

Developing a Web of Relationship: Learning from Indigenous People through their Sustainable Venturing

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One of the biggest challenges facing today's sustainable development is to balance the relationship between human and nature as the predominance of the anthropocentric worldview that often places human above all non-human agencies and treats natural resources as commodities (Capra 2005) has caused unprecedented deteriorations in environment as well as loss in biodiversity. On the other hand, some indigenous communities worldwide have shown successful entrepreneurial practices in developing environmental stewardship while maintaining their cultures and self-determination, building upon relational worldviews that see the world as "made of connections and relationships" (Wilson 2008) by celebrating the "interconnection, interrelationship and interdependency of people and the natural and spiritual realms" (Mika et al 2019). While the content of indigenous worldviews has been researched by numerous scholars (Mika et al 2019, Spiller et al 2019, Latulippe 2012, Little bear 2002, Martin 2003, Colbourne 2017), the link between such relational worldviews and sustainable venturing that promotes environmental protection and conservation has been largely overlooked. In addition, sustainable venturing has often been studied within Western contexts following the notion of "triple bottom line" (economic, social, and environmental objectives) (Munoz et al 2018) and its conceptualization within non-Western context, such as indigenous communities, remain unexplored.

Therefore, the research aims to explore, understand and reveal the alternative path towards sustainable venturing drawing on indigenous worldviews through reviewing the

literatures focusing on indigenous worldviews, sustainable venturing as well as indigenous or hybrid research methodologies. First, I developed a relational framework consisting of ontology, epistemology and axiology drawing on Wilson's (2008) work of indigenous research diagram in attempt to represent and analyse indigenous worldviews. The framework aims to encapsulate and construct the worldview through three aspects, namely as "relational way of being" (ontology) by stressing one's relationship to reality for being both physical and spiritual being (Marshall 2011), "relational way of knowing" (epistemology) by interpreting the relationships with communities/ancestors/nature/animals as well as within self (spiritual) (Spiller et al 2019), and "relational way of living" by reflecting on relational accountability (Wilson 2008).

As little work has been done in developing the concept of sustainable venturing from indigenous context, we will first refer the sustainable venturing as a process of creating, developing, and exchanging different sets of relationships in order to achieve primarily the environmental objective drawing on the conceptual framework developed by Munoz et al (2015), departing from conventional definition focusing on triple bottom line (Kuckertz and Wagner 2010). Indeed, Indigenous entrepreneurial ventures often consider economic objectives as less central in comparison with environmental and social objectives due to their land-based, holistic and relational worldviews, contrasting with Western entrepreneurs who are often economically driven and centred (Colbourne 2017). This temporary conceptualization will allow us to further explore and potentially reconstruct the meaning of sustainable venturing under the framework of relational indigenous worldviews.

The research chooses a broad interpretivist approach to develop methodology that align with culture protocols of indigenous people including "4 Rs" that are relationship,

responsibility, reciprocity, and redistribution (Harris et al 2004) as indigenous ontology, epistemology, and axiology are required to be “followed through” at all the stages of research design and implementation (Wilson 2008). While Western scientific methodologies often tend to abstract nature’s patterns in order to build models to explain the interactions, indigenous methodologies consist of a weaving of patterns within “nature and relationship among love, land and life” (Wright et al 2019). One of the indigenous methods proposed by Kovach (2019) is to learn through sharing by oral activities including storytelling, yarning, talk story, and ceremony. Researchers with different worldview are often encouraged to reflexively self-study as well as be explicit on their epistemological assumptions before commencing the study (Kovach 2019).

The research will not only provide an alternative path (or relational path) towards sustainable venturing, but also help provide alternative understanding of sustainable development by highlighting the concept of the “web of relationship” between human and non-human objects in order to achieve harmonious relations. The research will contribute to the transformative changes within sustainability researches and practices for both academics and policy makers. Last but not the least, both relational framework of worldview analysis and reconceptualization of sustainable venturing can contribute to future intersectional studies in sustainable venturing particularly within different indigenous contexts.

Two potential challenges remaining within the study are: 1) although indigenous worldviews are often perceived as relational, they are also highly contextualized and can vary from communities to communities depending on geographical, cultural, social-economic and environmental factors of the places that they are embedded in. For example, in urban areas of Australia and Canada, indigenous entrepreneurs tend to be driven by economic

development and their worldviews is often heavily influenced by modern Western cultures. As Little bear (2000) put it together that no one has worldview that is purely Indigenous or Eurocentric, rather “everyone has an integrated mind, a fluxing and ambidextrous”. The various degree of worldview integration will add complexity to the study and may require the development of typology to address the integrated degree of relational worldview. 2) Although it has been acknowledged that indigenous people tend to view natural resources as extended social relationship, it remains challenging to assess the view of point from non-human objects. The relationship between human and non-human are often assessed from the human side and could potentially be biased. This will require developing multiple methods such as environmental assessment in addition to conventional interview method in order to understand the relationship from point of view from non-human agencies, such as land or water.

Key:

Indigenous worldview, Sustainable venturing, Relationship