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Capstone Project Proposal: Indigenizing the Organization

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Capstone Project Proposal: Indigenizing the Organization

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) published its findings along with an action plan that outlined idealized reconciliation processes and frameworks for all aspects of Canadian society, including the corporate sector:

92. We call upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources. . . . iii. Provide education for management and staff on the history and legacy of residential schools, the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations. This will require skills based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights and anti-racism (TRC, 2015, p.10, Italics in original).

Indigenous and non-Indigenous corporate training consultants and firms began creating professional development workshops and training programs in anticipation of these findings and the action plan being produced by the TRC. Dragonfly Consulting Services Canada (DCSC) is one example, providing guidelines, written by an Indigenous adult educator, for the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives into organizations; suggested approaches include the use and placement of cultural artifacts and sacred objects in the workplace, yet there is a cautionary note in the discourse suggesting the possibility of cultural appropriation of traditional Indigenous knowledge, symbols and artifacts, and further marginalization of Indigenous peoples (DCSC, 2012, as cited in Davidson, 2016). Contrastingly, Environmental Careers Organization (ECO) has created a corporate hiring guide for the inclusion of Indigenous peoples into Canada's

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workforce, that is written from a Eurocentric settler-ally perspective, that attempts to promote Indigenous inclusion in the workplace, while maintaining the original Eurocentric construct of the organization and its culture (ECO, n.d., as cited in Davidson, 2016).

An emergent theme is reactionary reconciliation curricula produced for organizational learning, mandated by the TRC's *Call to Action*, that is inherently problematic, as it forces the reconciliation mandate onto the Canadian corporate sector without effectively challenging the Eurocentric construct of the organization. Indigenizing the organization:

acts to deconstruct the Eurocentric nature of the workplace, creating an inclusive organization that is built upon constructivist ideology, incorporating Indigenous ways of being and knowing into all aspects of the organization, rather than promoting the colonial assimilationist ideology which always acts to marginalize and oppress a diverse workforce (Davidson, 2016, p.7).

This capstone project intends to explore the theoretical concepts that underpin 'Indigenizing the organization', with the intention of constructing a decolonized framework for organizational learning that is theoretically sound, and practical, for use in the corporate sector.

The majority of scholarship on decolonization in adult education comes from the higher education stream, with discourse on 'Indigenizing the academy' that challenges the Eurocentric nature of evidence-based knowledge construction in educational organizations, seeking to validate Indigenous knowledge production and research methodology. There is relatively little scholarship that focuses directly on decolonization in organizational settings that exist outside the realm of post-secondary education; as such, this project intends to expand the collective

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knowledge base in the fields of adult and Aboriginal education, with a focus on organizational learning (learning in the workplace).

Format Choice and Rationale

The final product of this capstone project will be formatted as a journal article, written to the publication specifications for the peer-reviewed journal *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*. Specifications require the article to be 5000 to 7000 words in length (including title, keywords, abstract, acknowledgements, glossary/appendices, and references); be original work that “should link theory and practice in a way that sheds light on the present state of Indigenous theory, thinking and practice, and make sense out of concrete issues, whether they are at local, national or global levels” (AlterNative, n.d., p.2). This publication was selected for its international audience; its focus on Indigenous scholarship, the construction of Indigenous knowledge, and the validation of Indigenous methodology; for the credibility of its contributors, and their research interests in the interdisciplinary field of Indigenous Studies.

As this project aims to construct a framework for decolonized organizational learning, based on current Aboriginal and adult education theory, that is practical in nature, and generic enough to be used in various organizational (corporate) settings, it meets the publication requirements outlined above. The intended audience for this article is scholars from interdisciplinary fields of study including Indigenous Studies; Indigenous Governance; Aboriginal Education; Adult Education; and Organizational and Management Studies, along with

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professionals in the fields of human resource management, corporate training development, and business management.

Research Methodology

A literature review was conducted using primary sources searched via the Queen's University Library databases. Keywords included 'aboriginal education'; 'Medicine Wheel pedagogy'; 'Indigenous research methodology'; 'Indigenous knowledge production'; 'Indigenous organizational learning'; 'Indigenous corporate training'; 'decolonization of workplace learning'; and 'reconciliation in organizational learning'.

The annotated bibliography was written using the most relevant primary sources (peer-reviewed journal articles), and sources from the author's previous writings on the topic, that combine to create a theoretical foundation for the construction of Medicine Wheel based framework for 'Indigenizing the Organization'. Framework is intended to be practically applied to organizational learning initiatives that address the TRC *Call to Action* (2015) mandates, with the intention of validating Indigenous knowledge used in corporate contexts.

Conclusion

Limited empirical research and literature exist that directly relates to 'Indigenizing the Organization'; the majority of the literature used for this capstone project is interdisciplinary in nature, and requires extrapolation in order to apply theory directly to decolonization and indigenization discourse in organizational learning. As this field of inquiry is relatively limited, this work contributes to the collective knowledge base in the fields of Aboriginal and adult

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education. “Future educational research and scholarship is needed to develop, implement and monitor Indigenization strategies in Canadian workplaces, with emphasis on worker recruitment, retention, and overall cultural wellbeing” (Davidson, 2016, p.12); this current work intends to create a practical framework in which to implement Indigenization strategies into the workplace. It is the first step in ‘Indigenizing the Organization’, and will have to be evaluated in practice to measure its viability in moving toward a decolonized corporate sector in Canada.

Annotated Bibliography

Alfred, T. (2009). *Peace, power, righteousness: An Indigenous manifesto* (2nd ed.). Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

This text was selected as a foundational work on decolonization through ‘self-conscious traditionalism’ framework that focuses on the valuation of Indigenous core values, principals and traditional teachings. While this ideology is intended to inform and shape social, political, and economic issues in Indigenous governance, it can be used as a framework applied to the decolonization of organizational learning. The author is a Kahnawake Mohawk; a Canada Research Chair; and founding director of the School of Indigenous Governance at the University of Victoria.

Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. Saskatoon, SK: Purich Publishing Limited.

This text provides theoretical arguments for the Indigenization of organizational learning, and provides discourse on the ethics of creating space for educational and organizational

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decolonization, acknowledging the difficulties of combining Eurocentric (Westernized) and Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing. It provides discussion on Indigenous methodology, Indigenous pedagogy, and anti-racism discourse that are all instrumental for creating a viable framework for organizational learning that strives to decolonize the organization, rather than act as a tokenistic approach to organizational learning. The author is of Mi'kmaw heritage, an educator in the Faculty of Education, University of Saskatchewan; the 2013 Canadian Association of University Teachers, Distinguished Academic Award recipient; and is elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

Bell, N. (2014). Teaching by the Medicine Wheel: An Anishinaabe framework for Indigenous education. *Education Canada*, 54(3), 14-16.

This article validates the use of the Medicine Wheel as Indigenous pedagogy, through the illustration of Medicine Wheel framework based on traditional Anishinaabe teachings. While the use of Medicine Wheel symbolism and teachings vary amongst Indigenous nations, commonalities exists where the Medicine Wheel represents an interconnectedness to all things. The author acknowledges that Medicine Wheel teachings are often specific to each Indigenous nation or community, and creates frameworks that incorporate various traditional teachings, positing that Indigenous knowledge as a whole is collective in nature, though each Indigenous nation maintains its autonomy through the creation of knowledge that is place-based and reflective of cultural traditions and practices. This article serves as a foundation for the creation of Medicine Wheel framework specific to 'Indigenizing the organization'. The author is of Anishinaabe

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heritage, and is currently an assistant professor in the School of Education and Professional Learning at Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada.

Bhargava, R. (2012). The difficulty of reconciliation. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 38(4-5), 369-377. doi: 10.101177/0191453712447997

This article was selected for its discourse on reconciliation and the problems that are inherent with reconciling at the community level, including the realities associated with victim-perpetrator relationship building: ownership of past injustices, forgiveness, and the acknowledgement of the collective history and politics that underscored the subjugated relations. While the author is speaking of reconciliation between religious factions (Muslim-Hindu relations) in India, the problematic nature of reconciliation as illustrated, is inherently similar to the problems facing reconciliation of colonial-settler and Indigenous peoples and communities in Canada. The author, at the time of publication, was representing the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in India.

Botha, L. (2011). Mixing methods as a process towards indigenous methodologies. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 14(4), 313-325. doi: 10.1080/13645579.2010.516644

This article was selected for its discourse on Indigenous knowledge production and research methodology, with discussion of place within the Eurocentric academy for traditional Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous ways of being and knowing. The author proposes that Indigenous methodology is founded in conventional (Westernized)

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qualitative research methodology; this assumption acts to marginalize traditional Indigenous knowledge production by weighting it according to the currently acceptable conventional standards for empirical evidence collection, rather than promoting it on its own merits. The concept of mixing Eurocentric and Indigenous methodologies is intended to validate the Indigenous methodologies; however, it illustrates the problematic nature of decolonizing knowledge production within the organization. The author, at the time of publication, is a lecturer in the Department of Education and International Studies at Oslo University College; his research interests are based in anti-colonial perspectives, and include Indigenous knowledge production.

Brown, K.G., Doucette, M.B., and Tulk, J.E. (Eds.). (2016). *Indigenous business in Canada: Principles and practices*. Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press.

This text is foundational in nature, presented as a collection of essays that are key to addressing issues and challenges relating to Canadian Indigenous business policy and practice. It presents the Indigenous voice on issues relating to land usage agreements, Treaties, Indigenous economic development, sustainability, corporate ‘best practices’, business law, and so forth. While corporate training development and human resources management have little representation in this work, it is valuable for its insight into labour market demographics, and its focus on building relationships with Indigenous peoples and communities, and the corporate sector. The authors are scholars from the Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies at Cape Breton University, with experience in local, regional and national Indigenous issues in Canada.

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Davidson, C.M., (2016). *Intentional Indigenization of organizational learning: A critical annotated bibliography*. Unpublished manuscript, School of Graduate Studies, Faculty of Education, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

This manuscript was selected for its introductory work in building a knowledge base for the author's theoretical foundation in 'Indigenizing the Organization'. As there is little in the area of educational or organizational studies research being conducted on the subject, this work is intended to be an entry point into further research and professional practice in the field of organizational learning. The author is an adult educator and graduate student in the Professional Master of Education Program at Queen's University, with a field of study in Aboriginal Education. She is of Nakota (Assiniboine) and European heritage.

Elliot, M. (2016). Participatory parity and Indigenous decolonization struggles. *Constellations*, 23(3), 413-424. doi: 10.1111/1467-8675.12235

This article was selected for its theoretical framework that acts to provide space for public narrative on decolonization; while it does not speak directly to decolonization or reconciliation in organizational (corporate) contexts, it does provide a socio-political narrative of the discursive nature of Indigenous-settler relations, and offers participatory parity as a means to publicly problematize the colonial role of subjugating Indigenous peoples', seeking a paradigm shift in power relations as a positive step toward decolonization. The author provides a framework for participatory parity that is justice

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oriented, focusing on dispute resolution, and promoting an equity between settler and Indigenous normatives.

MacKinnon, S. (2015). *Decolonizing employment: Aboriginal inclusion in Canada's labour market*. Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press.

This text was selected for its narrative on the decolonization of Canada's corporate sector; written in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) findings, it is foundational in its approach to decolonizing the organization. However, the narrative focuses on critiquing neoliberalism and capitalism, and takes a narrow focus on Indigenous peoples' participation in labour market training that is designed to meet the demands of corporate 'just-in-time' mindsets. A case study of the Manitoba labour market is included, which illustrates the realities of the conflicting nature of Indigenous ways of being and knowing and the needs of the Westernized corporate sector. The author is an assistant professor in the Department of Urban and Inner City Studies at the University of Winnipeg.

Morcom, L. (2017). Indigenous holistic education in philosophy and practice, with wampum as a case study. *Foro de Educacion*, 15(23), 121-138. doi: 10.14516/fde.572

This article provides a philosophical underpinning for holism in Indigenous education, including discourse on cross-curricular learning that aligns with the interconnectedness of Indigenous pedagogy, which rejects a Westernized compartmentalization of curriculum based on individual subjects and levels of ability. While this article focuses on decolonized K-12 education, its theory can be applied to adult education and

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organizational learning. This work also validates the use of a traditional Anishinaabe Medicine Wheel as a pedagogical tool for holistic educational practices. The author is an assistant professor and coordinator of the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. She is of Anishinaabe (Algonquin) Metis and European heritage.

Orr, J. A. (2000). Learning from Native adult education. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 85(1), 59-66.

This article focuses on the traditional Indigenous origins and use of the Medicine wheel, and validates the use of Medicine Wheel traditional Indigenous teachings as a pedagogical tool to support holistic adult learning. Additionally, the article provides a theoretical reference for the creation and use of Medicine Wheel frameworks for decolonized organizational learning initiatives. At the time of publication, the author held the position of associate professor and chair of the Department of Education at St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Whiteman, G. (2009). All my relations: Understanding perceptions of justice and conflict between companies and Indigenous peoples. *Organization Studies*, 30(1), 101-120.
doi: 10.1177/0170840608100518

This article discusses the concept of justice as it relates corporate social responsibility in relationships with Indigenous peoples, lands, and communities. It is a foundational work necessary to understand the complexities of justice and perceived injustices relating to corporate social responsibility (i.e.: sustainability practices, land usage agreements,

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environmental responsibilities) and the Indigenous - corporate relationship which is built upon historically unjust organizational practices. The article discusses the implications for the field of organizational studies, and provides a theoretical lens in which to view an intentionally Indigenized organization. The author is affiliated with the Rotterdam School of Management at Erasmus University, The Netherlands.

References

AlterNative. (n.d.). AlterNative manuscript submission guidelines. Retrieved from:

[http://www.alternative.ac.nz/sites/default/files/AlterNative%20Manuscript
%20Submission%20Guidelines.pdf](http://www.alternative.ac.nz/sites/default/files/AlterNative%20Manuscript%20Submission%20Guidelines.pdf)

Davidson, C.M. (2016). *Intentional Indigenization of organizational learning: A critical annotated bibliography*. Unpublished manuscript, School of Graduate Studies, Faculty of Education, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). (2015). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Call to action*. Winnipeg, MB: Author.