

Indigenous Lifeways in Canadian Business

INDIGENOUS LIFEWAYS IN CANADIAN BUSINESS

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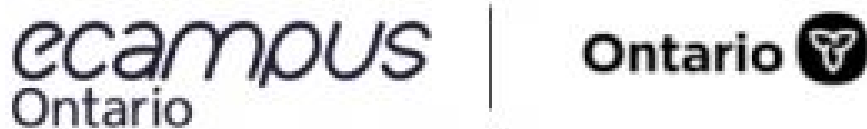
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VIDEO SERIES

Overview of Video Vignettes

Digital storytelling is an important tool in Indigenous educational practices and is a vital means of knowledge transfer (Woodhouse, 2011). This collection offers a series of digital storytelling vignettes that briefly explain topics related to the Indigenous business environment in Canada. The video series contains interview content from Indigenous business leaders from across the country and highlights both the obstacles and successes of Indigenous professionals. Further, interviewees explore their relationships with the law, governance, self-determination, history, and culture and how Indigenous populations interact with governments, corporations, and other non-Indigenous institutions while conducting business activities.

Strength in Networks

Business networking, the process of establishing personal and business connections with other professionals, can lead to mutually beneficial relationships in the future. For aspiring Indigenous professionals, building a network with others who share their culture, beliefs, and values provides previously unavailable social support. These processes are further facilitated by organizations such as the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Businesses (CCAB), who have provided research, training, and networking initiatives to encourage the growth of Indigenous-owned businesses; as well as the Indigenous Professional Association of Canada (IPAC), which is dedicated to advancing Indigenous leadership. In this video, Indigenous entrepreneurs Krystal Abotossaway and Kat Pasquach share valuable insights into the importance of professional and personal support systems, which ultimately build the foundation of shared prosperity.



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Overcoming Entrepreneurial Challenges

While there has been an increase in the success in the Indigenous economy, Indigenous small businesses are faced with a higher number of financial barriers than their non-Indigenous counterparts. These institutional barriers hinder Indigenous business owners from seeking financial aid through common avenues, whether through government programs or loans via centralized banks. Evidence suggests that over 50% of Indigenous entrepreneurs struggle to keep their businesses afloat due to inadequate access to debt financing. To aid FNMI businesses, Indigenous-led financial institutions such as Aboriginal Capital Corporation have been launched, though few Indigenous entrepreneurs are cognizant of their services. Indigenous entrepreneur Kat Pasquach emphasizes the importance of seizing every available option; and Sarah Hopkins-Herr, founder of Three Sisters Consulting, speaks of positive experiences when seeking financial resources to keep their businesses operational.



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Workplace Discrimination

In mainstream Canadian business environments, First Nation, Inuit, and Métis populations often face social and cultural barriers such as prejudice, discrimination, and racism. These systemic barriers have a negative impact on the health and well-being of Indigenous workers; particularly Indigenous women, who experience both racial and gender discrimination. In spite of the equity, diversity, and inclusion programs that are implemented by institutions to combat systemic discrimination, Indigenous employees express the manner in which they feel tokenized or held to different standards relative to their non-Indigenous colleagues. These experiences are further elaborated on by Krystal Abotossaway, the president of the Indigenous Professional Association of Canada (IPAC), and Alex Jacobs-Blum, an Indigenous entrepreneur and artist. With the increase of workplace initiatives that are dedicated to improving diversity and inclusivity, it is a growing hope that institutions cultivate a positive and safe environment for Indigenous workers.



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Building Bridges

When Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission presented its Final Report in 2015, it contained a series of Calls to Action that was intended to redress the legacy of residential schools and to pave a road forward toward reconciliation. In this framework, policies were created to commit members of corporate Canada to build economic consensus, foster meaningful consultations, and form respectful relationships with Indigenous populations. Business partnerships, joint ventures, and strategic alliances prove to be beneficial for all parties involved, as they collectively promote economic prosperity through sharing and integrating their respective knowledge and expertise. Steven Vanloffeld, the founder and CEO of eSupply Canada Limited, describes how the Canadian marketplace strongly desires viable Indigenous supply firms. Sarah Hopkins-Herr, Indigenous entrepreneur and founder of Three Sisters Consulting, offers insight into the networking opportunities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses. From diminishing unemployment rates to increasing the socio-economic wellbeing of Indigenous communities across Canada, these forms of business partnerships create the building blocks that bridge the economic divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders.



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Governance Board Membership

The Board of Directors is a governing body that represents the interests of community stakeholders on non-profit and owner shareholders when referring to corporate boards. Forming a skilled and balanced group of

individuals to work on boards promotes respectful and productive discussions, which is fundamental to achieving organizational success. Minority populations, however, are found to be vastly underrepresented in the boardroom. In 2020, a report on diversity disclosure practices demonstrated that only 0.5% of board members in Canada were of Indigenous descent. Corporations have yet to realize that Indigenous board members contribute valuable knowledge and perspectives, as well as attracting and retaining more Indigenous talent. It additionally provides organizations with the opportunity to demonstrate respect for social, cultural, and environmental values of Indigenous populations. These advantages are expanded upon by Indigenous professional Krystal Abotossaway, who recounts her experiences as a board member.



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Governance Board Membership – Video URL Direct Link

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Authenticity and Indigenous Products

Cultural artistic expression revitalizes and reaffirms the heritage of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The distribution of authentic Arts and handicrafts are methods in which Indigenous populations can preserve their cultural identity. A global marketplace for Indigenous Arts, handicrafts, and tourism was built on the widespread interest of Indigenous cultures, which is a necessary tool for alleviating socio-economic hardship. Due to this rise in popularity of Indigenous products, an entire market segment has developed where inexpensive, inauthentic, and mass-produced items are being marketed as Indigenous. As non-Indigenous companies commoditize culturally-appropriated Arts and handicrafts, they negatively impact authentic Indigenous producers. Kat Pasquach, the owner of Culture Shock Jewelry, offers her insight into the differences between cultural appropriation and appreciation. She further describes how the time, labour, and cultural expertise of Indigenous products warrant the demand for higher prices. The reclamation of culturally

significant arts and handicrafts is a crucial endeavour; one that will lead to positive social, economic, and cultural outcomes for Indigenous populations around the world.



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Authenticity in Indigenous Products – Video URL Direct Link

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One Foot in Two Canoes

Culture is fundamentally a social phenomenon that we acquire through frequent and consistent interaction with our close social groups. One’s cultural identity typically stems from the amalgamation of where one is born and among whom they’re raised. Indigenous business leaders must often balance the demands of their profession with their cultural and community roots, leaving their communities to further their professional careers. To have “one foot in two canoes” is described by author Beverly McBride as simultaneously participating in both traditional cultural lifeways and Western business practices. Because of the separation from traditional lands and the demands of their career, Indigenous professionals strive to maintain a connection with their community. Krystal Abotossaway, Indigenous entrepreneur and president of IPAC, describes how she maintains balance while working away from home by nurturing her connection to the reserve community. Indigenous artist and entrepreneur Alex Jacobs-Blum shares her experiences with choosing her community’s needs as a motivation for the work she performs.



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Natural Capital Accounting

The climate impact of corporate interests has long been regarded as a central cause of global warming. Due to the pressure of concerned consumers, companies are engaging in green marketing tactics to combat the strain on the earth's biosphere, including the implementation of sustainable economic and social development. Sustainable development is built on the theme of future generations, in which the needs of the population are ideally met without the overexploitation of natural resources. This notion is shared by the Indigenous teachings of the Seven Generations, which encourages decision-makers to consider the long-term impact of their decisions seven generations into the future. Extending inalienable legal rights to nature, known also as Earth Jurisprudence, would reduce the possibility of exploitation, particularly when combined with Natural Capital Accounting. This initiative, which was developed by the United Nations, could be the key to presenting environmental value in a manner that corporate interests will understand—by translating it into a quantifiable value and thereby offering environmental protection that was otherwise unavailable. Dr Russell Evans, a professor of accounting at the University of Windsor, elaborates on the concept of the Seven Generations and Natural Capital Accounting, both of which play a critical role in the protection of our planet.





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Corporate Indigenous Inclusion

Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action in 2015, corporations are struggling to engage with Indigenous communities and knowledge systems in a manner that is both ethical and meaningful. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) programs are tools that are utilized to address inequality in the workplace, including the inequities experienced by Indigenous populations in corporate environments. EDI initiatives that are designed for Indigenous populations in Canada must first become informed about the historic relationship between the settler government and its First Nations, Métis, and Inuit inhabitants. Corporations attempt to address the anti-Indigenous racism within their own companies by providing opportunities for their employees to engage with Indigenous culture, language, and art; offering financial support for Indigenous community non-profit organizations and the advancement of Indigenous education. If EDI principles are not sufficiently applied, corporations have established protocols and policies that are built to do so in its place. Dr Russell Evans, an Indigenous professor at the University of Windsor, speaks about the manner in which EDI and Indigenization serves to improve corporate culture for Indigenous populations and other marginalized groups.



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[Video?v=508756&node=2106721&a=1869312696&autoplay=1](https://uwindsor.yuja.com/V/Video?v=508756&node=2106721&a=1869312696&autoplay=1)**Corporate Indigenous Inclusion**

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Indigenous Entrepreneurship

Economic development through resource extraction is an important tool for the creation of own-sourced revenue. To achieve long-term economic sustainability, however, it must be supported by community-appropriate business development. Various Indigenous communities authorize impact and benefit agreements with multi-national resource extraction corporations, doing so with the intention that the economic benefits will offset the resulting ethical and environmental concessions. In reality, the agreements often leave the communities in a similar socio-economic state before the resources were extracted, which is attributed to the phenomenon of economic leakage. Business development for Indigenous populations, on the other hand, refers the strategic decision to produce and promote businesses for and within their own communities. Doing so would not only recapture economic leakage, but provide additional revenue sources. Dr Russell Evans, the professor of accounting at the University of Windsor, offers his insight into the benefits of Indigenous entrepreneurship.



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Funding

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References

Woodhouse, H. (2011). Storytelling in university education: Emotion, teachable moments, and the value of life. *The Journal of Educational Thought (JET)/Revue de la Pensée Educative*, 45(3), 211-238.

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Canadian Business logo

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Images

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Artwork

- Cover logo, and video logo – Hal Evans, Ojibwe Artist