Building business cred in the hood

Traditional teachings and legitimacy management in indigenous communities

Jean-Charles Cachon

Department of Marketing and Management, Laurentian University, Sudbury, Canada

Abstract

Purpose - Primary sector firms by and large operate on indigenous territories across the world. In Canada, partnerships, land rights settlements, decolonization and reconciliation efforts provide indigenous communities with the financial means and the political power to stop projects they consider contrary to their traditions. How can companies acquire legitimacy among indigenous communities? This paper aims to answer this question by examining what the economic issues are among indigenous communities, how theories and practices of sustainable and legitimacy management articulated and how some basic notions of traditional indigenous teachings could inform non-indigenous managers are and help them interact better with indigenous leaders and their communities.

Design/methodology/approach - This paper was informed about indigenous knowledge by secondary and primary indigenous and business sources from North America and from other areas such as Africa, Asia, Australia and New Zealand. Information about business relations with indigenous communities and stakeholders mostly came from non-indigenous sources, including scholarly results obtained within indigenous communities.

Findings - Sources of incompatibility between indigenous and European/Western worldviews are described. A selection of indigenous traditional beliefs and decision-making processes are presented, based on indigenous traditions around the Great Lakes region of North America. A discussion of desirable options for both indigenous and non-indigenous decision-makers to establish business legitimacy by overcoming their misperceptions is included.

Practical implications - A better understanding of economic issues in indigenous communities, indigenous perspectives and current developments, as well as lessons from the recent decades on successes and failures at establishing business legitimacy among indigenous communities, will help government and business decision-makers, as well as students and academic scholars.

Originality/value - Mainly based on management legitimacy theory and Anishnaabe knowledge, this paper makes an original contribution to the understanding of Indigenous strategic thinking in North America in its interaction with business legitimacy building issues.

Keywords Business legitimacy, Indigenous traditions, Sovereignty, Decolonization

Paper type General review

Introduction

Contrasting indigenous and business perspectives

In their communities, indigenous peoples are confronted with the challenges of improving their living conditions while keeping and reviving the traditional teachings that were at the core of their civilization prior to European contact. To that effect, they have to recover from the damages imposed by colonization, for example obtain proper enforcement of treaties (when they exist), legal recognition of aboriginal title, plus adequate compensation and reconciliation measures. Land rights settlements are currently in progress in Canada, where, as Mason (1983) observed, indigenous peoples retain little sovereignty unless they have kept traditional governing structures in place (which is the case, overtly or not, among some
communities). This is one of the reasons why the revival of traditional teachings is important among indigenous peoples in Canada.

In the USA, Kalt and Singer (2004) describe indigenous nations as pre-existing the United States, with their sovereignty recognized and protected by the Constitution, treaties (all signed before 1880, Mason, 1983), court decisions, and human rights principles. Even if the Bureau of Indian Affairs has played a major role in controlling and assimilating indigenous people into American society, the fact that reservations and treaties were mostly settled by the 1880s left room for indigenous populations to resist assimilation from within. In this more favorable sovereignty context, even if it took until after the second part of the twentieth century, American indigenous nations were able to conduct self-development activities earlier than their Canadian counterparts. By acting according to their recognized self-determination rights, chiefs such as Phillip Martin (2009) were able to deal directly with lawmakers and presidents in Washington without having to depend on courts’ decisions.

In Canada, the federal government started dismantling indigenous nations’ social fabric by enrolling children by force into residential schools away from their families almost at the same time (1870-1880) where the US Government was done settling most remaining indigenous populations into reservations. In Canada, while children abductions lasted over a century, the proportion of indigenous youth in foster care outside relatives is still six times higher than among Non-indigenous youth. Indigenous social services in Canada also remain underfunded (Blackstock et al., 2006; Hamidi and Kanapé Fontaine, 2018), due in part to jurisdiction conflicts (Blumenthal and Sinha, 2015). Chandler and Lalonde (1998) compared indigenous communities with and without protective social infrastructures such as land sovereignty, self-government, access to education, health services, cultural facilities, police and fire services. Communities with all these in place had a youth suicide rate of 2 per 100,000, but the proportion was 138 per 100,000 for communities lacking these conditions. In other words, sovereignty issues are related to key health, social, and economic issues among Canadian indigenous populations.

This is the context companies work with, in terms of defining their role and approaches in acquiring legitimacy with indigenous populations. This article brings together a study of the extant literature on economic issues among aboriginal communities, examines theories of sustainable and legitimacy management and their application to indigenous communities in Africa and Asia, before introducing some traditional indigenous teachings relevant to behavior and decision-making common in the Great Lakes region of North America. The final sections describe how indigenous communities and companies interact in light of the current context where indigenous teachings are made public by indigenous elders, through formal and informal channels.

Overview
This article is structured as follows. Section 1 reviews the extant literature relative to indigenous communities’ economic issues in relation to their contacts with the external world. The ensuing dynamics of these situations are described from both indigenous and Non-indigenous perspectives, including cultural aspects, economic transformations within communities, land rights settlements, formal agreements with business organizations, plus economic development success stories among some exemplary indigenous communities. Section 2 reviews applied research on business and stakeholder relations as they relate to building legitimacy for a company within indigenous communities’ territories. In these contexts, case studies of companies trying establish their legitimacy among indigenous communities are reviewed. Section 3 of the article first introduces the general differences between the Western and indigenous perspectives, then presents a selection of traditional
indigenous beliefs corroborated by publications as well as primary sources (which include personal conversations and public presentations by elders). Section 4 presents two current cases of companies operating in indigenous territories, one in the Inuit region of Inuvik, Northern Quebec, the other among Anishnaabe and Cree First Nations in Northern Ontario.

**Literature review – evolving indigenous economies**

Since the 1990s, when scholars (other than ethnologists) started studying indigenous Entrepreneurship and economic activities, five topics have been of particular interest: early on, the main question was whether indigenous populations had specific ways of doing business, as a result of social and cultural characteristics; a second area of studies examined the structure of economic activity by sector among indigenous communities; thirdly, the conclusion of numerous land rights agreements across Canada led to research identifying the consequences of such settlements for indigenous people; a fourth category of interest was how partnerships and business impact agreements with outside firms (such as mining and energy firms) modified life on indigenous territories, and finally, a fifth type of scholarship describes how various indigenous peoples have embraced new forms of economic life, sometimes while maintaining their traditional activities, as well as defended their land rights against unwanted developments.

**The cultural perception of economic opportunities**

Various studies conducted among indigenous populations concluded that economic opportunities were both perceived as means of either gaining on one’s own, or collectively through a community-owned business. Dana (1995, 1996) and others (Jankowski and Moazzani, 1995; Jordan, 1997) observed that, in Alaska and Canada, indigenous people displayed lesser proportions of self-employment than non-indigenous people, while they were more often engaged in informal activities. Several studies led to a conclusion that, among indigenous populations observed across North America and elsewhere, entrepreneurship resulted from cultural perceptions of opportunities rooted in traditional thinking (Dana et al., 2005; Dana and Anderson, 2007; Dana et al., 2010). For example, while Western entrepreneurs would often interpret a business opportunity as a source of potential monetary gains (extrinsic outcomes), as well as, quite often, personal satisfactions (intrinsic motives), indigenous entrepreneurs might interpret as an opportunity an economic activity able to bring the extended family together; in such context, other Western consequences of entrepreneurship such as innovation, growth, even job creation, are not as relevant. In a culture where most of the traditional knowledge is transmitted both orally and by performing subsistence activities (see below) while travelling from place to place, bringing family members together is way more than a gathering. It is, simultaneously, a vehicle to ensure continuity, but also to transmit to the next generations the human roles and life sustaining interactions with respect to land, sea, fauna and flora.

**Indigenous communities’ economic fabric**

Sources of subsistence, for any human group, are usually overlapped by income sources. While earlier studies tried to compare formal entrepreneurs within reserves to their external counterparts (Jankowski and Moazzani, 1995; Jordan, 1997; Cachon, 2000), more recent research (Meis Mason et al., 2009; Light and Dana, 2013) examined various categories of economic activities. These included formal and informal business, subsistence self-employment (such as fishing, hunting, trapping, guide outfitting, guided angling, hunting, and hiking or snowmobiling), and covert activities, including illegal trade (Meis Mason et al., 2009). While remoteness plays a role in preventing more than subsistence self-employment...
(Meis-Mason et al., 2008), the predominance of transfer payments from the Canadian Federal Government, as well as jobs created by local governments were noted for their economic impact (Doloreux and Dionne, 2008; Dana and Anderson, 2011; Hall, 2017; Hall and Coates, 2017).

Dana and Anderson (2007) also observed that some activities were culture-specific, such as house-building among the Pueblo people of Taos (New Mexico), a skill exclusively reserved to women. In terms of change and innovations, Dana (2010), Dana and Anderson (2011) and Dana and Guieu (2014) reported the important role of community-owned organizations among Canadian Inuit and Sami communities in sub-Arctic Europe, including cooperatives. Similar situations are also common among other indigenous communities in Canada and the USA (Baptiste, 2007; Silas, 2006), while it is also often reported by indigenous authors that change has been a way to adapt to disruptions and displacements of populations (Iverson, 2002; Coon Come, 2004; Martin and Hoffman, 2008).

Indigenous land rights settlements
In Canada, similarly to New Zealand (Jones, 2017), indigenous Land Rights Settlements have had positive economic consequences on indigenous communities. Anderson et al., 2006 observed that, while indigenous people have been more active outside their communities, they were also engaged in struggles to regain control of their traditional territories. This process was still ongoing in Canada in 2019, both in ‘unceded’ (without prior treaty) as well as treaty territories. Meanwhile, the business world has changed as well, as companies have to compete globally and cannot do so without developing partnerships with suppliers, clients, financing sources, but also with those communities where they are established. O’Neill (2018) commented that Aboriginal and treaty rights have been strongly reaffirmed by the 1982 Constitution and by several Canadian courts in Chippewas of Sarnia Band v Canada (2000), Haida Nation v British Columbia (2004), Tsilhqot’in Nation v British Columbia (2014). As a former judge, O’Neill (2018) emphasized that treaties are unique types of agreements that should not be interpreted technically: instead, there is a need to search for the common intention of the parties at the time of signing. He also added that everyone involved brings something into the circle as people, and that answers have to be found by the parties to the treaty together, concluding that indigenous populations and settlers are all treaty parties.

In Northern Quebec, in 2012, with An Act Establishing the Eeyou Istchee James Bay Regional Government, CQLR c G-1.04., the province transferred to the Cree Nation Government decision-making rights over traditional territories. This action has clarified the consultation processes to be followed by mining and energy firms on most of Northern Quebec areas south of that province’s Nunavik Inuit lands (Hall and Coates, 2017). Unfortunately, some other provinces are still undecided on which stance to take, causing delays to major mining projects while indigenous communities see limited change: the Governments of Ontario and Canada disagree on their interpretation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of indigenous Peoples.

Business partnership agreements
As most natural resources are located on indigenous territories, businesses operating in Canada are regularly confronted with the necessity to negotiate their way into these regions (Anderson, 1997). Until the 1990s, companies tended to use a two-pronged approach, consisting in obtaining support from various levels of government, while, sometimes also contacting local indigenous populations. Alcan, a major Canadian aluminum firm (now merged as Rio Tinto Alcan), had already spent a half-billion dollars on the Kemano expansion project in British Columbia, when the government decided to abort it in 1995.
because of environmental and indigenous issues. From then on, Alcan always involved local populations in the early planning stages of its industrial projects (Turcotte, 2018, pp. 93-94). The Mining Association of Canada reported that 455 agreements had been signed from 2000 to 2017 between mining or exploration firms and indigenous communities and governments.

Agreements take various forms according to specific circumstances: a letter of intent is a first step, whereby a firm and a community agree to pursue cooperation towards an agreement if viable materials are present. An exploration agreement or memorandum of understanding defines mutually beneficial advantages and principles governing relations between a community and an exploration company (usually a small business in geology). Impact and benefit agreements (IBAs, in Nunavut, Inuit IBAs or IIBAs) represent the most comprehensive category, and are generally signed between a mining firm and each community impacted by a mining site. An IBA generally includes five categories of clauses. Human development often comprises local indigenous job quotas to be reached, training for both indigenous and other employees, and other relevant aspects. Economic development can include profit sharing, community participation to a joint venture, and mechanisms to foster economic activity in the community. The three other categories of clauses cover social development, cultural, and environmental issues specific to the area (for example, on locations where winter circulation on sea ice is important; ice-breaker navigation is forbidden for several months).

IIBAs are specific to each of the four regions with Inuit habitat: Nunatsiavut (Labrador), Nunavik (Northern Quebec), Nunavut, and Inuvialuit (North-West Territories). In each region, expectations vary depending on the size of projects and businesses are obliged to negotiate directly with leaders of local communities. Several agreements have been reported in the literature, from success stories such as the Diavik diamond mine (Missens et al., 2007), to more mitigated ones, such as Raglan (Blais, 2015). The latter is discussed in more detail in this article.

Indigenous peoples and economic activities

Even in developed countries such as Canada and the USA, success stories such as the Mississippi Choctaws (Martin, 2009), the Navajo, or the Okanagan of Ossoyos (Baptiste, 2007; Missens et al., 2010), were the exception rather than the rule. Since the turn of this century however, there has been a substantial increase in the number of indigenous communities able to improve significantly their economic situation. Anderson (1997), and Anderson et al. (2007) noted that indigenous peoples had a collective desire to be involved in the economy at large, thus echoing indigenous economic development role models such as Chief Phillip Martin (2009). Dana and Anderson (2011) reported significantly more entrepreneurial activity among the Inuit of Arviat, in the wake of the arrival of a new generation. They observed a complete reversal in terms of the proportion of Inuit-owned firms, whereby non-indigenous business people had become a minority, when it used to be the contrary in Churchill 15 years before (Dana, 1996; both communities are located on Hudson’s Bay’s west shore).

Currently, Canadian indigenous communities are actively pursuing various ways of interacting with, and educating the business community, for example through Procurement, Employment and Partnership Conferences, attended by indigenous and business leaders, as well as students and government representatives (McKinley, 2019). Such conferences include formal, educative presentations where indigenous and business leaders interact through panels, as well as opportunities for informal exchanges. Meanwhile, Canadian indigenous nations still have to resort to court orders to oblige reluctant firms to consult them (Gilbride et al., 2016). There are also cases where indigenous nations have succeeded in
stopping projects, notably coal mine developments in British Columbia (Noble, 2015). Interestingly, the provincial energy and mines minister was reported as commenting that the Tahltan nation had a veto over the development of the coal licenses relative to its ancestral territory.

**Literature review – business perspective**

*Stakeholders’ relations, communities’ involvement*

Chicago School Economist Milton Friedman has been quoted as advocating that “the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits” (Friedman, 1970). Taken out of context, the sentence is often perceived as a suggestion that social, ethical, and environmental issues are beyond the realm of responsible managers, who must focus solely on maximizing stockholders’ equity. The original text actually added that “responsibility is to conduct the business in accordance with their desires, which generally will be to make as much money as possible while conforming to the basic rules of society, both those embodied by law and those embodied in ethical custom” (Friedman, 1970, p. 174). This clarifies and contextualizes the maximization of profits as advocated by Friedman, suggesting that managers must also engage in a form of competition absent of fraud and lawlessness in its various social contexts.

The latter brings us to the general issue of stakeholder relations, which are at the heart of this paper. Freeman (1984) introduced the notion of stakeholder management as a component of strategic management vested with environmental, social and governance (ESG) responsibilities. Stakeholder theory is based on a belief that a company’s long-term viability results from more than solely stockholders’ satisfaction, by taking into account various stakeholders, i.e. individuals and groups influencing or being affected by decisions made by the firm. Stakeholders include, besides shareholders, individual and industrial/institutional clients, suppliers, competitors, financial institutions, governments at all levels, as well as communities where plants, supply providers and business activities are conducted.

Stakeholder theory applies to strategic management in three areas. First, it provides a framework to analyze a firm’s strategic environment by the identification of the stakeholders – notably their nature (for example indigenous communities) and their location (for example communities whose territory would be impacted by production and/or transportation activities). Secondly, stakeholder theory includes determining a process by which stakeholders will become involved in cooperating to help the firm reach its goals, and under which conditions. Thirdly, stakeholder theory provides options on how a firm might proceed to manage adequately its dealings with stakeholders on a long term basis. As a result of applying stakeholder theory, a firm can seek to satisfy the interests of specific stakeholder groups, thereby improving its long-term viability.

**Implementing stakeholder theory: how companies ensure their legitimacy among communities**

According to Suchman (1995) and Deephouse and Suchman (2008), stakeholder management is central to the implementation of ESG responsibilities. The role of organizational legitimacy is to meet stakeholders’ expectations by conducting desirable actions that conform and are congruent with the norms, values, beliefs and laws of society. Suchman (1995) identified three categories of legitimacy: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive. The next section presents actual situations where these have been applied by business among indigenous communities in the past.

Pragmatic legitimacy is based on self-interest considerations benefiting the needs of limited groups of stakeholders who provide the organization with social acceptance. These stakeholders’ needs tend to be met by means of transactions that affect their well-being. At
the basic level, pragmatic legitimacy may occur simply because the implantation of an economic development project is expected to create jobs in a community. All which might be perceived as required for the businesses involved would be to set their activities up and run them as they would anywhere else, regardless of any other consideration. As has been discussed above, in actual indigenous communities contexts, practices required to earn pragmatic legitimacy have to be adapted to local situations, mostly through formal consultations and agreements that may evolve over time.

Moral legitimacy is determined by an ethical evaluation of an organization’s actions on the stakeholder’s part. Such a determination may take several forms, either together or in isolation. To obtain moral legitimacy, the organization must meet ideals and values in its environment by reaching expected goals and by cooperating with institutions who already possess moral legitimacy. For example, Walmart has widely publicized its supply chain improvements aimed at a reduction of the firm’s indirect emissions of greenhouse gases.

Cognitive legitimacy is the most enduring category. It represents a social recognition of the necessary presence of an organization (or of categories thereof, such as hospitals and other health care institutions, educational and financial institutions). For a company to achieve this level of legitimacy means that its role within society is taken for granted and never discussed or put into question, except in extreme cases.

If we consider education institutions, the positive image associated to their cognitive legitimacy is a given in most societies, but there is one exception. In Canada, the role given to educational institutions known as residential schools, where indigenous children were sent during most of the twentieth century has had the effect of destroying the cognitive legitimacy of the educational system among most indigenous communities. For many members of these communities, the educational system is not perceived as a safe place to go to and to be a part of, particularly for parents who were educated within the residential school system. Indigenous children were abducted and placed in boarding schools by the Canadian government between 1870 and 1996; in these institutions, indigenous children were routinely abused and mistreated, a scenario that endure for several generations (Hamidi and Kanapé Fontaine, 2018). Only recently did the federal government apologize for its previous actions, but few of the victims were still alive to be compensated (indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2019). The shockwaves from this disaster are still rocking the Canadian education system and society as a whole.

In practice, organizations secure and maintain legitimacy in the long term by engaging with stakeholders on a regular basis. The following section describes processes for doing so through sustainable management practices. In this context, sustainability is described as follows by Bertels (2010): “Sustainable businesses are resilient and create economic value, healthy ecosystems and strong communities. Sustainable businesses survive over the long term because they are intimately connected to healthy economic, social and environmental systems”.

Legitimacy management implementation requires change toward a sustainable culture

According to Bertels et al. (2010) and Bertels (2010), the processes required to establish sustainable management practices within an organization’s culture are similar to those followed in the past to adopt effective safety modes of operation. They noted that, to succeed at integrating safety into daily tasks, a web of processes had to be introduced. Safety has become, over time, part of the formal and informal tasks within organizations, it is both part of strategic and tactical decisions, and its implementation works both through top-down and bottom-up processes. Safety is also monitored through specific goals and by both internal and external monitoring and reporting mechanisms.
Once adopted as a goal, sustainability requires similar implementation methods to succeed. For Bertels (2010), these implementation practices include three aspects: a) fostering commitment within the firm, by encouraging informal practices for delivering on current sustainability commitments; b) clarifying expectations through formal practices for delivering on sustainability commitments (including new policies, products’ design and life cycle analyses, added responsibilities at all levels, adequate formal training and incentives, new metrics and reporting processes, and effective external monitoring and audit); c) building momentum and instilling capacity for change through informal innovation practices (this results in new business processes, new products and services).

Bertels et al. (2010) have conducted a thorough search of the academic literature on sustainability implementation. They report that successful firms have been able to demonstrate how sustainability was a financial opportunity that can be put in quantitative terms in everyday business language; it can be explained as urgent, innovative and cutting edge, and as being about quality in terms of maintaining a firm's license to operate as well as good publicity/contributing to its reputation, as well as 'the right thing to do' in terms of its benefits for employees. Bertels advocates encouraging research and experimentation aligned with the company’s sustainability values, providing autonomy to workers and managers to develop new solutions to sustainability challenges, allow self-started projects to germinate, and allow employees some flexibility in implementation.

Such processes are applied by companies in various sectors, for example, in Canada (Bertels, 2010): Tembec, a forest products company, Teck, a mining firm, Canadian Pacific, a railway firm specialized in the transportation of industrial products, and Suncor, who produces energy products (mainly oil and gas). While Tembec has created a position of Manager of Environmental and Aboriginal Relations, the firm also partners with Natural Resources Canada and the World Wildlife Fund to share forestry management data and evaluate forest products harvesting and transformation processes in relation to carbon print management. In practical terms, Tembec used benchmarking to develop metrics for monitoring, tracking, and reporting both internally and by cooperating with external entities. These actions led the company and stakeholders to reflect on how to further reduce its carbon print. Similar case studies were reported by Bertels (2010) with the three other firms cited.

**Legitimacy management and indigenous communities**

This section provides examples of legitimacy management implementation within indigenous communities in Africa and Asia. As can be expected, actual contexts vary considerably, as well as outcomes.

Primary sector industries have a tendency to be the ones most often present on indigenous territories. Derakhshan et al. (2019) noted that legitimacy management produces mixed results that seem to be related in part to social complexity within specific communities. Consider Shell Oil in Niger’s Delta Ogoniland (Nigeria) compared to NCOC on Eastern Caspian Sea, Kazakhstan (NCOC, 2018). Both cases are described below, followed by a short conclusion.

**Nigeria**

Since 1958, oil exports represented approximately 80 per cent of Nigeria’s government income, with oil extraction mainly controlled by joint ventures involving foreign firms (Agip, Chevron, Equinor, Exxon-Mobil, Royal Dutch Shell, and Total) and the Nigerian National Oil Corporation. Oil firms have attempted to prevent actions of violence against them by increasing social philanthropy and investments (Frynas, 2010), however discontent
has endured (Konne, 2014). For one part, Nigerian authorities have not been able to develop effective remedial legislation to force oil firms into cleaning environmental damages (Sam et al., 2016), while promising solutions that would benefit local communities have been identified by scholars (Zabbey et al., 2017; Sam and Zabbey, 2018).

Particularly affected in Nigeria, is the Ogoniland region on the Niger River Delta, home to the indigenous Ogoni people (Boele et al., 2001), as well as several others (Konne, 2014). The region also harbors a fragile subtropical mangrove ecosystem, of which flora, fauna and aquatic life are affected by ongoing pollution. Traditional economic activities such as fishing and seafood gathering have disappeared because of oil spills, not counting sea-based pollution across the Gulf of Guinea. During the 1958-1995 period, Ogoni protesters were actively chased by Nigerian military, jailed, beaten, raped, killed, or exiled; main leaders were executed (Boele et al., 2001). In 1993, under Ogoni people’s pressure, Shell Oil decided to pull out of Ogoniland, returning in 1995 with a sustainable development attitude, while still refusing to admit its role as a destructor of the environment (Boele et al., 2001).

Nevertheless, Shell opted to invest in local economic development within Ogoniland on a systematic way after 1995. These efforts resulted in projects including seedlings for agricultural development, fish fingerlings cooperatives, and family farms. Women, youths, and other vulnerable groups have been specifically included in these projects, while education is funded either through training courses that lead to competencies required on the job market (mechanics, catering, hair dressing, carpentry) or through bursaries towards higher education. There are weekly community meetings where elected representatives from diverse categories are present, such as farmers, women, and youths; individuals can fill grievance forms about any community project and obtain a response. Yet, Derakhshan et al. (2019) still report a high level of community dissatisfaction in the Niger Delta, due in part to the discrepancy in the standard of living of project employees as compared to the Ogoni people, but also because of the corrupt image of Nigerian government authorities.

Kazakhstan
Kazakhstan’s North Caspian Operating Company (NCOC, 2018) has been operating in one of the three main oil and gas producing regions of the country since the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1989-1990. As a former Soviet Republic no longer part of Russia, Kazakhstan lost part of its Russian elite in the early 1990s, but retained its diverse population, with close to 100 minorities, including indigenous groups. Netherlands (2018) reported that Caspian Sea oil and gas fields are operated through joint ventures between foreign firms (Chevron, Exxon Mobil, Lukoil) and the Kazakh government, as well as local companies, none of them owned by indigenous minorities.

Derakhshan et al. (2019) analyzed interactions between oil sector firms and Caspian Sea local communities in Kazakhstan. Since the onset, oil companies planned their extractive operations’ strategic implementation with a perspective encompassing societal heritage and environmental conservation, as well as community development and sustainability projects. As populations (including several minority groups who had been displaced into the area, in some cases during the Stalin era of the 1950s) were scattered between a town of about 30,000, and indigenous villages of a few hundred, a community development project organization aimed at benefiting communities over 40 years was deployed across the region by the Kazakh government. The goal was, in part, to develop the local economy to eventually reach world markets.

During initial years, roads had to be repaired, and basic infrastructures such as water treatment plants, schools and hospitals were built. The next step was to invest in cultural and traditional social activities within communities, including regular medical visits for all,
summer camps for children and families, and rest homes for the elderly. An important side effect of the activity generated by these initiatives was to reduce unemployment, as 65 per cent of the population worked indirectly for the project organization. As a result, Derakhshan et al. (2019) report high legitimacy levels within communities around which oil and gas fields have been developed in Kazakhstan.

Complexities of legitimacy management within indigenous communities

To conclude this section on legitimacy building within indigenous communities, Derakhshan et al. (2019) noted that, in Nigeria and Kazakhstan alike, local communities were in control of the organizations in charge of economic development and social infrastructures, but with almost opposite results in terms of legitimacy evaluations towards the oil and gas industry. Okeke-Ogbuafor et al. (2016) observed that, in Nigeria’s Ogoniland, part of the problem lies in the vulnerability of the traditional, hereditary leadership system, which had revealed itself to be vulnerable to corruption in the past fifty-plus years. They advocated in favor of vigorous reforms, so that traditional hereditary leaders become more open to scrutiny and responsible towards their people.

When comparing legitimacy management outcomes in Nigeria and in Kazakhstan, Derakhshan et al. (2019) identified three important differentiating factors:

1. The fact of starting with a community-oriented approach at the beginning, combined with the addition of evidence by.
2. Maintaining and nurturing support for community development projects build positive perceptions of legitimacy towards the oil firms among communities.
3. The Kazakh Government also had, among its Caspian Sea populations, a better legitimacy image than the Nigerian government in Ogoniland; furthermore, potential corruption was not reported as being present in the Caspian Sea villages in the absence of strong traditional leadership structures.

As a result of the government’s more positive image, communities were more likely at both the individual and collective levels to accept as valid the legitimacy evaluations expressed by officials towards the oil and gas industry.

Writing from an indigenous perspective, Hamidi et al. (2018, p. 13) observed that instead of trying to perpetuate a pretense of ‘fine relationships’ with First Peoples, it would be more useful for Canadians to face their blind spots. Hamidi et al. stated that First Peoples could not forget, throughout their oral traditions, the inescapable problems caused by the deleterious effects of colonial presence; equally unavoidable is the issue of respect towards the territory as a source of life, which we’ll never be able to erase either from the First Peoples’ mouth or from the public debate about this planet’s future. The following sections describe, as briefly as possible, a selection of indigenous oral teachings, mainly drawn from First Peoples from the Great Lakes region of North America.

Traditional indigenous teachings

Context of indigenous strategic thinking

As opposed to Western cultures, indigenous Strategic thinking is intrinsically connected to day-to-day activity, itself imbedded into a spirituality in relation to the natural world. Le Clézio (1993) observed that, beyond differences between European and New World cultures, pre-Colombian Civilizations were more advanced than Europe in the sixteenth century in medicine, astronomy, urbanism, irrigation, and soil drainage. Indigenous peoples in the Americas had in common a set of beliefs that encompassed their vision of the world, the
place of each human in that world, in spirit as well as in body and emotions, and in harmony with the surrounding natural world, earth, elements, animals and plants included. From an indigenous perspective, Whyte et al. (2018) describe contemporary indigenous planning as a process where lessons from the past (i.e. traditional knowledge) must be interpreted to organize the future in the current context of oppression and colonization.

Sources of indigenous traditional knowledge (ITK)
There are two main sources of ITK: non-indigenous sources are mainly anthropologists, ethnologists, historians and other scholars. (Sahagun, 1577; Twaites, 1896-1901; Catlin, 1975; Schoolcraft, 1851). Zhaawanogizhik (2014, p.111 and 132-133) and others (Bell, 2017; Mishibenijima and Lewis, 2008) indicate that indigenous sources among Anishnaabe populations include members of organizations such as the Midewiwin (Society of Unseen Ones), Clan Elders and Waabanowin (Society of Dawn), as well as others who received written records on birch bark scrolls passed on to them by community acknowledged keepers.

Symbolic representations were in some cases recorded from early times on with paintings and engravings over rock cliffs alongside the Great Lakes (Callahan, 2004; Cachon, 2015). These pictures of historic events and cultural memorials include information about clans (doodemag), family structures, astronomy, maps and seasonal migration routes, plant locations and other subsistence information on waterways; they also evoke remembered songs, visions, prophetic and dream stories. Today, older people still take young adults for trips to visit places ornate with parietal art and other such types of markings on land and water. As part of visits into indigenous territories, this author was shown parietal art still carrying meaning to this day, notably at Canyon de Chelly in the Navajo Dinetah (Martinez, 2012), and in the Northern Territory, Australia: Arnhem Land (Kelly, 2013) and the traditional territory of the Yankunytjatjara in 2017. Printed and oral material provided by indigenous people for this research include various types of material, from historic documents and information (Kelly, 2013; Silas, 2006; Little, 2009; Mika, 1985; Tehanetorens, 1972), to teaching material destined to indigenous students (Coulter, 2008; San Juan School District, 2012), to more general accounts (Bell, 2017; Nadjiwon, 2012; Meeches, 2008; Rheault, 1999; Johnston, 1990), stories (Colosimo and Tuglavina, 2010; Mitiarjuk, 2002; Odjig and Schwartz, 1974; Morriseau and Dewdney, 1965) and more specific topics (Phillips, 2012; George, 1990; Moore, 1978-1981).

Spirituality and cosmogonic traditions among Anishnaabe peoples

Spirituality and daily life are intertwined
Martin (1996) observed that nature has spiritual dimensions that link humans and non-humans, as all entities are involved in life perpetuation. Although among Anishnaabe peoples, such traditions have been labeled as belonging to the shamanistic-animistic category (Taylor, 1997), Anishnaabe people themselves consider their traditions as their way of life, and not as a religion (Campeau, 2018). Furthermore, their view of the world is not anthropocentric, as it encompasses the complete ecosystem (Whyte et al., 2018), where humans are present to share responsibilities in reciprocity with animals and plants, as well as land and bodies of water. All those components of the environment are sources of knowledge. Among the Anishnaabe, social structures are deeply rooted in this tradition by way of the doodem or clan system. Similar traditions are found across the world among various populations. Well-described examples include the Sami (Mulk, 2014) in northern Russia and Fennoscandia (northern Finland, Sweden, and Norway), and most civilizations.

Communicating knowledge
Among the Anishnaabe, spirituality and traditional knowledge is communicated in various ways such as stories, myths, rituals, music, songs, and dances. Specific times of the year are occasions for celebration such as the winter solstice, the summer solstice, the fall equinox, as well as some moments of life, such as the beginning of adolescence for young women. A ritual still observable in the twenty-first century is for a young adolescent woman to open the first dance at a traditional pow wow: she wears a traditional ceremony dress formerly owned by her grandmother, who might accompany her into the dancing ground, into the world.

Rituals may be performed by everyone, also by shamans, often mentioned under various names by Bell (2017), Nadjiwon (2012), and other indigenous speakers: dancers, sometimes qualified as sun dancers or rain dancers; healers; medicine men; helpers; sand painters, medicine painters, (shkavers or shkaversa in Nishnaabemwin). Kesich (2014) has observed that, while shamanism has been prevalent among ancient hunting-gathering civilizations, its most distinctive feature is its intimate relation with activities focused on procuring food (Nadasdy, 2007; Vaillancourt, 1976). In that context, the function of shamanism is to relate the hunter to the guiding spirit of the animal who’s death will help humans survive; however, to maintain harmony in the world, the shamanistic ritual is there to confirm that the action of taking the animal’s life is not an action of destruction, but an action of submission to a covenant coopted by animals prior to the arrival of human beings (Aguonia, et al., 2000).

Several Anishnaabe artists have been referred to as Medicine Painters by Zhaawanogizhik, 2014, as they were taking an active role as members of the Three Fires Midewiwin Society and in using in their works symbols taught by ancient traditions (Zhaawanogizhik, 2014; Bell, 2017; Little, 2009; Odjig, et al., 1992; Southcott, 1984; Morrisseau, et al., 1979). Similar artistic traditions of religious representations still exist elsewhere (Djaltchinova-Malec and Hoppal, 2014; Keyser and Klassen, 2001; Whitley, 2005, 2011; Chauvet et al., 1996; Conway, 1993; Balikci, 1970), notably among the Aztec-descendant Wixarika (Huichol) of Western Mexico (MacLean, 2012; Powell and Grady, 2010), and the Navajo (Parezo, 1983).

Oral tradition, language aspects and issues
Oral traditions are predominant among indigenous peoples of North America. Languages are the predominant vehicle of the traditional knowledge necessary for survival. Preserving what’s left of indigenous languages is therefore of first importance to the revival and dissemination of teachings. Bell (2017) recalled that he had decided, when twelve years old, that he would never forget his language, that it was of prime importance to him, and that he would commit to it, advocating others to ‘have a whole bunch of fun with the language’. He went on saying that he had to refer to Nishnaabemwin speakers and learn correct pronunciations from them, as elders ‘will always correct you in a good way’. Below are presented two grammatical peculiarities of the Cree and Nishnaabemwin languages.

Genders
Jenness (1967) noted that Ojibweys attributed a soul to stones. Indeed, in Algonquian languages such as Nishnaabemwin and Cree, there are two grammatical genders, animate and inanimate (Ahenakew, 1987). What is considered animated includes everything forming part of the natural environment, including humans, animals, plants and water, as well as stones and rocks. Contrarily to a common mistake, it does not refer to the fact that
something is « moving » by opposition to being immobile or unanimated (Lacombe, in his 1874 Cree grammar, mentions that some nouns are animated, even if not representing a living being, and reports an absence of explanation for such an abuse, Lacombe, 1874). The term should rather be interpreted as similar to the ancient Greek anemos, or anima and animus in Latin, used to describe the essence of life, or the source of everything living.

Obviously, this encompasses quite well the mix of spiritual perspective and practical use of the languages that indigenous peoples would have developed over more than ten thousand years of presence in the Americas (Grugni, 2019). As an example, it is quite fitting for a stone to be animate, as many tools are made of them (scrapers, for a very long time, were passed on through generations). Stone tools related burial arrangements were reported by archaeologists of the Great Lakes (Deller and Ellis, 2001; Deller et al., 2009).

Zhaawanogiizhik (2014) reported that distinguishing genders in Nishnaabemwin should not involve a colonial vocabulary, when proper terms exist in the language and can be explained in their proper cultural context. As a gender, ‘Biimadizi’ refers to the quality of life based on how humans, plants, stones, and objects of daily life such as spoons and tools are used within the world at present time. The other gender, ‘Bimaadad’ refers to human-made and acquired objects such as buildings, furniture, meat, but also birch bark. It is important to note that the boundary between these genders is not always clear, as part of the culture is to recognize that all beings transform themselves over time and across their experiences; this means that a tree will belong as such to the ‘biimadizi’ gender, but may become in part ‘bimaadad’ once manufactured into a table. In the same way, an animal is of the biimadizi gender until its meat, once prepared as food, then belongs to the bimaadad gender.

Social organization – the doodemag or clans

The Anishnaabe term doodem (plural doodemag) is generally translated into English as clan representing a type of extended family group. Clans, according to Anishnaabe teachings, are deemed to have pre-existed humans. According to tradition (Aguonia et al., 2000), clans existed under the form of animals living in pre-human times. Animals were informed of the arrival of Humans by the Creator, and of their need for learning to live harmoniously with nature, for food, for skin protection, and for healing medicines and rituals. At that time, animals promised to sacrifice themselves to supply humans with food, with their skins to protect themselves, and provide Humans with medicines and ceremonies for healing purposes.

Among the Anishnaabe, specific animals are entrusted with corresponding skills, which became emblematic of their corresponding clan. For example, the Eagle is associated with respect and hunting skills, as well as family unity; the Crane is related to teaching and leadership, while the Bear is the community guardian. Clans are named after animals that inhabit a human group’s surrounding region, with over 100 clan names recorded across the Great Lakes (Zhaawanogiizhik, 2014), including: Turtle, Bear, Frog, Wolf, Snipe, Marten, Loon, Moose, Beaver, Deer, plus variations of generic clan names, such as Painted Turtle or Little Moose.

The role of the clan system is said to serve six purposes (Aguonia et al., 2000), as thus:

1. develop and sustain the community;
2. provide each member with a place to belong, and where to obtain protection;
3. provide members with a better quality of life;
4. provide teachings about morals and clan;
5. maintain strong blood lines; and
6. maintain the four categories of laws – great laws (on the sacred nature of life); universal laws (universe and solar system physics); natural laws (earth balance); tribal laws (national and tribal legislations).
Viewing the world: the medicine wheel as a symbolic tool

To the opposite of European-based philosophies and creeds based on the concept of a constant linear progress, the medicine wheel analogy is used to symbolize the cyclical and symbiotic nature of all life (Mishibinijima and Lewis, 2008). It is based on the allegory of the daily course of the sun on the horizon, and of the four seasons, which shape human activity (Brody, 1981, p.197-199). When examined in perspective with the teachings presented below, the medicine wheel also suggests that human behavior also produces consequences that affect both the individual and the entire social group (clan or tribe).

The Seven Sacred Teachings

The Seven Sacred Teachings are now in the public domain and, in their general form, accessible to anyone from credible sources, such as: Zhaawanogiizhik, 2014; Bouchard and Tehanakerewkwen, 2009; Hamilton Native Women’s Centre, 2008; Meeches, 2008; Cheechoo, 2019. Some of the descriptions in these sources are at variance respective to others, however the rules of conduct derived from various narratives are similar. Recently, Ross (2019), described how the ‘Seven Grandfather Teachings’ had made their way into a presentation to indigenous leaders by a Non-indigenous mining firm CEO. He was welcomed for having demonstrated his respect for Anishnaabe and Cree cultures in such a way. Below are some short illustrations of each of these teachings.

Wisdom

Each person is given wisdom to use to help others. Wisdom and the knowledge that we can acquire are choices we can make as Humans to correctly understand, interpret and express others’ ideas. Wisdom is related to rules of conduct that prohibit coercion in any form, whether it is verbal, physical, or psychological (Brant, 1993):

The old people […] do not tell you that you must do one thing or another, they tell us a story, and then we think about it, and realize they have been telling a truth – […] they would never force anyone to do anything. (B. Debassige in Southcott, 1984).

Love

Love is described as the result of accepting the totality of oneself as an integral part of Earth and then the universe. The teachings also emphasize the importance of loving oneself before being able to love others. Love is related to rules of conduct prescribing no quarrelling be allowed within a given tribe, but may occur against others.

Respect or honor

Some narratives show the buffalo as an example of how the animal gives its life to humans to show its respect. This is a way to teach how respect can be shown towards other living beings. It is the opposite of considering them inferior or of lesser value. The rule of conduct about never taking from nature more than what is necessary is clearly about respecting and honoring what surrounds humans. Southcott (1984) reported how “a white man looks at a birch tree […] he thinks to himself ‘that tree when cut down will make a fine piece of furniture, some pencils or some matches,’” while an Anishnaabe would see the tree as being there for us to enjoy things that were created but not to abuse them.
Bravery or courage
Bravery is described for humans to find their own inner strength; this allows them to be themselves in facing life’s challenges and dangers by making positive decisions based on convictions. A metaphor of the Bear is a way to teach humans how to balance life activities between work, play, and resting. Rules of conduct related to bravery are that:

- group survival is more important than individual prosperity; and
- what humans take from nature may be shared openly with others without selfishness, in a spirit of mutual respect.

Honesty
Honesty is about walking tall and make do with what you have, accepting who you are without trying to be someone else. Rules of conduct such as being honest with oneself and others, develop the ability of speaking from the heart, and develop the quality of being true to one’s word are linked to honesty.

Humility
Humility teaches that each human is equal to others, but not better than others. A rule of conduct directly related to humility is emotional restraint, imposing an obligation on everyone to suppress extreme emotions, including anger, enthusiasm or joyfulness.

Truth
Truth is expressed as being faithful and remembering all laws, and considering oneself before making observations about how others conduct their life or make decisions. Truth is also symbolized by time and numerology in indigenous traditions. Metaphorically, laws governing nature are recorded on the Turtle’s back (as the turtle was already there when humans appeared), where 28 markings evoke the days of a woman’s cycle for creating life. There are also 13 moons figuring the 13 yearly rotations of the Earth around the Sun. Finding truth must be done through observation and human abilities to decipher information available in the natural world.

The human being
The four components of the human being
The traditional vision of the human being is focused on four components: Body, Mind, Spirit, and Emotions. However these components are intertwined within a person, and interact constantly with the natural world. These relationships are expressed by stories, as well as by rituals: hunters on their way to kill an animal will invoke or pray to the spirit of the animal (Nadasdy, 2007). The fact of taking a life for food is therefore not limited to a physical action, as it is an interaction between humans and animals also interpreted at a spiritual level. This perspective is quite different from the dualism (body vs soul) shared by Plato, 1966 (Conrado, 1995) and Descartes (1992, 1994, 1997; Suzanne, 2009), and from Laborit’s, Freud’s, and Jung’s descriptions of the mind as divided into three separate parts. In the latter case, these components interact within the human being, but psychologists leave it to other sciences to deal with social interactions, spirituality, philosophical and ethical issues. Traditional indigenous knowledge does not make those distinctions, the human being encompassing all dimensions at the same time.
Emotions
In a world where human economic activity is driven to satisfy emotions through consumption of goods and services, it is interesting to find that traditional Anishnaabe teachings describe emotions as a predominant component of the human persona. Advertising and much of other marketing activities (pricing, store location, choice of consumption environments such as recreational areas, entertainment parks and performing arts stages) focus on satisfying human desires by triggering pleasant emotions associated with the satisfaction of desires.

Business and government strategists obviously invest emotional capital as well in the projects they develop on indigenous territories. Consider the ‘Ring of Fire’ region of Northern Ontario, located in the boreal swampy and muskeg area located west of James Bay. The name given to the area by Non-indigenous prospectors-settlers has a powerful emotional appeal.

Community decision-making
Issues related to representation and colonial legislation
Organizational decision-making in industrialized countries tends to be concentrated in the hands of a small group. To the opposite, many indigenous communities’ traditional rules of governance mandate that decisions be made on the basis of community-wide representation and participation. Representation may be according to patrilineal or matrilineal clans, or through more complex forms of representation (Bourgoin, 1984; Parker, 1915). Similar traditional decision-making systems have been reported in Africa (Bourgoin, 1984) and other regions of the world.

In Canada, the Indian Act contains strict governance rules among First Nations. While abolition of this colonial legislation has been advocated for decades, it remains a complicating factor in community decision-making. This is particularly true in communities that maintain a strong traditional governance system, such as Mohawks in Kanesatake and Kanawaghe First Nations. Elected leaders under the Indian Act may differ from those leaders elected under traditional processes: Mohawk clan mothers may designate clan chiefs at intervals not coinciding with Indian Act election schedules. The coexistence of two decision-making processes renders community decision-making more complex and time consuming.

Indigenous consensus in community decision-making
The Western definition of consensus implies that it can only happen if everyone agrees. Obviously this is sometimes impossible, and such a limitation was recognized by indigenous elders. This is why indigenous consensus requires an understanding from all community members about what direction needs to be taken, rather than a full approval of implementation measures. Armstrong (2000) explains it best in her description of the traditional Okanagan process of En’owkin: “Your responsibility is to see the views of others, their concerns and their reasons, which will help you to choose willingly and intelligently the steps that will create a solution – because it is in your own best interest that all needs are addressed in the community. While the process does not mean that everyone agrees – for that is never possible – it does result in everyone being fully informed and agreeing fully on what must take place and what each will concede or contribute”. This form of consensus provides an opportunity to mitigate potential adverse effects on some members of the community who may become negatively affected by the community’s decision at stake (Baptiste, 2007).
Response to change and mobility through knowledge and mutations

Rapid response to change and mobility were key survival advantages for small human groups threatened by adverse environments. Nuclear family structures involving parents and children were the norm among ancient indigenous populations of hunters-gatherers (Todd, 2011). In these environmental and social contexts, indigenous thinking integrated change as a matter of fact. Marwick (2003) and Nougier (1988) documented how the evolution of language was related to culture and trade between human groups, while Cheyne (1998) explained how technology, family structure, and language combined to create long-lasting traditions and knowledge. White and McCullough (2005) have documented how human groups reacted to rapid climate change with various subsistence strategies at the end of the Paleolithic.

Change is an integral part of the notion of human self, as much as a component of the dynamic interaction between humans, animals, earth, and the surrounding elements. All beings are perceived as experiencing ongoing transformations, mutations and successions of shape transformations. These are illustrated by stories, such as the myth of the Thunderbird, a combination of a hawk and an eagle, which brings in spring and summer rains, as well as everything that grows and rejuvenates the natural world. Through several of his paintings, Morrisseau has represented himself as a shaman transforming (i.e. taking the shape of) into a thunderbird (Schwartz and Morrisseau, 1978; Morrisseau, et al., 1979).

Preserving indigenous knowledge and defining a sustainable future under change

Pedri-Spade et al. (2015) directed an ethnographic film showing the traditional process of tanning a moose hide and some of the conversations that were occurring during the filming. The succession of complex actual gestures required for the successful accomplishment of this activity is undoubtedly one that has been transmitted over thousands of generations. Yet, there is not any known depiction of this specific craft on parietal art or any other form of ancient record-keeping. What Pedri-Spade demonstrated here, as an ethnographer, was how fragile may become a particular knowledge when not kept alive, or recorded with the level of detail required to be replicated. As mentioned in Cachon (2015), conflicts such as World War I have caused the loss of specific knowledge in Europe. In other contexts, discoveries such as the wheel in pre-Columbian Mexico, or the steam engine in Ancient Greece, were never brought to the uses they were later meant for because of differing cultural contexts. Reyes-Garcia et al. (2013) observed cultural knowledge loss under rapidly changing socio-economic, political, and environmental conditions within a single generation, owing to gaps in knowledge teaching.

Lythberg et al. (2016) explained how an overarching indigenous perspective, based on traditional teachings similar to those discussed above, can bring answers to current problems. Some of the complex environmental and business issues facing Earth over the next decades could benefit from indigenous conceptions of sustainability and how to achieve it. The time has come to pay attention to the fact that indigenous cultures of hunters-gatherers still in existence today have survived much longer than their Western and other agriculture and property-based counterparts. This success may be related to a symbiotic traditional perspective of the place of human beings in the world, combined with an ability to preserve essential traditional knowledge memory over millennia.

Western and indigenous thinking compared

To paraphrase Mishibinijima and Lewis (2008), they described how traditional sharing among indigenous societies has been at the core of survival behavior. Sharing includes not only food, but also land, natural and manufactured resources, knowledge, and culture. They
explain how, for example, culture can be shared according to personal abilities, and involve specialties in ritualistic behavior, as well as artistic and storytelling activities. They point out that such activities tend to be neglected among most Western-based lifestyles, where these activities are performed by a minority of members, instead of being a part of everyone’s way of life.

Anishnaabe thinkers agree that culture, language, as well as the earth around us, are related and part of all human experiences, including spiritual (Southcott, 1984: 192). They see their learning process as an encompassing experience of life events intertwined at the crossroads of countries (Canada, the USA), of cultures (Anishnaabe, European), of belief systems, and daily life activities.

By opposition, European based cultures started fragmenting human social life into work, personal life, belief systems and rituals, sports practice, as separate spheres of activity towards the twentieth century (Peguy, 1992). In some way, European cultures have reduced human life into disorganized role playing episodes.

Consequences of symbiotic thought on strategic analysis and execution

Most strategic analysis techniques taught by Business Schools across the world have compatible features with regard to traditional indigenous thinking, as it has been exposed in the sources considered in this paper. In fact, this author has seen them applied willingly by MBA students within strategy classes, as well as by traditional indigenous consultants during seminars. In latter cases, some consultants have adapted strategic analysis techniques, such as SWOT analysis, to traditional representations and analytic models (Phillips, 2012).

The tree of life analogy very successfully represents the strategic process: The long term vision is symbolized by the tree roots; the seeds represent strategic objectives, while leaves of various colors can represent strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and specific strategic goals. The circle is very appropriate to represent the business life cycle, as well as other business dynamics such as various geographic locations.

These examples remain however cosmetic, in the sense where it is not how the strategic thought is presented that counts, it is what it contains. Symbiotic traditional thinking brings into strategic reasoning the teachings evoked earlier in this paper, in particular:

The primary importance of a long-term view that can extend over decades and centuries, in particular for projects that may become particularly harmful to the natural environment and will take decades or more to restore the original biome; full restoration may not be feasible, in which case a different but livable habitat might be restored instead, as was the case in Sudbury (Ontario, Canada). In that latter case, a formerly 38,000 km² pristine forest of large red pines was destroyed over the course of about 90 years by a large complex of mines and smelters: since 1974, this industrial complex has continued to produce larger quantities than ever before, while creating a new habitat of mixed forest in a city of 165,000 with over 300 formerly dead lakes, now all restored to a healthy natural habitat. Sustainable economic development and management have been local goals for over thirty years and have produced positive results, along with the cooperation of local indigenous communities.

Indigenous community consultation is no longer a courtesy in Canada but an obligation first imposed on governments and companies by the Supreme Court of Canada, then more recently rendered mandatory and enforced by the federal government and by most provinces. Most companies operating in Northern regions of the country have endeavored to consult with indigenous communities at least since the 1990s, despite difficulties (Lowe, 1998).

Indigenous community leaders still have challenges explaining to outsiders how decision-making works within indigenous communities, the notion of community
consultation with consensus seeking and Indian Act related leadership issues. In some communities within Canada, traditional leadership sometimes commands more respect from community members than elected tribal officials under the Indian Act. Of course, in other instances either there is no traditional leadership present, or the same members combine both positions. In recent years, a new body of research has emerged, documenting evidence of decision-making processes within First Nations’ communities (Barry, 2012; Jojola, 2013; Prusak et al., 2016; Whyte et al., 2018).

For too many communities yet, such as those located in the northernmost parts of Labrador, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and other Western provinces, as well as those in the three territories, the level of social discomfort, poverty, and lack of basic amenities is such that any local economic development perspective brings with it high levels of hope and expectations.

Developing a circular or sustainable economy able to deal effectively with the issue of waste recycling, and potentially reverse climate change, has been identified as the only viable step for humanity (Murray et al., 2017; Comet, 2016), as long as it also involves significant management improvements combined with social justice (Haynes and Murray, 2015; Schneider, 2015). Industries, governments, and cities have been taking steps towards carbon neutrality and carbon negativity and there is active research in progress to identify processes that will significantly reduce atmospheric carbon emissions (Williams et al., 2017). In Canada, the mining, forestry, oil extraction and aluminum industries have been actively pursuing emission reduction processes (Sharma and Henrques, 2005).

Doing business among indigenous communities

General comments

The extant literature contains several approaches that result in similar outcomes on a continuum that extends from projects that have been abandoned (Kemano II with Alcan, 1995), to projects that have been negotiated for more or lesser years until approved through impact benefit agreements (IBAs). In several cases, conflicts have taken place between government levels (mainly provincial against federal in Canada), but also relative to disagreements amongst various stakeholders, beyond indigenous communities. For example, the discovery of the Voisey’s Bay minerals deposit in Labrador in 1993 (Lowe, 1998) became a productive mine site only in 2005 (now with 50 per cent Inuit and Innu staff), while the Ontario Ring of Fire area, discovered in 2007, was still stalled in 2019.

Long established, large mining firms such as former Inco Limited (Vale since 2007), have ignored the fact that they were occupying indigenous territories until the turn of this century. An agreement was signed with the most prominent First Nation impacted by company operations in December 2018 (Ross, 2019). A similar outcome occurred with Glencore and another First Nation within the Greater Sudbury Basin. In all cases, company officials stressed the importance of high-level discussions in the earliest stages as possible, and a consideration for a longer term perspective. An understanding of indigenous traditional knowledge would help.

Carney (2016, 2017) concluded an impact study of the former Asbestos Mountain mine in Nunavik (1972-1984) by noting that « the impacts and experiences of indigenous peoples with past mineral exploration are largely unknown and unstudied. » Another study took place at the Raglan mine, in operation since 1998 near the same Salluit and Kangiqsujuaq Inuit communities of Nunavik (Northern Quebec province of Canada).
Raglan mine, nunavik

In contrast to Carney, Blais (2015) describes a more recent context, where an Impact Benefit Agreement was signed between the company (a subsidiary of Glencore in 2019) and local Inuit. It is also worth noting that 27 other companies were conducting exploration work on the Nunavik region at the time of the study, therefore mining activity is by no means a rare, single event, in that region. The same is true in most indigenous regions of Canada, but a similar situation was prevalent in Central Asia in the same period (except that indigenous communities are not consulted in these countries); vast areas in the Kyzyly-Kum Desert are rendered dangerous because of drill holes left open with no safety warning signs near them. Blais’ main findings include the role of community leaders, as well as the differences in mining’s impact for various indigenous communities.

Blais (2015) noted that leaders who are actively engaged into developing awareness about a mining development among their constituents were able to contribute to reduce the resulting negative effects. At one point, whether impacts are positive or negative resulted in part from subjective perceptions. Perceptions also reflected how well prepared or not were those affected communities, to put in place mechanisms able to alleviate the problems associated with economic and social changes. Blais reported that, in one of the main communities, the former mayor had played a major role in preparing the population to forthcoming changes, including how decisions about mining royalties’ redistribution. He emphasized the importance of taking time to consult each affected community and allow their leaders to act proactively with members in order for them to prepare in the most effective ways and means for forthcoming major changes. It is of note that, from 1998 to 2013, Inuit employment in the Raglan mine grew from 55 to 152, but remained below the ratio of 20 per cent of total jobs mandated by the 1995 impact agreement.

Another major finding from Blais (2015), which corroborates similar findings by Anderson and Dana, is that Inuit people still use large tracts of land and sea to hunt, fish, trap, and gather berries. This translates into the fact that Inuit culture is intimately, to this day, land based. Therefore, any environmentally detrimental effect is a threat to Inuit identity. Any biophysical change will directly result in social impacts at various levels: economic and material well-being, cultural, health, social structures, and quality of life. During interviews, the Inuit expressed the importance of keeping feeding the coming generations with traditional food products, rather than “chips and chocolate”. This preoccupation of the Inuit cultural heritage echo the traditional teachings evoked earlier in this article. The same is true for comments about preserving the natural environment on land and sea from potential pollution by mining and drilling companies.

Negative impacts at the Raglan mine include: increases in air and land traffic (large trucks cause dust to accumulate on snow, which melts faster, rendering travel by land impossible); increases in alcohol and other toxic substances abuse; and problems related to accessing lakes and various parts of the region that have been claimed by exploration firms. Access is still granted to Inuit upon prior notice, however, there is a feeling of dispossession when you must ask for permission to go hunt and fish on your own land. This is notwithstanding the fact that you no longer always know which game or fish might become contaminated. Some Inuit expressed anxiety over fish populations, threats to migratory birds and to caribou populations. Increased sea traffic with icebreakers disrupts winter ice travel, as the Inuit find it safer to travel on ice than on inland hills. Inuit mine workers cannot keep a trap line, as they lack time to tend to it, which causes a reduction of an important social and cultural activity within communities. This is seen as most damaging by the Inuit. It is worth noting that such views are not as favorable to mining as those expressed in Western Arctic communities towards oil and gas extraction (Dana et al., 2008).
Positive impacts reported by Blais (2015) included job creation, new businesses created in the communities (including by community-owned organizations, like elsewhere in the Canadian Arctic), higher incomes, infrastructure developments, female respondents expressed their contentment to be flown in and out of the mine site and being able to have their own room there (in contrast to their crowded family home). For families left behind, it is to their advantage to have one person less to feed.

**Manitou Gold, Ontario**

This junior mining firm operates on Cree and Anishnawbe territories located in Northern Ontario, over 1,300 km north of Toronto. Ross (2019) reported that Manitou’s president (P. Dubreuil) had approached the Chief and Council of a First Nation community near Dryden. His business presentation embedded the Seven Grandfather Teachings and concluded the talk with a ceremonial exchange of tobacco. Complimented for his respectful approach, Dubreuil explained that Manitou also provided the indigenous community a full year to examine and discuss its technical application (instead of the mandatory 45 days required by the Ontario Government) before drilling for any samples. In another area of Northern Ontario, the firm compensated an indigenous trapper for his lost income owing to exploration activities. The company has a policy whereby all First Nations impacted by activities are kept informed on a regular basis, even if consultation is not required by legislation.

According to Ross (2019), Manitou Gold’s respectful attitude matches the expectations of indigenous leader members of the Wabun Tribal Council, who represents six communities near Timmins and has signed ten impact benefit agreements (IBA) and almost 100 joint ventures with mining firms in northeastern Ontario.

**Conclusions**

**Establishing legitimacy**

Cases reviewed involving primary sector firms working with indigenous communities in Canada and elsewhere lead to three main conclusions. Number one is that any company or organization wishing to be active on indigenous territory must first start with consulting with community members. This is before planning, as the project could be perceived as non-viable from the onset. Lesson number two is that community relations, support and exchanges must remain ongoing for the whole duration of a company’s presence on indigenous territory. Conditions will change in economic, social and other terms, agreements will need monitoring, require amendments and improvements, as reality takes over planning. Thirdly, it was clear from contrasting realities in Nigeria, Kazakhstan and Canada, that the legitimacy image of the local government, as well as of more regional and central governments will affect directly the ability of indigenous populations to legitimate external companies. Communities who cannot trust their local government are likely to have great difficulties trusting and welcoming others. When a dispute occurs in a Hopi village, the local chief shuts the village down to strangers, with a sign to that effect at the entrance.

**Approaching indigenous communities**

Approaching one or more indigenous communities requires specific attention given to each one. Isolated communities tend to evolve apart from each other, with documented differences that are reflected in their respective ways of speaking the same language. The Raglan mine impacts two main Inuit communities that are governed in different ways. Not surprisingly, outcomes are different, in particular with respect to the distribution of income
shared by Glencore with both communities. This emphasizes the fact that local peculiarities are important and have lingering long-term consequences.

Educating oneself as well as members of the management team is a must, and the pitfall of designing a single person or only a small group as an ‘indigenous specialist’ would be a mistake. All should be encouraged not only to read relevant material, but also attend presentations and activities where one can meet and learn from other managers already active in indigenous communities, as well as indigenous leaders and speakers. Finding people who can serve as mentors, both indigenous and Non-indigenous, within or outside communities, can be very valuable.

Building a credible team within the company is also a key factor. Senior managers of high rank within the firm must be actively engaged. Specialized lawyers and other professionals might have to be involved at some point, keeping in mind that, in Canada, indigenous communities do not all involve professional negotiators. In some cases they will prefer dealing with ‘real’ people first, then bring in other parties when necessary. In all cases, time cannot be of the essence. Building and nurturing meaningful and durable rapports with community members as well as official and traditional leaders is particularly important. This can happen by building trust on a personal basis.

It can be useful to be able to assess the credibility and the legitimacy of current local Non-indigenous businesses, why and how they have gained respect from the population. Knowing about indigenous local business owners is also important. Events of the past few years will shed light on current economic, social, environmental and infrastructural preoccupations. A James Bay community had experienced spring flooding for 17 years as of 2019. The chief signed a third agreement to have the community rebuilt on higher ground, after the two preceding agreements (one after the third flood) had been reneged by governments.

Finally, planning should be managed as an evolving process, from the letter of intent or memorandum of understanding stage following a discovery process and several meeting engagements where mutual interests are found and can be put together. Several steps will have to take place until eventually negotiations can take place in a climate of trust, towards reaching the main stages.

**Implications for further research**
Empirical research will be required to confirm and amplify the provisory findings presented in this paper, fortunately the mineral, oil and gas industries have numerous ongoing projects in Canada and elsewhere. There will be ample material eventually available to allow for evaluations of how companies (indigenous and non-indigenous alike) will establish their legitimacy among indigenous communities in the not so distant future.

**References**


Bell, L.B. (2017), *Lecture from a Loon Clan and Second Degree Member of the Three Fires Medawiwin Society*, Sudbury, Ontario.


Callahan, K.L. (2004), Interpreting the Pictographs of North Hegman Lake, MN, Department of Anthropology, University of MN.


Kelly, E. (2013), Oenpelli: Western Arnhem Land, Australia. Conversation with author and visits to rock art and burial sites.


Lacombe, A. (1874), Grammaire de la Langue Des Cris, Beauchemin et Valois, Montréal.


MacLean, H. (2012), The Shaman’s Mirror: Visionary Art of the Huichol, University of TX Press, Austin.

Martin, P.R. (1996), Aboriginal World Views and Their Implications for the Education of Aboriginal Adults, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon.


Mitigarjuk (2002), Sanaaq, Stanké, Montréal.


Pedri-Spade, C. (Director), Bimose Tribal Council, (Producer), and Lac Des Mille Lacs First Nation (Producer) (2015), *Nind Assekadan: I Tan a Hid*, Ethnographic Film, Canada.


Powell, M.S. and Grady, C.J. (2010), *Huichol Art and Culture: Balancing the World*, Museum of NM, Laboratory of Anthropology, Santa Fe.


San Juan School District (2012), *Cultural Awareness – Second Grade and Fifth Grade*, Blanding, UT.


White, R.A. and McCullough, A.G. (2005), *Paleoindian Chronology and Technology in Northeastern IN*, IPFW Archaeological Survey, IN University-Purdue University, Fort Wayne, IN.


**Further reading**


**Corresponding author**
Jean-Charles Cachon can be contacted at: jccachon@laurentian.ca

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: [www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm](http://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm)
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com