

So you, for example, mentioned that certain Inuit tattoos serve as reminders of values or experiences. And I mentioned that many BI solutions also use the power of reminders rather than relying on memory. And that

was just such a great, interesting discussion. So I recommend it for anyone who hasn't listened, it's episode 26 in our archive, and kind of something we started to talk about last episode was the intersection of behavioural insights and reconciliation. How can behavioural insights contribute to reconciliation? And I thought that would be a really great thread to pull on today. So let's just dive right into that big topic. And let's start with the problem. So what are some of the ways behaviour contributes to colonization? What are some of the barriers in the way of decolonization?

PAPIK: Now, they're such great questions, and I would start within that kind of internal realm of ourselves, some of our assumptions and our biases, we all have blind spots, physical ones and when we're driving. And so we've got these tools to help us, mirrors, to help us see. So I think some of those ones that we're just raised through, especially through the media and movie industry, there's a really great documentary called Real Intent. You can learn all about that or even misrepresentation or about how women are affected.

Another one, I think it's an unconscious, systemic exclusion of Indigenous people and knowledge from Western knowledge systems. And so inclusion of Indigenous people, knowledge and practice, there's the phrase "Nothing about us without us" and making sure that there's that inclusion, which goes along with any kind of decision making where you know you're having impacts on folks to include folks that you're going to most impact.

And kind of along that line too is kind of sometimes behaviour, I'll see some folks might be like, “Oh yeah, let's reach out” and then they'll get some idea or practice from Indigenous folks and then kind of run with it and you do their own thing, and that can often end up in a area of cultural appropriation and causing further harm despite whatever initial good intentions.

And then a systemic barrier too is not enough time and not enough money. You know, “We've got this next, we need to have this done in the next two months”. There's not enough time to do that engagement or relationship building, or it's going to take a lot of money to do that engagement because then we need to think about capacity building and reciprocity so that it's not just a one way take relationship. And kind of with that tide is as a narrative to that I've witnessed it from time to time, you know, one seeking advice on how to do things in a good way, then kind of deciding that, you know, already and lots of time and money has been invested into the original approach. So to go ahead, regardless of what that feedback was offered.

So those kind of are a few barriers come to mind and also just trying to acknowledge that, you know, some of this might be feeling uncomfortable to be hearing. I know it's uncomfortable for me to share, so I invite in a deep belly breath, let go of any tension we may be carrying. Thank you.

APPELT: Yeah, thank you for those and yeah, I love, well, hate that it happens, but I love how you brought in the idea of the blind spots and how they're not just physical blind spots, we can have mental blind spots, emotional blind spots. And then that idea you mentioned around time and resources and sometimes people engage, but then they go back to the previous idea. And I think that draws on the behavioural concept of opportunity cost. Once we've already sunk in resources, we just want to keep sinking in resources to that thing. We don't want to sink in resources to something new and it's hard to overcome that.

And then you were also mentioning this idea that a lot of times people feel very time bound or resource bound that, “Oh, we don't have the time.”. And I think that's something that has really played out a lot in the last two years where the COVID-19 pandemic has actually been an additional barrier to reconciliation. One of my grad school advisors coined this term, the “finite pool of worry”, which is this idea that we can only worry about a certain number of things. And if we add a new worry, then, something like COVID-19, other worries

we might have, like the climate emergency, like reconciliation, might kind of get downgraded in our mental lists. And that's work that Elke Weber has done, and it's proven true in various different contexts.

And I'm wondering if in your work coming from Emergency Management BC, if you've seen that play out where when people are dealing with times of emergency whether it's COVID-19 or other emergencies, does that seem like it's an additional barrier to reconciliation?

PAPIK: Hmm, mm hmm. Yeah, I think I think in some ways, because often in a time of emergency, it's like, “Oh, there's not time for that.”. So the relational priorities can get deprioritized when in fact, there's that Indigenous relationship, behavioural competency of self-discovery and awareness. And they talk about in times of most urgency is when we need to take that moment to be self aware and take that breath then and just like, look the person in the eyes or connect and imagine they're loved one on the other end of the phone or across from you. And that, you know, this is a really unsettling time, and how to go about it can still save people and do it with a smile and some kindness. I think another kind of aligning with that concept is we tend to focus on what's easy.

And I think there's that term like the low hanging fruit. I like to say humans are inherently energy efficient. There are also people who've told me they're just inherently lazy. I think that's just an awareness without blame or shame. It's like human nature. What are these things so that we can then work with it. In forgetting about taking the time to pause, oftentimes, when I'm meeting and invite folks as a grounding to do some deep belly breath, and sometimes they'll be like, “Wow, that's the first time I've taken conscious breath all week or in a month, or I don't know how long, and it feels so good”. It's a really easy way to start to bring more energy into our bodies by deep belly breaths, bringing in some more oxygen.

And then I think also that kind of back to the consideration of our relations and consideration for the impacts of our words and actions that can have on those relations, especially in these times of the pandemic and ongoing emergencies that are happening due to the climate crisis. And it's totally fair to have that feeling of overwhelm of it all, right so I can see the idea of like, “Ok, let go of one thing”.

And yet at the same time, I think it's good to be aware of this and then offer in a way that is like inviting us to remember things that our brains are super complex. Someone recently told me that, you know, they're more complex than any computer we've created yet to create. So I think it's entirely possible for us to have to let go of one worry because I think that can become a limiting narrative that kind of gives us permission to be complicit. Like, “Okay, well, I'm doing good here, so I'll just start littering here again, because over here I'm recycling or something”. And so just that invitation of the possibility that we can be holistic in our approach to addressing multiple worries, because they're just going to keep coming with that trajectory unless we do something drastic, behavioural shifts globally.

APPELT: Absolutely. Yeah, and that reminds me of the concept, too of licensing, which is exactly that idea you spoke about of, “Oh, you know, I got the Diet Coke, so I could have the large fry” like that “I did one good thing, so I get like a freebie on something else”. And it's absolutely true that I was also a lot of these worries are intertwined.

So if we care about reconciliation, that also has impacts for climate change because it's different ways of dealing with the environment and different ways of dealing with the environment also contribute to COVID-19. So if we care about one of these, we should really be caring about all of them, and there is no one in one out. It's-- that might be something we sometimes feel, but like you said, we should push back on that and try to increase the size of our pool of worry, which doesn't sound very optimistic, but might be an important thing to do.

And something else you mentioned that I wanted to pull on again is this idea of like the deep breaths and when we spoke before, you mentioned as well that these conversations can feel awkward and uncomfortable. And a lot of times in our growing years, we're kind of taught to avoid those feelings of uncomfortability and awkwardness. But like you said, it's okay to have those feelings, it's natural to have those feelings, and it's natural for certain situations to trigger those feelings. So can you expand on that a little bit?

PAPIK: Yeah, it's so interesting. Definitely, and our brains are wired that way to avoid uncomfortable things, so. And our amygdala is nine times stronger than our prefrontal cortex. And if we've experienced any kind of childhood trauma, it gets even harder wired to go faster to like danger. And, you know, I always like to acknowledge whatever you know, any feelings that people are experiencing in a situation are real and valid and appropriate response to that situation.

And sometimes as well, people might not have any feelings as well. You know, and that's okay. And all of those are an invitation to be curious and self-reflective and without any blame or shame. And just like what's under there, you know, what's underlying that kind of feeling? Are there any unmet needs that I have and I'm just kind of approaching oneself with curiosity? And I think, you know, as part of decolonizing our narratives around feelings is letting go of shame and blame and guilt that is often used as a way to keep people in a stuck place.

So when we aren't making that turn to acknowledge our feelings, then often we're acting in them so we can be acting in fear, we could be acting in anger, jealousy and all of those actions inherently just sound like they're going to cause harm, probably for ourselves and other folks. And I know some people in their concept of like toxic positivity, and I think that’s not a piece here. It's more about those feelings are real and valid, and it's really good to have them and experience them and then be responsible for those emotions and not put them on other people.

So for myself, I've learned to have like adult timeouts when I'm having feelings and remove myself from the situation, maybe go outside, have some breaths. Sometimes I've had to go like for a sprint just to like, transform that energy and then take that time to sit and figure out what it is that I need to ask for to help create that space and safety. And so I found it so powerful to come from a place of curiosity, and that's been a big shift in and kind of decolonizing behaviour.

I used to, as a second generation residential school survivor, have this kind of apocalyptic belief in the basic badness of folks, which was inherited through the nuns and priests. And so it's been transformative to come from a place of curiosity and shift and, you know, belief in good intentions, belief in the basic goodness of people and kind of go from there and being curious what's going on for the other person. You know, perhaps they have some unmet needs that are creating some expression that's causing harm. And so really, you know it's really led to creating opportunities for self care, self awareness and discovery.

And I think that's kind of at the core with our cultural safety and humility work, is just kind of dialing it right back to be in a good place ourselves before we can be in a place of caring or mindfulness of others. And then with that self-care, it can help us to be able to step into those spaces to have those sometimes harder conversations. And that's been a really big piece for me, especially doing practice, like yoga, learning to kind of hold poses and let time and gravity and my breath can do the magic to, like, heal my body and then also to help me build my resiliency for when I'm in other situations that can be really uncomfortable and really hard. Like, okay, deep breaths, then you start to create this unconscious habit.

APPELT: Love that, if you can hold pigeon pose and you can be in another uncomfortable situation. And I also wanted to pull on, you mentioned like the self-care, the self-awareness, self-discovery, and I think that goes back to what you mentioned around the Indigenous relations behavioral competency and that resource offered tools for exploring those competencies and how we can develop those competencies. It was also reminding me of something that I've read in the anti racism literature around, and I think this is pulling in on some of the things you already mentioned, but just that were raised within cultures and systems that have so much inbuilt racism.

And like you said, it's natural that you'll have thoughts and feelings and experiences, and those thoughts and feelings and experiences are okay. And rather than self shaming and immediately shutting down, it's better to take the moment, if we can, to be constructive and think about, we had that thought, feeling, "Now what do we do with it? Can we interrogate where it came from and why we think it came to our mind? What can we do about it?". And it actually kind of reminds me of the practice of meditation, where you try to step outside the stream of your thoughts so that you're not just in it, but you can take that moment to get outside and think about it. And I know you're a mindfulness practitioner. So does that connection make sense to you that there's the natural reactions, but stepping outside of those can be powerful and help us take further steps?

PAPIK: Most definitely, it creates that space, and there is like the narrative therapy approach, narrative approaches, and they talk about the separating the problem from the person. So doing that, taking that step separates that and creates that space for what are all the other pieces. The golden rule of social psychology is that the situation is a better indicator of behaviour than the individual. And so what is it about the situation that's creating it? And also then where can be the solutions too, by bringing in friends, family and community?

Another piece I think that's coming up for me is that this stereotyping that we do, where our brains are constantly determining things, "Safe, not safe, safe". And I prefer to use the term "stereotyping" over "racism" just again with how the neuroscience works and how our brains work, like racism, you know, even mentioning that behaviour is racist, people will hear them being named racist and then they're in the fight, flight, freeze or fawn state.

So I like to talk about stereotyping, and it's just the way our brains work. You know, there's no blame or shame to that. That's important to understand, so then we can respond accordingly, like being kind and compassionate with ourselves and each other on this journey, recognizing that we're going to make mistakes, we still have blind spots all the time and often drawing on people next to you to ask for that help to see what you can't see yourself. And I really like that in terms of seeing, there's this fable called it's about six blind men and elephant and if it's okay, maybe I'll just share it. Wonderful. So this was shared to me from a good friend and colleague, Yuxwelupton, Bradley Dick, from the Lkwungen territory and the idea of being like a reconciliation elephant.

So there is a little village and in the center of the village there's kind of a open area, and there were six blind men who were gathered there and as they were sitting there in the center of the village, they heard this rumbling and then scattering and people running away. And they had no idea what was happening. And I guess this elephant had come charging into the center of the village and the six blind men kind of found themselves around the elephants and were kind of sharing with each other what they thought it was based on what they were experiencing. So when blind human was at the trunk of the feet. And so they're like, "Yeah, this feels really solid and immovable". Another human was over at the tusk and they're like, "Ouch this is really sharp, this is dangerous". And the other was that the end of the elephant nose and they were like, "Oh, this is like a really powerful tool that could be used for lots of different things". And then there was another blind human who was at the tail end with the hair and they're like, "Oh, this is so simple, we could use this to create

art and make paintings and whatnot". And another one with over at the ears and like, "Wow, this is so big and flexible and comforting. I can wrap myself in this".

And so it's each human experience was entirely different for the same thing and entirely true and valid experiences. And so often the journey and practice of reconciliation can feel many different ways at different times, depending on where we're at in that journey. And it's not linear, it's an ongoing journey. And yeah, so I just really love that story because it just speaks to that, how creating that space for sharing and that dialog we can kind of help figure out, you know, what is that bigger picture? And it's that piece too of coming together and sharing which really lend support for community care and then inherently about self-care to you.

APPELT: Yeah, I think that's really powerful, and I think it also, like you said, it talks about the different experiences, whether they're simultaneous or sequential. And that bringing the different experiences together, you get a different picture than if you have kind of siloed each experience separately. And I think it also kind of goes back to what you were saying about the situation versus person where some things are due to who we are. Some things are due to the situation out there and more is determined by the situation than we often realize, but many of us would respond the same in a given situation. So, I think that nicely encapsulates a lot of what we've been talking about. And it kind of feels like we've segued from some of the barriers to some of the strategies and how behavioural insights can maybe start contributing to reconciliation in real ways.

So maybe this would be a good place to discuss that perennial topic in behavioural insights - habit formation, disrupting old habits, creating new habits. And I know you have some thoughts about how habits relate to reconciliation and how we can change habits. So could you talk a little bit about that?

PAPIK: Yeah, I love habits, you know, new ones that we can create and which ones can we let go of? You know, some habits were created during a time that were really helpful and beneficial for where we were at in time and space, and then as we grow and change, some of those habits may no longer be serving us and maybe causing harm.

And I recently listened to episode of Hidden Brain around habits, I can't remember the name of it, but it was a really interesting episode where they talked about creating some friction to end an old habit, a classic one, I remember being a kid and used to bite my nails, my mom would put that stuff on my fingernail so it would taste awful. There's an example of that creating that friction to end the old habit and then also removing friction to start a new habit. And in the episode, the guest was talking about how she would go for morning runs, and her friction was like getting ready. So she started going to bed with her running gear on so that she could just get up and go. And I definitely can relate to that doing the exercise in the morning, I like to do that before my brain can start to think of 101 reasons why I don't need to do any exercise this morning.

And then also, there's that power of repetition versus transformative practice which has four pillars and attention seeking guidance. And then the fourth is repetition, and I really found that to be so helpful especially as a mama, because I remember, you know, like how many times do I have to say and I do this thing and feel some frustration and then learning about this, I'm like, "Okay, I guess I need to do this 101 times in order for maybe this to become a thing". So approaching with that kindness instead.

So over time, that power repetition can create new neural pathways and new habits and new tendencies and the key is to help to create enough repetition so that a new behaviour can become an unconscious habit. Because I guess that's essentially what a habit is. Is like this unconscious behavior that we do. And I think that's so key, is how to just kind of embed it. So we're just kind of getting up and doing some stretches without even thinking about it. Life goals.

APPELT: Absolutely. Yeah. And I think what you were saying about friction will probably really resonate with our listeners who, especially those coming from the behavioural certificate program because a lot of what we talk about is removing friction towards the goal behaviour. And it's equally true that adding friction against the previous behaviour, the less wanted behavior is important, and I think that's a piece we don't talk about quite as much. So I think that's a great point of not only do we want to ease the path to the goal behaviour, but we can also put up some friction against the less desired behaviour, I think that's a great one.

And then another thing that struck me about another area of where behavioral insights has something to say is about the idea of tailoring that has to be the right idea for the right person at the right time. And I think that's really important with heavy topics like reconciliation, topics where there is attitudinal components where things might be deeply ingrained behaviours and habits. So is that something that you've seen where different ideas or experiences or practices will resonate with different people, and it's important to have the one that matches for the person?

PAPIK: Most definitely. And it's something I take into consideration when we're designing workshops, say, for example, we just did a Pathways to Allyship workshop. And just about value and importance of having allies be a part of the training to echo and put in their own words the insights or knowledge that we're sharing because of the way that our brains work. You know, back to the biology, you know, their folks, public servants who are non-Indigenous will be able to better hear a message, especially maybe a more uncomfortable message from someone who looks and sounds like them so that it's so powerful. And I think that's what, everybody has a role and an opportunity and a purpose within the journey of reconciliation, whether we're Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

And then another piece too, I think has been really key is providing education through storytelling. You know, the neuroscience shows that activates all parts of our brain and we love it. You know, we all love watching TV shows and movies, it's all storytelling. And so featuring people's voices, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, sharing their stories, sharing their feelings and their experiences.

And then we use a process called Collective Story Harvest, which comes from the art of hosting, where you invite folks to listen to stories with specific lenses. And so you kind of create this pathway like listening for moments occurred within a story. What did you notice, see, hear, and feel? And it can become also a very enriching experience for the storyteller because they can kind of round out that story based on all these other insights that people are providing for them that they might not have considered before.

And, you know, in terms of reconciliation, there's so many different ways to come into this. Depending on what your interests are like. Like behavioural insights can be one way. Or perhaps if you are an avid ice hockey player or you love to watch hockey, you know there's a rich history of Indigenous people and stories within every kind of aspect of society. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Actions is a great place to start. There's all aspects of society in there and those are calls to action to give to spark ideas. If any folks are on campus that UBC, there's the Indian Residential School History and Dialogue Centre, and they have a really great kind of resource centre where you can enter in whichever topic really interests you.

And lots of other resources as well, like the UBC Learning Circle. And there's a lot of these kind of circles that are emerging within various sectors and practices. People are really wanting, you know, as we're growing awareness about the truth of our shared history, they're wanting to do the right thing. They don't always know what that is, where they are. They have a lot of feelings and fear. And so having those spaces to kind of realize that “You're not alone in this, it's okay”. And it means where we're on the right pathway. And so I love Circle because there's always room for one more.

APPELT: Absolutely, and I think, like you said, there's so many resources at this point, it's not the issue that there's not the resources, it's just finding the resource that speaks to you, that is your point of entry. And one thing that kind of was percolating in my mind while you were talking there and you were talking previously about repetition and then you were talking about how the message is delivered will work for different people. And it actually reminded me of something that's a more recent research finding around note taking and in classes.

Now we actually tell people that it's better not to take notes on a computer because we can type as fast as we hear. So if we're taking notes on a computer, we often just type verbatim what the person has said. Whereas if we're writing out longhand, we often put it into our own words. So it's not just the repetition, but it's actually putting it in a way that makes sense for us. And we find that students actually learn better because it's not just "This is exactly what they said", but "This is what that means to me" and it helps build that connection to the material. So I think that just really jumped out at me.

PAPIK: Hmm. Yeah, that's definitely how I figured out in the university, how I learned best, I take notes, and then it's in there.

APPELT: Yeah, exactly. And then one last piece I wanted to bring up is another thing from behavioural insights is we know that people and as you've mentioned, it can be overwhelming and it's easier if we have a couple of concrete suggestions. And last time, you had a brilliant suggestion towards the end, which was putting a symbol nearby to remind you to work towards reconciliation. And for myself after that, I found this really neat sticker by an Indigenous artist and it reminds me to recognize Indigenous knowledge, people and land. And it's been such a powerful addition to my workplace, and I really appreciate that recommendation. So I was wondering if you have another suggestion you'd like to share today, kind of like a call to action, one thing that listeners could do today to start to support decolonization in their own lives.

PAPIK: Wonderful, yeah. I was thinking about this one thing, and I think saving the date for May 12 and registering for Moose Hide Campaign Day, May 12, this year it'll be in Victoria as well as online, nationally. You can go to the website moosehidecampaign.ca, register for the day order moose hide pins and wear them. I find that wearing the pin creates space for the dialogue in terms of inviting in how and what respect can look like with each other in terms of ending violence towards women and children.

May 12th, the day of, you can join us in a day of ceremony, storytelling. There's a bunch of workshops being offered, including one by myself, along with some co-hosts from Emergency Management BC on self-discovery and awareness through storytelling. As well, there's a bunch of other workshops that are being offered by Indigenous people. So yeah, I think it's one way to kind of gain some inspiration and additional kind of pathways forward.

APPELT: It's great. So we have a concrete date, and we all know that people respond to deadlines, so we have to register before May 12, that is perfect. And yeah, that's such an important day and I look forward to hopefully participating in some of the activities. I'll have to look up your session. And I know we're running low on time, so I'll move towards our final questions. Do you have any last message for our BI practitioners in training?

PAPIK: I'd like to offer gratitude for your open hearts and open minds in this journey. And along with that, I'd just offer a gentle reminder to practice self-care and self compassion and love for yourselves and each other along the way. Stepping into this space can really be like a quadruple word score in terms of those holistic

benefits, helping us to be able to do our jobs better, improve relations to each other, and the land and improve our mental health and well-being and this I share from what people write to me over the years to say, “Oh, you know, this is has had such a positive impact”, and so just offer that as a way to end.

APPELT: That' s perfect, and were there any last thoughts, any questions I should have asked and didn't, anything you wanted to end with besides that beautiful ending?

PAPIK: Gratitude to you and to the whole Behavioural Insights Group and team. And I really love the space that's created, and I love the opportunity to have alongside Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, as well as the BI perspective. I think that's just so powerful and such a wonderful way for us to have that space and create those linkages.

APPELT: Absolutely, I totally agree, and I'm really looking forward to finding more ways to explore how the two knowledges intersect and how we can do more to lift them both simultaneously. So perfect end. I didn't think it could get better than your previous end and it did, so thank you so much for joining today. I always feel very fortunate and grateful to have the opportunity to explore this topic and other topics with you. It's always such a rich discussion, so I'm really thankful for your time and your knowledge and your generosity. So thank you for taking the time today.

PAPIK: Thank you.

APPELT: And thanks to our listeners for joining us for another episode of Calling DIBS.