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Editors in Chief

Professor Ella Henry, retired 2025, [1] (Ngātikahu ki Whangaroa, Ngāti Kuri, Te Rārawa) has a background across multiple disciplines including sociology, business and Māori Indigenous development. She has been actively involved in research, teaching and advocacy for Māori media for over twenty years. Ella was a Treaty Negotiator for her Iwi, Ngātikahu ki Whangaroa, and has been involved with the Post-Settlement Governance Entity, as Trustee and Chair, until her appointment as Director of Māori Advancement for the Business School, 2020.

Associate Professor Sharlene Leroy-Dyer [2] is a Saltwater woman; she is a descendant of Matora (Awabakal) and Bungaree (Garigal / Darug). She is an Associate Professor at the UQ Business School where she is the Director of the Indigenous Business Hub. Sharlene was the first Aboriginal person to be awarded a PHD in Business from the University of Newcastle. Sharlene has extensive experience as an equity practitioner, having worked for over 45 years in industry and academia. Sharlene's positionality as an Aboriginal scholar informs her research work in academia. Her research specialises in Closing the Gap on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage in education and employment. Sharlene's scholarship bridges theory and practice, with a focus on real-world impact.

Dr Gaala Watson [3] is a Gangalu and Birri-Gubba (Wiri) scholar and governance researcher based at the University of Queensland Business School. Her work focuses on Aboriginal governance, Indigenous economics, and Indigenous enterprise. Gaala's research brings Indigenous knowledge systems into dialogue with organisational practice, with a focus on systems change and Indigenous-led development. With experience across academia, business, and community sectors, her work supports culturally grounded approaches to governance and enterprise and aims to create practical impact.

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[1] Auckland University of Technology https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9681-6060
[2] University of Queensland https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3755-0837
[3] University of Queensland https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2373-4870

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Editorial Volume 1

Ella Henry (Ngātikahu ki Whangaroa, Ngāti Kuri, Te Rārawa)[1], Sharlene Leroy-Dyer (Garigal / Darug, Awabakal, Wiradyuri)[2], and Gaala Watson (Gangalu and Birri-Gubba)[2]

[1]Auckland University of Technology
[2]The University of Queensland Business School, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Abstract: This inaugural issue of the *International Journal of Indigenous Business* marks the establishment of a dedicated, Indigenous-led space for advancing scholarship, practice, and critical dialogue in Indigenous business. IJIB is an open-access, peer-reviewed journal with an international focus, committed to centring Indigenous voices, knowledges, and priorities across all areas of the Indigenous business discipline. The journal adopts a strengths-based approach that recognises Indigenous businesses and organisations as sites of leadership, innovation, and intellectual authority. It responds directly to the long-standing absence and marginalisation of Indigenous voices in academic literature on Indigenous business, where research has too often been conducted about Indigenous peoples rather than for, with and by them. IJIB prioritises Indigenous-led research and requires Indigenous authorship as a foundational principle of publication. This first issue brings together contributions from Indigenous scholars, practitioners, and business leaders from across the globe, reflecting the breadth and diversity of Indigenous business contexts, practices, and futures. Collectively, the articles demonstrate that Indigenous business is not a niche field but a vital and generative domain of knowledge that informs how organisations are led, economies are shaped, and futures are defined on Indigenous terms.

Keywords: Indigenous Business Knowledges

Introduction

The launch of the International Journal of Indigenous Business marks an important moment for Indigenous scholarship, practice, and leadership in business. This journal has been established not simply to add to an existing body of literature, but to shift how business is understood, researched, taught, and practised when Indigenous peoples define the terms.

Indigenous peoples have always engaged in sophisticated economic systems grounded in place, kinship, law, culture, and responsibility. Yet within mainstream business scholarship, Indigenous enterprise has too often been positioned as marginal, emergent, or in need of explanation through non-Indigenous frameworks. This journal begins from a different starting point. It recognises Indigenous business as intellectually generative, theoretically rich, and already offering viable models for economic life in a time of global uncertainty.

The contributions in this inaugural issue demonstrate the breadth and depth of Indigenous business scholarship across education, policy, enterprise, procurement, governance, and leadership. Together, they show that Indigenous business cannot be reduced to questions of participation or performance alone. Instead, business emerges as a site where purpose, place, community, and sovereignty intersect, shaping how success is defined and pursued.

Several papers in this issue engage directly with institutions that shape contemporary business practice, including universities, public sector systems, and corporate procurement regimes. These contributions do not seek inclusion on existing terms. They interrogate purpose, expose structural limitations, and articulate alternative logics grounded in Indigenous standpoints, priorities, and lived experience. In doing so, they challenge the assumption that mainstream business frameworks are neutral or universal, and instead reveal them as culturally and historically situated.

Other contributions centre Indigenous enterprise success as something defined by Indigenous peoples themselves. Drawing on diverse Indigenous voices, this issue foregrounds enterprise as collective, place-based, and future-

oriented. Success is not framed solely through profit or growth, but through community wellbeing, cultural continuity, environmental responsibility, and intergenerational impact. These papers make clear that Indigenous enterprises are not deviations from "real" business. They are expressions of long-standing economic traditions that continue to adapt, innovate, and lead.

The inclusion of the opening address delivered at the launch of this journal is intentional. It situates the International Journal of Indigenous Business within lived leadership and community responsibility, rather than abstract debate. The reflections shared in the opening address speak to the daily realities faced by Indigenous business leaders as they navigate cultural obligations within contemporary economic systems. These realities are not peripheral to business scholarship; they are central to understanding how business is practised in Indigenous contexts.

As Managing Editors, we are clear about the stance of this journal. The International Journal of Indigenous Business is Indigenous-led and Indigenous-centred. It values Indigenous methodologies, ethics, and ways of knowing as foundational, not supplementary. It does not support extractive research practices, deficit narratives, or work that treats Indigenous peoples as objects of study rather than knowledge holders and leaders. We welcome rigorous scholarship that is accountable to communities, grounded in context, and committed to contributing beyond the page.

Supported by the Indigenous Business Hub at The University of Queensland Business School, the journal has a global remit. Indigenous business scholarship transcends institutional, disciplinary, and geographic boundaries, existing wherever Indigenous peoples determine their futures on their own terms.

This first edition sets the direction for what follows. It signals a journal that platforms Indigenous business as a field of knowledge, practice, and leadership. We invite scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and community leaders to engage with this work, to challenge it, to build on it, and to contribute to a growing body of scholarship that reflects the diversity, strength, and vision of Indigenous business globally.

The contributions that follow give form to this commitment. Together, they demonstrate the breadth of Indigenous business scholarship, spanning enterprise, education, policy, governance, and leadership, while remaining grounded in Indigenous priorities, contexts, and lived experience. The first edition covers a range of topics roughly grouped in themes; opening address, historical accounts of Indigenous business, Indigenous enterprise, wicked problems within Indigenous business, employment and business education.

Opening Address: Launch of the international Journal of Indigenous Business

This article is such an important contribution to the journal, it was written by Baringa Barambah and delivered at the launch of the IJIB in 2025. In this opening address, Barambah reflects on the lived realities of First Nations business leadership, drawing on her experiences as a Turrbal woman balancing cultural responsibility within contemporary organisational and commercial settings. She explores how Indigenous leaders centre culture, community, and Country in decision-making while engaging with systems that privilege speed and narrow definitions of success. Through three interrelated challenges, Baringa shows how Indigenous leaders lead with cultural protocols, assert the value of Indigenous knowledges, and embrace collective responsibility as strength. The address positions First Nations organisations not as exceptions to mainstream business, but as offering grounded, transferable approaches to leadership and sustainability.

The Past to the Future: The National Indigenous Business & Economic Conferences (NIBEC) Footprint

The National Indigenous Business & Economic Conferences (NIBEC) of 1993 and 1995 were landmark Indigenous-led interventions that shaped Australia's Indigenous business and economic development agenda in the wake of the Mabo decision. This article traces NIBEC's influence from 1993 to 2025, assessing its relevance against contemporary equity, diversity and inclusion agendas, Indigenous procurement policy, and the expanding Indigenous Estate. Using a qualitative historical review structured around the NIBEC facilitators' triad of political, support, and financial structures, the paper shows how early calls for a national business voice, supplier registers, procurement levers, and Indigenous-led finance anticipated later developments such as Supply Nation, Indigenous chambers alliances, and the Indigenous Procurement Policy. Despite these gains, persistent gaps remain, including the absence of a nationally mandated peak body, uneven capability across jurisdictions, limited access to finance, and unresolved issues around business definition and asset protection. The article argues that NIBEC's original work program remains a valid diagnostic and proposes a renewed national forum to advance First Nations-led economic self-determination and sovereignty.

Moments in Time: A systematic review of Indigenous business research 1999-2019

This article presents a systematic review of Indigenous business research published between 1999 and 2019, critically examining how the field has developed and how effectively it supports Indigenous business practice and education. Analysing 127 empirical studies, the authors identify strong growth in research output, particularly in the past decade, but note persistent structural limitations. Indigenous business research is heavily concentrated in high-income countries, remote contexts, and sectors such as tourism and agriculture, with urban, regional, and developing-country contexts underrepresented. The review highlights inconsistent definitions of Indigenous business, limited application and reporting of Indigenous methodologies, and a dominance of western theoretical frameworks within business schools. While some progress has been made toward hybrid and Indigenous-informed theory, Indigenous voices remain marginalised in what is considered "quality" business research. The authors propose a conceptual framework and clear recommendations to advance Indigenous-led, methodologically rigorous, and practically relevant research that better supports Indigenous economic self-determination.

Indigenous Enterprise Success: In Our Peoples' Voices

This article reconceptualises Indigenous enterprise success by centring the lived experiences and worldviews of First Peoples in Australia, Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, and Indigenous Ugandans. Drawing on three Indigenous-led qualitative studies, the authors challenge profit-centric, western definitions of success and instead foreground relational, cultural, spiritual, and intergenerational dimensions. Indigenous methodologies—including yarning, kaupapa Māori, and Ubuntu philosophy—are employed to elevate Indigenous epistemologies and disrupt deficit-based and extractive research traditions. The paper introduces a Triadic Relational Model that frames enterprise success as a dynamic interplay between people, place, and purpose, grounded in collective wellbeing, stewardship of land, and self-determination. Across all contexts, success is understood as sustaining culture, strengthening community, and enabling future generations, rather than maximising short-term financial returns. The authors argue that Indigenous entrepreneurship represents a form of resurgence and offers a decolonised alternative to dominant economic narratives, particularly in times of global economic instability.

Beyond Compliance: Black Cladding, Indigenous Procurement, and the Realising of Economic Sovereignty

This article examines *Black cladding*—the superficial or fraudulent representation of Indigenous ownership in business—as a structural failure of Indigenous procurement policy rather than a series of isolated misconducts. Using a Relational Indigenist Framework that integrates Indigenist Critical Policy Analysis with Aboriginal Terms of Reference, the paper critiques Australia's Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP) for privileging bureaucratic compliance, efficiency, and market logics over Indigenous governance, cultural legitimacy, and self-determination. It argues that Black cladding emerges where Indigeneity is reduced to an administrative category, enabling non-Indigenous actors to access benefits intended for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses while displacing legitimate enterprises. The analysis demonstrates that these practices cause material, cultural, and systemic harm, including the erosion of relational Indigenous business models grounded in reciprocity, custodianship, and community accountability. Drawing on international comparisons and UNDRIP principles, the paper concludes that procurement reform must embed Indigenous-led authority, verification, and governance to reposition procurement as a mechanism of economic sovereignty and structural justice.

Between Culture and Context: What Shapes Māori Perspectives on Capitalism and Government Regulation?

This article presents the outcomes of a multidisciplinary research initiative conducted collaboratively between leading academic institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia. The investigation addresses a critical issue within the social sciences, centring on Indigenous perspectives—particularly those of Māori communities—in the context of capitalism and government regulation. Employing innovative and inclusive methodologies, the study foregrounds Indigenous voices and knowledge systems, ensuring that cultural context and lived experience are integral to both the research process and its interpretation. By prioritising cross-cultural understanding, the research offers fresh insights and highlights the necessity of culturally responsive approaches in social inquiry. The findings underscore the value of sustained academic collaboration and ongoing dialogue between institutions, while also emphasising the importance of empowering Indigenous communities in shaping research agendas. This work serves as a valuable resource for scholars and practitioners seeking to engage thoughtfully with the broader societal implications of Indigenous perspectives on economic and regulatory frameworks.

Indigenous Women's Inclusion in the Workplace: Setting the Blak Agenda

This article examines Indigenous women's workplace experiences through an Indigenous standpoint grounded in Indigenous Feminist Theory, Intersectionality, and Critical Race Theory. It argues that employment inequity is not accidental but a structural outcome of ongoing colonisation, embedded racism, sexism, and white institutional power. Centring Blak women's voices, the research uses yarning and storytelling as sovereign Indigenous knowledge practices to expose how systemic racism, cultural load, shadeism, and gendered expectations shape labour market participation, wellbeing, and career progression. Drawing on extensive empirical research and national data, the paper demonstrates how colonial workplace structures produce a "white ceiling" that marginalises Indigenous women while demanding constant cultural labour and cross-cultural code-switching. Rather than positioning Indigenous women through deficit narratives, the study foregrounds resistance, leadership, resilience, and agency. It calls for decolonised, culturally safe workplaces that recognise Indigenous governance, remunerate cultural labour, and move beyond tokenistic inclusion. The paper ultimately frames workplace transformation as essential to Indigenous self-determination, sovereignty, and justice.

Identified Positions in Queensland: A Discussion on Purpose, Practice, and Possibilities

This discussion paper critically examines the purpose, practice, and possibilities of identified positions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Queensland. Drawing on Indigenous standpoint theory and early-stage qualitative PhD research, the paper interrogates how identified roles are legislatively enabled, organisationally interpreted, and culturally experienced. While identified positions are intended to address employment inequities and recognise Indigenous cultural knowledge under section 25 of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld), the paper argues that the absence of a clear legal definition has resulted in inconsistent application, confusion, and, at times, tokenism. Using personal reflection, literature analysis, and emerging insights from research topic yarning sessions, the author highlights tensions between equity-driven intentions and compliance-based practices, including the risk of unrecognised cultural load. The paper contributes to Indigenous employment scholarship by centring Indigenous voices and calls for clearer purpose, Indigenous-led co-design, and stronger organisational accountability to ensure identified positions foster genuine inclusion and structural change rather than symbolic representation.

Stepping into Standpoints: Indigenous Standpoints Guiding Decolonial Reflexivity in Business Education

This article argues that Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST) is essential for guiding decolonial reflexivity and meaningful transformation in business education. Responding to the persistence of colonial and Eurocentric knowledge systems within business schools, the authors call on non-Indigenous academics to engage Indigenous standpoints not as supplementary content, but as epistemic foundations that challenge dominant paradigms. Drawing on Indigenous scholarship, lived experience, and pedagogical practice, the paper demonstrates how Indigenous standpoints—expressed through story, art, data, and relational practice—disrupt extractive, capitalist logics embedded in curricula, pedagogy, and institutional culture. Using the Indigenisation spectrum and the concept of parallax, the authors show how reflexive engagement with multiple standpoints can expose power, privilege, and epistemic exclusion. The paper positions IST as both theory and praxis, demanding relational accountability, ethical allyship, and structural change. Ultimately, it contends that centring Indigenous knowledge is a necessary condition for an ethical, inclusive, and decolonised future for business education.

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From Past to Future: Lessons Learned from Walking in Two Worlds - Opening Address at the Launch of the International Journal of Indigenous Business at The University of Queensland

Baringa Barambah (Turrbal)

Abstract: This speech was delivered by Baringa Barambah at the launch of the International Journal of Indigenous Business at The University of Queensland. It explores how First Nations business leaders navigate the intersection of culture, community, Country, and contemporary business demands. Drawing on her own journey growing up immersed in Turrbal culture and later navigating corporate environments, Baringa highlights lessons from "walking in two worlds". The speech examines three key challenges faced by Indigenous leaders: balancing cultural protocols with external expectations, shifting mainstream mindsets to value Indigenous knowledges, and carrying the weight of the collective. Each challenge is paired with practical responses, demonstrating how First Nations organisations provide a model for holistic, sustainable, and purpose-driven approaches to business.

Introduction

How do we walk in two worlds at once: the world of culture, community, and Country, and the world of business, growth, and efficiency? These worlds don't always move in the same direction—cultural obligation and community responsibility can sit in tension with commercial timelines, efficiency, and growth targets.

This question has been shaped by my own journey: growing up immersed in my Turrbal culture, guided by Elders, and later navigating the corporate world where success was often defined only by profit, growth, and efficiency. Yet what I have witnessed is that many First Nations businesses weave together economic strength and cultural responsibility—measuring success not just in dollars, but in people, culture, and Country.

By navigating these tensions daily, we develop approaches, frameworks, and values that offer lessons for anyone seeking a more holistic, sustainable, and purpose-driven way to do business. These lessons emerge from what we call "walking in two worlds", where an identity grounded in over 65,000 years of culture, law, and knowledge with a deep connection to Country, community, and ancestral wisdom must be balanced with modern business demands.

Walking in Two Worlds

I've seen the tensions of walking in two worlds appear in multiple, interconnected ways. While not exhaustive, the following three highlight common areas where many Indigenous business leaders continually adapt and innovate.

1. Balancing Cultural Protocols with External Expectations

In my experience, balancing cultural protocols with external expectations is a constant challenge. Cultural protocols are grounded in values, relationships, and responsibility. They guide how we engage, make decisions, and honour our communities. External expectations, on the other hand, often focus on timelines, budgets, and deliverables. Bridging these two ways of working requires patience, skill, and intentional communication. What is considered urgent or essential in one world may be secondary, or even irrelevant, in the other.

For example, a corporation once approached my community about commissioning artwork. In the first meeting, their focus was entirely on approvals, deadlines, and ticking the project off their to-do list to meet a key performance indicator (KPI). Not once did they ask about values, community, or story. Where they saw a project, we saw a

relationship (or a lack thereof, in this instance). That moment highlighted the ongoing balancing act required to bridge these worlds to ensure our culture is honoured while working within commercial systems.

Response: Leading with Cultural Protocols

Across my work, I've seen various First Nations businesses respond to the challenge of balancing cultural protocols with external expectations by leading with culture from the outset. This often involves approaches like opening conversations with values rather than KPIs, holding meetings on Country rather than in boardrooms, or sharing stories of place before discussing deliverables. It also includes having the courage to decline projects that do not align with cultural protocols.

The impact of this approach is tangible. Partner organisations willing to engage in this way often experience a shift in perspective; instead of asking "How can we tick this off?", they start asking "How can we honour this land and its people in the right way?". Over time, this shift in language reflects a deeper transformation in how projects are conceived, partnerships are built, and responsibilities to Country and community are understood. What begins as cultural leadership from First Nations businesses can ripple outward, creating lasting cultural change in the partner organisations.

2. Shifting Mainstream Mindsets to Value Indigenous Knowledges

In my experience, creating space for Indigenous knowledges to be recognised and valued alongside other forms of expertise is another challenge. I've seen western systems privilege technical expertise, data, and efficiency, while overlooking the cultural wisdom that grounds decisions in values, relationships, and long-term sustainability. Sidelining this wisdom can lead organisations to prioritise short-term outputs, potentially at the expense of deeper, longer-lasting outcomes.

Response: Bridging Knowledge Systems

There are First Nations leaders actively bridging Indigenous wisdom with modern knowledge in mainstream settings, creating spaces where both knowledge systems operate as equals. One powerful example is WV Technologies, founded by Kurt Grueber. Kurt's words reflect the very essence of WV Technologies: "Aboriginal people have long understood that we are one with Country and must care for it. In a modern world, this can take many forms." The company bridges traditional knowledges with modern practice, tackling environmental challenges while creating meaningful employment pathways for First Nations youth. By re-using and recycling the vast majority of the e-waste it processes, WV Technologies delivers measurable environmental benefits, such as reducing emissions, conserving resources, and recovering valuable materials.

From this example, several key lessons emerge that illustrate how bridging knowledge systems can deliver impact.

- Indigenous knowledges as the foundation: Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing shape purpose and decision-making.
- Modern tools as enablers: Digital skills, technology, and systems allow scaling and impact.
- Youth engagement: Young people learn, lead, and translate knowledge into action.
- Outcomes that matter: Social, economic, and environmental impact is achieved.

This approach shows that, when Indigenous wisdom and modern knowledge are treated as complementary, the results can be far-reaching for communities, for business, and for the wider world.

3. Carrying the Weight of the Collective

For many First Nations business leaders, stepping into business spaces is never just about ourselves. We carry our Elders' stories, our community's hopes, and the dreams of those who never had the same chances. Every decision, every partnership, every workshop or speech carries the questions: *Will this uplift our people? Will this open doors for others?* For many of us, individual success holds little meaning if it does not contribute to the wellbeing of our community, strengthen cultural connection, or create opportunities for the next generation.

From the outside, I can understand how this weight may be perceived as a burden, but it is actually a strength. It makes every decision matter and reminds leaders that success is collective. This perspective sheds light on why many Indigenous businesses operate differently.

Response: Redefining Success Metrics

In my work, I've come across First Nations organisations that respond to this collective responsibility by defining their own measures of success. Financial returns are just one part of the picture; equally important are community wellbeing, cultural strengthening, and intergenerational impact.

Some leaders have their standard business KPIs sit alongside cultural outcomes, ensuring that work honours both community and Country. Others focus on employment opportunities, accepting lower margins because the social and cultural impact is valued more than commercial outcomes alone. These approaches show that purpose and profit are not mutually exclusive, but rather that they can coexist to drive sustainable, community-centred growth.

Why This Journal Matters

These approaches exemplify the values this journal seeks to capture, making today's launch especially significant. This is why the work we're launching today—this journal—is so important.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge and congratulate everyone who made it possible: the researchers, editors, community partners and Elders. Your dedication, deep listening, and courage have brought this vision to life. This launch is the result of years of work, and it deserves to be celebrated. In my view, the value of this journal is as follows: it preserves our knowledge, provides evidence to influence systems, and connects us across generations and countries. And, as we reflect on that, it naturally leads us to the question of how we carry these lessons forward.

Conclusion: From Past to Future

Past to Future reminds us that business can be about more than financial returns, that social impact and commercial success can go hand in hand, and that responsibility to community, Country, and future generations can shape how we measure success.

If this way of doing business is possible, what role will each of us play?

- For First Nations entrepreneurs and leaders: How might you continue to define success on your own terms—grounded in culture, community, and Country—even when pressures to conform are strong?
- For mainstream business leaders: What lessons from Indigenous ways of doing business could help your organisation thrive in the decades ahead?
- For policymakers: How can your decisions help expand the impact of business models that deliver not just economic benefits, but social and cultural benefits as well?
- For researchers and academics: How will your work go beyond papers and reports to create real pathways that document, validate, and amplify First Nations business models?

By thinking about how we can support businesses that balance purpose, people, and profit, we open the door to a stronger, more connected, and more sustainable future.

About the author

Baringa Barambah is a Songwoman of the Turrbal People. Raised in Meeanjin, she grew up learning traditional laws from her Elders. Following the Voice referendum, Baringa founded Yadeni Consulting to foster cultural understanding. Prior to this, she worked in finance, strategy, and operations roles in corporate, government, and not-for-profit sectors to deliver projects across Australia, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. Baringa holds commerce and economics degrees from The University of Queensland, is a Chartered Accountant, and earned a Master Business Administration from the University of Cambridge as a Chevening and a Roberta Sykes Scholar.

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The Past to the Future: The National Indigenous Business & Economic Conferences Footprint

Rod Williams (Bundjalung)[1] and Samantha Cooms (Noonuccal Quandamooka)[1]

[1]The University of Queensland Business School, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Disclaimer: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that this paper contains the names of people who are deceased. We have included their names as a sign of respect for their contribution to the Indigenous business sector.

Abstract: The National Indigenous Business & Economic Conferences (NIBEC) held in 1993 (Alice Springs) and 1995 (Brisbane) were landmark Indigenous-led interventions in Australian economic policy, convened in the wake of Mabo and intensified struggles over land rights, self-management, and economic independence. Marking the 30th anniversary of the inaugural NIBEC, this paper traces the conference footprint from 1993–2025 and reassesses its contribution in the context of contemporary equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) agendas, Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP) settings, and the growing Indigenous Estate. Using a qualitative historical review, we analyse conference reports, facilitator speeches, program materials, subsequent sector reports, and oral histories, coding them to the 1993 Facilitators' triad of Political Structures, Support Structures, and Financial Structures. We show how delegates' calls for a national business voice, a practical "Black Pages" register, procurement levers, and Indigenous-led finance prefigured later institutional developments, including Indigenous chambers alliances, Supply Nation certification and registers, and the IPP. At the same time, we identify persistent gaps: the absence of a nationally mandated peak body with a strategy remit and stable funding; uneven capability and coordination across jurisdictions; ongoing constraints on access to finance; and unresolved challenges around Indigenous business definition, black cladding, and protection of cultural and economic assets across the Indigenous Estate. We argue that NIBEC's original work program remains a valid diagnostic for 2025 and propose a NIBEC 3 as an agenda-setting national forum to articulate, resource, and measure a First Nations-led business and economic strategy grounded in self-determination and sovereignty.

Key Words: Indigenous business, Indigenous economic development; Indigenous entrepreneurship; Indigenous estate; Economic self-determination.

Introduction

The National Indigenous Business & Economic Conference (NIBEC) has played a pivotal role in the evolution of Indigenous business and economic strategies in Australia. Marking its 30th anniversary in 2023, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the progress made since its inception and to chart a path forward in the context of contemporary trends in equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). This paper aims to review the achievements and ongoing challenges of the Indigenous business community, focusing on the foundational NIBEC conferences of 1993 and 1995, and to provide insights into the future directions necessary for sustained growth and self-determination.

Appendix A lists the names, roles, and contributions to NIBEC 1993 and NIBEC/QIBEC 1995. This list indicates the commitment made by Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants to developing the early Indigenous business and economic strategies in Australia.

The early 1990s were a transformative period for Indigenous Australians, marked by significant legal and political developments. The landmark Mabo decision of 1992, which legally recognised native title for the first time, provided a critical backdrop for discussions at the first NIBEC conference. This decision underscored the need for economic positioning and self-management within the Indigenous community. The convenors of the first NIBEC in Alice Springs in 1993 were focused on understanding the opportunities and challenges of Indigenous business. The conference aimed to bring Indigenous people across Australia together to discuss and make a national statement about our business and economic future.

The NIBEC conferences were pioneering in their approach, bringing together Australian and international delegates from diverse backgrounds, including university students and experienced industry professionals, to discuss and strategise on Indigenous economic development. The themes of the conferences were designed to address the multifaceted barriers to Indigenous economic participation and to lay the groundwork for sustainable business development. In the years following the initial conferences, the Indigenous business landscape in Australia has continued to evolve. The establishment of organisations such as Supply Nation and the growth of the Indigenous business sector have been significant milestones. However, the need for a comprehensive review of the progress made and the challenges that remain is critical. This paper draws on historical documents, including conference reports and speeches, to analyse the achievements of the past 30 years and to identify areas where further efforts are needed.

Contemporary trends in EDI have also influenced the discourse around Indigenous business. The growing recognition of the importance of cultural diversity in the workplace and the push for greater inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in business practices have created new opportunities for Indigenous enterprises. These trends align with the original goals of the NIBEC conferences, which emphasised the importance of cultural values, community support, and economic empowerment. Moreover, the current focus on decolonising business education and integrating Indigenous knowledges into curricula reflects a broader shift towards recognising the value of Indigenous contributions to the economy (PricewaterhouseCoopers-Australia, 2018). The holistic, relational nature of Aboriginal knowledges contrasts with the compartmentalised approach of western business pedagogies, highlighting the need for systemic change in how business education is delivered.

This paper documents and critically analyses Indigenous business development from the NIBEC conferences (1993–1995) to the present, assessing the strategies employed and their outcomes. The 30-year arc coincides with contemporary policy shifts, such as the Australian National University First Nations Portfolio's *Murru waaruu Economic Development Seminar Series: Outcomes Report* (2024) and the maturation of the Commonwealth *Indigenous Procurement Policy* (IPP) (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2020), creating a timely policy window to reassess what NIBEC seeded and what remains structurally constrained. We do not claim direct causality; rather, we trace agenda-setting influence, whereby NIBEC's nationally aired problems/solutions (peak voice, register, procurement levers) provided reference points later taken up by sector actors, certification regimes, and the IPP. The article proceeds as follows. We outline the historical context of the NIBEC conferences and analyse the 1993 and 1995 proceedings. We then review achievements and persistent challenges (1993–2025) to derive contemporary implications and future directions. The conclusion summarises key points and reflects on the ongoing journey toward Indigenous economic self-management, self-determination, and sovereignty.

Analytically, we organise the review around the 1993 NIBEC Facilitators' triad of Political Structures, Support Structures, and Financial Structures, following these trajectories through 1995 to the present. We draw on contemporaneous conference reports, facilitator speeches, program materials, and subsequent sector reports and peer-reviewed literature. Sources from personal archives and published outputs were coded to the triad; continuity and change (1993–2025) were verified against documentary evidence and oral history.

Contemporary Implications and Future Directions

It is essential to maintain and make accessible historical documents such as the NIBEC conference reports. These documents provide valuable insights and serve as a foundation for future strategies. The significance of these historical records cannot be overstated, as they offer a roadmap of the achievements, challenges, and lessons learned in Indigenous business development. Ensuring that these documents are preserved and accessible to future generations is crucial for the continuity and evolution of Indigenous economic strategies.

Historical Context (Pre-1993)

The first NIBEC in 1993 marked a significant turning point for Indigenous business in Australia. These conferences emerged during a period of profound socio-political change and heightened awareness of Indigenous rights, underscored by the landmark Mabo decision in 1992. This decision, which legally recognised native title for the first time, fundamentally altered the landscape of Indigenous rights in Australia and provided a critical backdrop for the discussions at the first NIBEC conference. The socio-political environment of the time also included significant developments in Indigenous policy and advocacy. From the early 1970s with the Aboriginal Tent Embassy (Foley et al.,2013) and the land rights movement, Aboriginal people have led a long struggle over land rights across many state and territory borders, one which continues today. The beginnings of this struggle began almost a century ago. In the time since, Aboriginal people have led public protests, brought about positive political action, set up a tent on the front lawn of Parliament House, and caused positive law reform (Queensland Studies Authority Indigenous Perspective Resource, 2007).

The early 1990s were characterised by a growing recognition of the need to address historical injustices faced by Indigenous Australians. The Mabo decision, handed down by the High Court of Australia, rejected the doctrine of terra nullius (land belonging to nobody), which had previously denied Indigenous Australians their land rights. This legal recognition of native title was a monumental victory for Indigenous Australians and set the stage for broader discussions on self-determination and economic independence (Behrendt et al., 2008).

The establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 1990 was an attempt to provide Indigenous Australians with a greater voice in their own governance and to facilitate the delivery of programs and services. ATSIC played a crucial role in supporting initiatives like NIBEC, which sought to empower Indigenous communities economically and politically (National Indigenous Business & Economic Conference, 1993a). Additionally, the broader movement for Indigenous rights and recognition was gaining momentum, with increased advocacy for treaty negotiations and reparations. The 1980s and into the 1990s saw a surge in activism and public awareness campaigns aimed at addressing the socio-economic disparities faced by Indigenous Australians. This period also witnessed significant academic and policy discussions about the need to decolonise existing structures and create frameworks that genuinely supported Indigenous autonomy and development.

Against this backdrop, the NIBEC conferences were pioneering in their approach, emphasising the importance of Indigenous-led solutions and the need for robust support structures to facilitate economic growth.

"The need for a national business conference to explore economic independence which is just as important as the recent Mabo High Court decision we have survived on welfare funding and need to stop reacting and start taking the initiative to create new opportunities was the motivation for NIBEC 1993" (National Indigenous Business & Economic Conference, 1993a).

The 1993 triad shows (i) what delegates proposed, (ii) what subsequently matured, and (iii) what gaps persist. Future directions are framed as updates to the original NIBEC work program, not a new agenda. Table 1 is the master map: what delegates asked for (1993), what matured (1995–2025), and what remains.

Table 1: What NIBEC asked for, what happened, and what is still missing (1993–2025)

Theme	1993 – What delegates said they needed	1995 – What was tried or coordinated	2009–2025 – What changed	What is still missing today
Have one strong national business voice	Establish a national body and a register to "get the Black Economy moving"	Working groups scoped a national voice and registry ideas	State/territory chambers formed; national chambers alliances began; Supply Nation created a national register (2009)	No nationally mandated peak with a strategy remit and stable funding
Government tends to direct Indigenous business clients to ATSIC	Educate public servants and balance access to programs with economic development programs	Agency-facing sessions and recommendations from workshops	Commonwealth Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP) added demand-side targets (2015 onwards)	Capability and coordination are uneven across jurisdictions and agencies

Make Indigenous suppliers visible and verifiable	Create a practical national register	Practical options discussed across sessions	Supply Nation certification and Indigenous Business Direct built verification and visibility (2009 onwards)	Coverage is incomplete beyond Commonwealth and participating buyers
Access to finance	Remove barriers to mainstream finance and collateral	Finance streams canvassed pathways and joint ventures	Indigenous Land and Sea Council (ILSC)/ Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) instruments expanded (1995–2001 onwards)	Demand for access to finance is far greater than IBA and ILSC restrictive programs; early-stage risk capital and regional access remain limited
Use procurement to grow firms	Put government and corporate spend to work for Indigenous businesses	Procurement engagement was pushed by delegates (the Black Economy)	IPP (2015 onwards) and state/territory policies increased contract flow	Targets and verification are not uniform across all jurisdictions/tiers

NIBEC 1993, Alice Springs

The first NIBEC, held in Alice Springs in September 1993, convened over 350 delegates from diverse backgrounds and was hosted by the Arrernte Council of Central Australia with President Charles Perkins and Vice-President Ted Hampton. The conference aimed to unite Indigenous people across Australia to establish mechanisms for support, education, finance, and growth, which were seen as essential for transitioning from a dependency on welfare to achieving economic self-determination. The first NIBEC consisted of the NIBEC Conference itself, the National Indigenous Trade Exhibition, and the National Indigenous Business Awards night.

The inaugural NIBEC conference focused on plenary sessions and workshops. Day One workshops covered issues of (1) Support, (2) Finance, (3) Education/Training, and (4) Growth; and Day Two industry workshops covered (1) Arts and Crafts, (2) Tourism, (3) Housing, (4) Media/Entertainment, (5) Primary Industry, and (6) Consulting (National Indigenous Business & Economic Conference, 1993a, b).

On arrival in Alice Springs a day and a half before the conference Charles Perkins, Ted Hampton, Ross Hampton (Administrator), and Colin Cowell (Marketing) asked Graham Atkinson and myself, Rod Williams, to jointly manage the Facilitators. We were asked to make a speech on the final day summarising the conference and workshop points. The first question I asked as the newly appointed joint Facilitator Co-Manager was who are the Facilitators that we will be managing? The answer was that it was our role to find them. We decided to look at the list of the 350 delegates attending the conference and found that a number of Indigenous people attending had 20 to 30 years of experience across various industries and sectors. Each workshop group of 20 people was matched with an Indigenous workshop facilitator and a workshop scribe (young Indigenous Charles Darwin University students or experienced writers with community/public service/industry backgrounds).

See Appendix A for NIBEC 1993 people contributions.

At the end of each day the Indigenous workshop facilitators and all workshop scribes would present the main points from their workshops and argue whether it was good enough to be written on my white board. The afternoon before my final presentation to the full conference we had three white boards of business-related points from the above workshop sessions. I was able to link all of the points to three categories: Political Structures, Support Structures, and Financial Structures. This was used for my final speech (Williams, 1993)

Political Structures (1993–2025) (Dispelling the Myths)

- 1993: Delegates asked government to stop treating businesses as welfare recipients and to re-train public servants. Place business support on the agenda (educate public service) and find a balance with cultural, social, and political agenda.
- 1995: Sessions engaged agencies and set out concrete recommendations.
- Since 2009–2015: Verification and procurement levers matured (e.g., Supply Nation, IPP).
- Gap now: Capability and cross-jurisdiction coordination are still uneven and undeveloped.

The Alice Springs conference identified several myths and systemic issues that needed to be dispelled.

Dispelling the Myths

1. “Plenty of money is spent on Aboriginal economic development”: Delegates highlighted that this perception is misleading. Much of the ATSIC funding counted under “economic development” was actually directed to the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), which created short-term employment opportunities but

did not generate sustainable enterprises. The message was clear: do not confuse welfare or employment programs with genuine investment in Indigenous business.

2. "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not interested in business": This myth was strongly rejected. Many delegates had paid their own way to attend the conference—an act that in itself demonstrated commitment, sacrifice, and determination to pursue business opportunities. As one delegate noted, "If that is not telling Australia that we mean business, then nothing ever will."

Reframing Government Responsibilities

Delegates stressed that government agencies must shift their approach. Indigenous business aspirations cannot be seen solely as the responsibility of ATSIC or one portfolio. All departments—industry, trade, finance, and beyond—share a responsibility to support Indigenous Australians in business. The prevailing attitude that "ATSIC will deal with it" was seen as discriminatory and unacceptable.

Balancing Social and Economic Funding

Participants argued that the dominance of social welfare funding in Indigenous Affairs must be counterbalanced with real investment in economic initiatives. This required:

- educating public servants and ATSIC councillors who were not economically minded or trained
- reorienting policies and programs to include clear economic development targets
- ensuring a portion of Indigenous Affairs funding was dedicated to business support, enabling communities to move from dependency to generating their own income and profits.

Building on the Mabo Decision

While delegates acknowledge the importance of the landmark Mabo decision, they emphasised that it should not dominate the conference agenda. Native title recognition was celebrated, but the task ahead was to ensure that Indigenous Australians could build upon that foundation. Delegates envisioned Indigenous peoples becoming business partners with the corporate sector, rather than being positioned only as recipients of social programs. Part of this broader vision included ensuring that the Social Justice Package following Mabo struck a balance between social and economic measures. Delegates asserted that the future of Indigenous communities lay in business development rather than government control of their economic destiny.

Support Structures (1993–2025)

- 1993: Delegates wanted a national voice and a practical business register.
- 1995: Working groups and coordination advanced those ideas.
- Since 2009: Chambers alliances strengthen; Supply Nation built a national register.
- Gap now: No nationally mandated peak body with a strategy remit and stable funding.

National Business Voice

At the Alice Springs conference, delegates discussed the need for developing a representative body to give us a business voice, an Indigenous Chamber of Commerce. Some of the names presented were NICIC – National Indigenous Chamber of Industry & Commerce, INTAC – Indigenous National Trade Agreement Congress, and NIBEC – National Indigenous Business Economic Council. Currently we do not have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business voice. There is strong support for a national body and delegates were clear that ATSIC cannot represent our business interests. In structuring a national representative body, delegates stated that it must ensure that it caters for our economic and business aspirations. National strength will come from the building of the state and regional associations. Unless there is support and commitment from Indigenous businesspeople, the concept will never succeed.

1. Need for a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business and Economic Strategy: To focus on change and identify how we can better utilise our human resources and assets. Unless we start to have a better understanding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander market, money flow, and economic bargaining power of our human and capital resources, they will never be utilised to their maximum potential.

2. The need for specialist Industry Management Support Services, e.g., the Stores Program, Tourism Management, Pastoral Management Services, Housing Industry, and others: The industry workshops of the conference identified that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses have similar problems, and solutions can be found when industry representatives cooperate.

3. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business Register – Black Pages:

   a. consultants and resource people
   b. individual business house
   c. funding bodies and their criteria for funding.

We need to get the Black Economy moving by doing business with one another.

1. Business and Economic Support Units: In some states they are working well, in others they are not. Our businesses need support. New businesses need assistance in the preparation of business plans. Support is needed when individuals start to consider going into business and support is needed in the early stages of setting up the business.
2. Utilisation of current Organisation Support Structures:
   a. Land Council Resources to give business support
   b. Legal Aid Services should have access to contract or commercial legal advisors in each state or some of the larger regions for commercial contracting difficulties.
3. Protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Assets is very important:
   a. Cultural Values: to ensure that these are not exploited
   b. Patents and Copyright: patent to protect Indigenous flora and fauna; copyright designs and information which are currently being exploited by national and international business interests
   c. Economic Assets: to utilise our capital assets more effectively. Remove restrictive legislation which prevents the capital asset being used as equity. Educate our own people about the economic value of the assets they control, e.g., housing companies and other organisations.

Financial Structures (1993–2025)

- 1993: Barriers to mainstream finance were universal concerns; joint ventures encouraged.
- 1995: Financing pathways were mapped and discussed.
- Since 1995–2001: ILSC/IBA instruments expanded; IPP demand helped firms to grow.
- Gap now: Early-stage risk capital, collateral options, and regional access remain limited.

Barriers to Finance

Delegates consistently raised the lack of access to mainstream banks and financial institutions. Indigenous business faced two key questions: Where can we seek funds? and How should we present our cases? At the time, there was almost no access to financial information, services, or support at either a national or international level.

Key Proposals

- Improve access to mainstream finance: Indigenous businesses must be able to engage with banks and financial institutions like any other business sector.
- Promote joint ventures: Delegates highlighted joint ventures as a pathway to capital and market entry. A local example cited was the partnership between Peter Kittle Toyota, the Central Australian Aboriginal Community, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commercial Development Corporation.
- Community controlled finance: The development of Indigenous-controlled banks and credit unions at regional, state, and national levels was strongly recommended.
- Break down barriers with banks: Existing mistrust and institutional barriers between Indigenous businesses and Australian banks need to be dismantled. Delegates noted that if this could not be achieved domestically, Indigenous business might be forced to seek international financial support.

Other Financial and Governance Concerns

- Database of bad consultants: Delegates called for a national database to identify and exclude consultants who had exploited Indigenous businesses and communities.
- The Black Economy: Participants stressed the potential of mobilising the “Black Economy” comprising Aboriginal Affairs budgets, at least 2% of other government department contracts, and Indigenous-to-Indigenous trade. Harnessing this spending power could create real control and benefits for Indigenous communities and businesses.
- Redefining financial benefits: Too often, financial progress was measured by the number of social programs delivered by the government. Delegates argued instead that true financial change required getting the Black Economy moving to generate wealth directly for Indigenous individuals, businesses, and communities.

NIBEC 1995, Brisbane

Building on the foundations of the 1993 conference, the second NIBEC was held in Brisbane in 1995 and introduced new strategies and support mechanisms to strengthen Indigenous enterprise. The event was organised as National Indigenous Business Week (NIBW) and featured multiple components:

- a special screening of the 1955 film *Jedda* (in colour) in partnership with the Brisbane International Film Festival
- the second NIBEC Conference
- the National Indigenous Trade Exhibition
- the Telstra Indigenous Business Awards night
- a Networking Breakfast

Hosted at the newly opened Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, the second major event at the venue, it attracted more than 637 delegates. The conference theme, Business Partners in Australia's Future, underscored the importance of building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous business leaders. NIBEC 1995 reaffirmed the aim of promoting long-term enterprise growth, enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to achieve self-management and self-determination through financial independence. The event was hosted by the Queensland Indigenous Business and Economic Corporation Limited (QIBEC), which had been incorporated in October 1994 specifically to organise NIBW.

See Appendix A for the NIBEC/QIBEC 1995 people contributions.

Workshops at NIBEC 95: The Innovation Workshop; Options for Corporate Pastoral Leaseholders; Joint Ventures; Identifying Fraud and Corruption in Business; Indigenous People in the Housing Industry; Funding Your Business and Finding a Suitable Legal Structure; Your First Steps to Business; How to Start a Business Enterprise Centre; Your Staff and Your Business, Retail; Credit Unions; International Networking; Marketing Your Business; Consultants and Economic Research; How to Deal with Your Bank Manager; Understanding Your Finances; Business Opportunities for Sydney Olympics 2000 and the Youth Forum (National Indigenous Business & Economic Conference, 1995).

The establishment of the QIBEC Board and Secretariat demonstrated a commitment to creating sustainable support structures for Indigenous businesses. The involvement of prominent Indigenous leaders and collaboration with non-Indigenous business experts underscored the importance of partnerships in driving economic growth.

Achievements and Challenges: 1993–2025

Over the past 30 years, significant progress has been made in areas both discussed and overlooked during the NIBEC conferences. While the Indigenous Estate was not addressed, notable achievements have included the establishment of representative bodies, increased access to financial resources, and the growth of Indigenous enterprises. However, challenges remain particularly in finding the right balance between social and economic funding, and in ensuring that government policies effectively support Indigenous economic aspirations.

Political Structures (Dispelling the Myths)

At the 1993 NIBEC the delegates stated that many of our people measure financial benefits by how many social programs the government has implemented that year. Real financial change is about getting the Black Economy moving in a direction that will benefit both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and individual business houses.

Balancing Social and Economic Funding

One of the persistent challenges highlighted during the NIBEC conferences and still relevant today is the balance between social and economic funding. The historical focus on social welfare programs has often overshadowed the need for economic development initiatives. As discussed in the NIBEC 1993 conference, there is a critical need to reorientate government policies and programs to support economic growth alongside social support (Williams 1993). Ensuring that funding structures do not perpetuate dependency but instead promote sustainable economic development remains a key issue.

The *Murru waaruu* process calls for a paradigm shift in First Nations economic policy. Governments must move away from a legacy of social policies directed at First Nations welfare and simple mainstream industry participation to a strategic commitment to policy underpinning sustainable First Nations wealth creation. First Nations peoples must be seen as capable and competent economic partners with unique knowledge and assets, not as passive recipients (Australian National University, 2024).

Policy and Institutional Support

The national Indigenous "Social Justice Package" refers to a series of measures proposed in Australia during the mid-1990s. The Keating Government's Social Justice Package was envisioned as a third part of its response to the Mabo (No. 2) decision. It aimed to address the broader social justice issues arising from the dispossession and historical treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. While the Native Title Act 1993 and Land Fund were implemented, the Social Justice Package itself was never fully realised. The full commitment from the federal government for the Social Justice Package outlined by the Keating Government was not taken up by the next Howard Government (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 1994).

Policymakers and Indigenous business leaders must work together to create an environment that supports sustainable economic development and self-determination. This includes advocating for policies that provide equitable access to resources and opportunities. Government programs should be designed with input from Indigenous communities to ensure they address real needs and aspirations. Institutional support is also crucial. Universities and research institutions can play a significant role by conducting research on Indigenous business issues, providing training and development programs, and facilitating knowledge exchange. The decolonisation of business education is a key component of this effort. Integrating Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into business curricula can help create a more inclusive and relevant educational environment (Leroy-Dyer et al., 2025; Motta & Allen, 2022; Woods et al., 2022).

Policy Support and Public Sector Education

There is an ongoing need for continuous education of public servants and policymakers about the unique economic needs of Indigenous communities. The integration of Indigenous perspectives into mainstream economic frameworks requires a nuanced understanding of cultural, social, and economic contexts. Training programs and policy reforms are essential to ensure that government initiatives are inclusive and supportive of Indigenous economic aspirations. As highlighted in recent scholarship, effective policy support can significantly impact the success of Indigenous businesses (Cutcher et al., 2020; Eva et al., 2024).

The *Murru waaruu* seminar series outcomes report also highlighted that government engagement with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) requires significant internal government capacity-building. For example, public servants require further education to meaningfully engage with UNDRIP. The findings of the Productivity Commission, such as those relating to cultural capacity, "institutional racism, cultural safety, and unconscious bias", are instructive and important to considering how government can effectively engage with UNDRIP as a tool to develop effective laws and policies (Australian National University, 2024).

Integration of Indigenous Knowledge in Business Education

The integration of Indigenous knowledge into business education is an ongoing challenge that ties into broader efforts to decolonise the curriculum. The holistic and relational nature of Aboriginal knowledges contrasts with the compartmentalised approach of western business pedagogies. Efforts to Indigenise the curriculum must go beyond tokenistic inclusion and address the structural changes needed to make business education more inclusive and reflective of Indigenous perspectives (Eva et al., 2024; Motta & Allen, 2022; Woods et al., 2022).

Support Structures

Develop a Representative Body to Give us a Business Voice

Currently we do not have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business voice. There is strong support for a national body and ATSIC cannot represent our business interests. Early to mid-2000s the following organisations have been developed such as the National Indigenous Business Chambers Alliance, Aboriginal Business Industry Chamber of South Australia, First Nations Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Goldfields Aboriginal Business Chamber, New South Wales Indigenous Chamber of Commerce, Noongar Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network, and the South Queensland Chamber of Commerce.

National Indigenous Business Chambers Alliance (2024): In October 2022, Indigenous business leaders from across the country met on Larrakia Country to establish the National Indigenous Business Chambers Alliance Working Group. The group is a collective of majority-owned Indigenous businesses that advocate for a First Nations-led, place-based approach to growing the Indigenous business sector. Membership of the Alliance is comprised of active state, territory and regional Indigenous Chambers of Commerce and Industry with First Nations leaders appointed to the Alliance Working Group from various organisations.

The National Indigenous Business Chamber Alliance is established but will require funding support to become a sustainable entity.

1. Need for a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business and Economic Strategy: To date, no national Indigenous business and economic organisation has been established with the recognised authority and mandate to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy. While various regional bodies, institutional agencies, industry associations, and advocacy groups have contributed valuable initiatives, their efforts have often been fragmented and limited in scope. The absence of a centrally resourced nationally endorsed body has meant there is no unified framework to coordinate policy, align funding priorities, and drive long-term strategic economic development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia. This gap has contributed to inconsistencies in government engagement, uneven access to resources, and missed opportunities for coordinated action within the Indigenous Estate.
2. The need for specialist Industry Management Support Services, e.g., the Stores Program, Tourism Management, Pastoral Management Services, Housing Industry, and others: The industry workshops of the conference identified that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses have similar problems, and solutions can be found when industry representatives cooperate.

   Future directions should focus on enhancing support structures that are tailored to the specific needs of Indigenous businesses. This includes the establishment of more specialised industry management support services, as discussed during the NIBEC conferences. Such services can provide targeted advice, mentorship, and training in key sectors such as tourism, construction, and cultural industries (Williams, 1993).

   An example of a successful Indigenous specialist industry support body is the Aboriginal Enterprises in Mining, Energy and Exploration Ltd. AEMEE is an incorporated not-for-profit company set up to grow Indigenous businesses in Australia and overseas in mining and allied industries.
3. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business Register – Black Pages: Over the years, several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business registers have been established to identify, promote, and connect Indigenous-owned enterprises with procurement opportunities. Notable among these is Supply Nation, which operates a national database of verified Indigenous businesses, and the various state and territory Indigenous Chambers of Commerce, each maintaining their own registers of certified members. These certification processes are designed to confirm Indigenous ownership and control, giving government agencies, corporate buyers, and other organisations confidence that they are engaging with genuine Indigenous suppliers. Together, these registers play a critical role in supporting the growth of the Indigenous business sector by improving visibility, facilitating market access, and linking businesses to programs such as the IPP and other supplier diversity initiatives.
4. Business and Economic Support Units: In some states they are working well, in others they are not. Our businesses need support. New businesses need assistance in the preparation of business plans. Support is needed when individuals start to consider going into business and support is needed in the early stages of setting up the business. This service (generic business planning and small business support) is currently offered through online workshops by Indigenous Business Australia (IBA), the large Australian banks and Commonwealth and state government agencies.
5. Sustainable Business Support Structures: The effectiveness of business support structures varies across regions, with some states showing better performance than others. The creation of specialist industry management support services, as discussed during NIBEC 1993, has been partially successful. However, there is still a need for more comprehensive and accessible support services that cater to the diverse needs of Indigenous businesses. Programs that offer mentorship, industry-specific advice, and start-up support are crucial for nurturing new and existing enterprises.

Strengthening Indigenous Business Frameworks

Strengthening Indigenous business frameworks will require ongoing collaboration, innovation, and advocacy. Collaboration between Indigenous business leaders, policymakers, and academic institutions is vital to create robust support systems. Research by Jones (2023) and by Eva et al. (2024) highlights the importance of Indigenous entrepreneurship as a means of achieving economic self-determination and reducing socio-economic disparities. Partnerships with non-Indigenous entities can also bring in diverse perspectives and resources, fostering a more inclusive business environment.

Innovation in business practices and support structures is necessary to address the unique challenges faced by Indigenous businesses. The integration of digital technologies, for example, can enhance market access and operational efficiency. Studies have shown that leveraging technology can significantly boost the productivity and competitiveness of Indigenous enterprises (Beetson et al., 2020).

1. Utilisation of current Organisation Support Structures:
    a. Land Council Resources to give business support
    b. Legal Aid Services should have access to contract or commercial legal advisors in each state or some of the larger regions for commercial contracting difficulties.

This action proved difficult to implement because many organisations delivering social, health, land council, educational, and legal services to the community operate under strict funding agreements. These contracts typically define the scope of services in narrow terms, leaving little or no provision for activities outside the approved remit. As a result, providing commercial contracting advice or business development support could be considered beyond the organisation's funding charter, potentially breaching funding conditions and jeopardising future financial support. This structural limitation has often restricted the ability of such organisations to play a direct role in fostering Indigenous economic participation, despite their close relationships with community members who might benefit from these services.

1. Protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Assets is very important:
    a. Cultural Values: to ensure that these are not exploited
    b. Patents and Copyright: patent to protect Indigenous flora and fauna; copyright designs and information which are currently being exploited by national and international business interests
    c. Economic Assets: to utilise our capital assets more effectively. Remove restrictive legislation which prevents the capital asset being used as equity. Educate our own people about the economic value of the assets they control, e.g., housing companies and other organisations.

Protection of Cultural and Economic Assets: The protection of cultural and economic assets, including intellectual property rights, remains a significant challenge. The exploitation of Indigenous knowledge, designs, and natural resources by national and international entities has been a longstanding issue (Janke & Sentina, 2018). The need for robust legal frameworks to protect Indigenous intellectual property was emphasised during the NIBEC conferences and continues to be critical today (National Indigenous Business & Economic Conference, 1993a, 1995).

The rights of Indigenous people are described in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Fundamentally, entrenched in the UNDRIP is the key principle of free, prior, and informed consent. In developing laws and policies that recognise and protect Indigenous knowledge, the fundamental point of reference is Article 31 of the UNDRIP which recognises Indigenous peoples' rights to: own, manage and control their Indigenous knowledge; be consulted about use of Indigenous knowledge; give or withhold consent around use of Indigenous knowledge (the free, prior, and informed consent right); and make self-determined decisions about Indigenous knowledge (Assembly UN General, 2007).

Financial Structures

Indigenous Estate in Australia

We consider the Indigenous Estate as the asset base through which the financial domain envisioned at NIBEC can be realised. Williams et al. (2025) argue that the Indigenous Estate is a "wicked complex problem" requiring strategies and application of Indigenous knowledges in business and community contexts. These insights are essential for ensuring long-term cultural, social, environmental, political, and economic sustainability of the Indigenous Estate, fostering a more sustainable, equitable, and prosperous future for all people living in Australia.

Growth of the Indigenous Estate of Australia: The Australian Indigenous Estate in 2014 was estimated at 20% of the land mass held under exclusive possession of native title or land rights and estimated to grow to 31% with the number of registered native title claims in progress. This does not include jointly managed National Parks and Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA), forming 40% of the Australian terrestrial conservation estate (Altman & Jackson, 2014). It encompasses assets held or anticipated to be held for the benefit of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, with a focus on the collective ownership, stewardship, and responsibility for the assets of the Indigenous Estate (Fry, 2016). The Indigenous Estate continues to grow across Australia, including the Torres Strait Islands, with land claim settlements, native title agreements, asset purchases, compensation, and rights settlements (Williams et al., 2025).

The *Murru waaruu* economic development outcomes report stated, "Over 50% (increasing to an expected 65% by 2030) of the Australian landmass is subject to some form of First Nations legal right or interest. These rights and interests are given effect through 25 separate Commonwealth and state and territory statutory instruments" (Australian National University, 2024).

Wealth Creation Across the Indigenous Estate

Here we draw on the Indigenous Business Network (IBN) wealth creation model to enrich our definition. This model is a component of the Gongan Business Model which we discuss further below (Williams, 2023). This model responds to the tangible and intangible assets of the Indigenous Estate, offering a comprehensive definition of the Indigenous Estate that includes the growing social enterprises and Indigenous small businesses sector, and the various initiatives that build the capacity of this sector. The Indigenous Estate in this model is defined by the way in which it is used to develop wealth for Indigenous peoples in the contemporary Australian context. It includes:

Individual and Family Wealth: This includes individual and family investments, and savings. Business structures such as family trusts, sole traders, family-owned social enterprise, individual and family small businesses and companies limited by guarantee.

Community Wealth: This includes structures for community-owned resources, including land assets to enhance cultural, social, environmental, and economic wellbeing, community enterprises, company limited by guarantee, community trusts, social enterprises, and investments.

Corporate Wealth: This includes Indigenous for-profit businesses, Pty Ltd businesses, joint ventures with non-Indigenous partners, businesses that have a percentage of Indigenous ownership (but do not qualify as an Indigenous business), and other for-profit entities that are beneficial to Indigenous individuals, families, and community.

Institutional Wealth: This pertains to federal, state, and territory statutory bodies and funds established to act in the interest of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' businesses, such as IBA, ILSC, Aboriginal Hostels Ltd (AHL), Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), and various state and territory Land Councils. These assets and corporate structures are held under various legislative instruments and can be redirected to other government priority and policy endeavours.

Cultural and Spiritual Wealth: This dimension necessitates a holistic definition, encompassing cultural heritage sites, spiritual connections to land and family, and the intangible assets of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights. These intangible assets can contribute to the value of the social enterprise, for-profit business, or trust structure.

The IBN model is a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to defining the plethora of ways that Country, in the form of the Indigenous Estate, can provide for Indigenous peoples' wealth within the current context of the Australian Estate (Williams et al., 2025).

Social enterprise (as mechanism): The Indigenous Social Enterprise sector will reflect a wider social enterprise impact model approach due to the cultural, social, environmental, and economic aspects of the land holdings of the Indigenous Estate.

Increased Access to Financial Resources: Efforts to improve financial inclusion have led to increased access to resources for Indigenous entrepreneurs. Initiatives such as IBA have provided loans, grants, and business support services, helping to bridge the financial gap that has historically hindered Indigenous enterprise development. The IBA's tailored financial products have limited impact to service the Indigenous economy of Australia.

Delegates emphasised the urgent need to address systemic barriers to finance and outlined several key proposals:

- Mainstream Access: Indigenous businesses require full access to financial information, services, and support at the national level. Without this, many remain excluded from mainstream economic participation.
- Joint Ventures: Partnerships between Indigenous communities and established businesses were seen as a practical pathway to capital, skills, and market opportunities. One example cited was the joint venture between Peter Kittle Toyota, the Central Australian Aboriginal community, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commercial Development Corporation.
- Community-Controlled Finance: Delegates called for the establishment of Indigenous-controlled banks and credit unions at regional, state, and national levels. These institutions could provide culturally aligned financial services and reinvest directly into communities.
- Breaking Down Barriers: Structural barriers between Indigenous businesses and mainstream financial institutions must be dismantled. Delegates warned that if domestic banks remain inaccessible, Indigenous businesses may be forced to look internationally for financial support.

Improving Access to Financial Resources

The *Murru waaruu* outcomes report stated that the paradigm shift envisaged by the seminar series proposals is intended to change the current transactional relationship that First Nations peoples have with governments and

industry to one of genuine partnership involving an equity stake in economic projects. This vision underpinned the seminar series with an understanding that developing and implementing an economic self-determination policy is a long-term approach and is complementary to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The question of capacity was ever-present throughout the seminar series and although not specifically addressed on its own in this report, must underpin any framework that seeks to improve economic development opportunities for First Nations peoples (Australian National University, 2024).

Improving access to financial resources remains a critical priority. Indigenous businesses often face significant barriers in securing funding from mainstream financial institutions due to perceived risks and a lack of collateral (Evans & Polidano, 2022). Initiatives such as IBA, ILSC, Social Ventures Australia (SVA), Traditional Credit Union (TCU), Many Rivers Microfinance Ltd (MRM), First Nations Capital (FNC), and the First Nations Foundation (FNF) have made strides in providing tailored financial products, but there is still room for improvement. Expanding the scope and reach of such initiatives can help bridge the financing gap. Moreover, exploring alternative financing models, such as community development financial institutions and impact investing, can provide additional avenues for funding. Research by Benjamin et al. (2024) underscores the potential of community-based financial models to support sustainable economic development in community.

Another issue raised was the creation of a database of consultants. Delegates proposed creating a national database to identify “bad consultants” who had exploited Indigenous communities and businesses. This would serve as a safeguard to prevent repeat exploitation and ensure accountability. Status: Despite strong support at the time, this recommendation has never been actioned.

Black Economy

If we calculated how much is being spent in the Black Economy each year, which is made up of the Aboriginal Affairs budget, the 2% of other government department contracts that should be directed towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business, and the income generated by doing business with one another, imagine the control and benefits the Black Economy can give us.

Post-1995, the growth of national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assets and business activities has been driven by several key factors, including native title settlements, land purchases by the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC), acquisitions by State Land Councils, business development activities supported by IBA, and the overall expansion of the Indigenous business sector.

Establishment of Representative Bodies: The period following the NIBEC conferences saw the establishment of several representative bodies aimed at advocating for Indigenous business interests. Organisations such as Supply Nation, formed in 2009, have been instrumental in connecting Indigenous businesses with procurement opportunities in the corporate and government sectors. Supply Nation’s certification of Indigenous businesses has helped enhance visibility and credibility, fostering economic partnerships that were envisioned during the NIBEC era.

Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP): The IPP is the primary mechanism to drive Indigenous participation within the Commonwealth Procurement Framework. Since it was introduced in 2015, the policy has generated over $9 billion in contracts for Indigenous businesses (National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2020)

Growth of Indigenous Enterprises: The growth of Indigenous enterprises over the past three decades is a testament to the resilience and innovation within Indigenous communities. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the number of Indigenous-owned businesses has steadily increased (ABS, 2021), with sectors such as construction, health, and cultural services seeing significant representation. This growth aligns with the goals set out during the NIBEC conferences to foster entrepreneurial spirit and economic self-sufficiency. The best available evidence suggests that the number of registered Indigenous businesses and corporations grew at around 4% per year between 2006 and 2018 (Evans et al.,2021).

Established in 2009, Supply Nation empowers Indigenous-owned businesses by promoting supplier diversity and facilitating procurement from verified Indigenous suppliers, driving social impact and economic inclusion. Since 2009, Supply Nation has facilitated more than $20 billion of procurement spend from corporate, government and non-profit members with verified Indigenous businesses. In 2023–24 alone that figure was $4.6 billion (Supply Nation, 2025). Indigenous businesses also have significant reach into Indigenous communities. An estimated 16% of the Indigenous population is directly connected to the Indigenous business sector; this includes 29,200 Indigenous business owners, more than 61,300 people living in the households of these business owners, and more than 65,700 Indigenous employees working at these Indigenous businesses (Supply Nation, 2025).

Challenges

Indigenous Business Definition: To qualify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander business in Australia an individual must complete a form or provide a letter of "Proof" or "Confirmation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Heritage". Government agencies, Aboriginal organisations, universities, and schools often supply their guidelines for confirmation of Aboriginality requesting three "working criteria" points to be addressed (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020):

- being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- identifying as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person
- being accepted as such by the community in which you live or formerly lived.

The confirmation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Heritage documentation is essential for accessing Indigenous government support, employment programs, education programs, Indigenous business loans, membership to Supply Nation, membership to Indigenous Chamber of Commerce organisations, and the like.

The second stage to qualify as an Indigenous-owned business is the percentage of business ownership. Foley (2012) has been researching the areas of Indigenous business definition and Indigenous entrepreneurship for many years and has found the definitions to qualify as an Indigenous business can range from 51% to 25% ownership, depending on the government policy, membership requirements for Supply Nation or Indigenous Chamber organisations, or tender contractual guidelines. Many of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses in Australia are certified members of Supply Nation (Supply Nation, 2019) and/ or certified members of the network of Indigenous Chamber of Commerce organisations across Australia.

Black Cladding: This is the practice of a non-Indigenous business entity or individual taking unfair advantage of an Indigenous business entity or individual for the purpose of gaining access to otherwise inaccessible Indigenous procurement policies or contracts. Unfair advantage involves practices and arrangements that result in the disadvantage or detriment to an Indigenous business, or that do not represent a genuine demonstrated level of equitable partnership and benefit (Supply Nation, 2019). Black clad businesses appear as if Indigenous people own, operate, and benefit from them, whereas, in reality, power and the resultant benefits of business ownership are vested in non-Indigenous owners (Denny-Smith et al., 2024).

Fostering an Entrepreneurial Culture

This paper considers two main definitions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entrepreneurship: the Indigenous entrepreneur and the Indigenous social entrepreneur, both of which play important roles across the Indigenous Estate. Indigenous entrepreneurship is shaped by cultural values and is often motivated by community wellbeing and cultural preservation, rather than profit alone. Recognising these drivers is essential for policy and program design. As Peredo et al. (2024) argue, supporting these motivations leads to more sustainable and impactful practices. Evans & Polidano (2022) further note that First Nations entrepreneurship in Australia is relatively new and increasingly takes a "partnership approach" with leading Indigenous entrepreneurs and sector intermediaries.

Globally, Indigenous entrepreneurship has been described through various categories: sustainable, environmental, social, heritage, tribal, and others (Austin et al., 2012; Colbourne, 2017; Curry et al., 2016; Dana, 2007; Dana, 2015; De Bruin & Mataira, 2003; Dees, 2001; Evans & Williamson, 2017; Foley, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2008; Lindsay, 2005; Majid & Koe, 2012; Shirodkar et al., 2020; Tengeh et al., 2022). However, "tribal entrepreneur" is not widely used in the Australian context. Foley (2000) defines the Indigenous Australian entrepreneur as one who "alters traditional patterns of behaviour, by utilising their resources in the pursuit of self-determination and economic sustainability via their entry into self-employment, forcing social change in the pursuit of opportunity beyond the cultural norms of their initial economic resources" (p. 11).

Indigenous entrepreneurship manifests across for-profit and social forms, spanning individual, family, community, corporate, institutional, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of the Indigenous Estate (Williams, 2023). Both forms are critical to growing and protecting the asset base, with social enterprise and hybrid structures expected to play a central role in wealth creation and distribution. Fostering an entrepreneurial culture is essential for long-term growth. This requires not only financial and technical support but also embedding entrepreneurship in education, through curricula, specialised training, and community engagement, to equip the next generation with the skills and mindset to succeed.

Conclusion

NIBEC 1993–1995 crystallised a triad of challenges that remains a valid diagnostic for 2025. Since then, voice and visibility improved (e.g., chambers alliances), supplier-diversity infrastructure matured (Supply Nation, IPP), and limited capital pathways expanded (IBA/ILSC), yet mandate, coordination, and capability gaps persist. We show historical concordance rather than direct causality, tracing how conference agendas, working groups, and sector milestones align over time. The single largest barrier is the absence of a nationally mandated peak with a strategy remit. We therefore argue for a NIBEC 3 that is agenda-setting: a nationally endorsed forum to articulate, resource, and measure a First Nations-led business and economic strategy.

Reflecting on the history of NIBEC and the progress made over the past 30 years, it is evident that significant strides have been taken towards Indigenous economic self-determination. However, the journey is far from complete. The challenges faced by Indigenous businesses today are complex and multifaceted, requiring a coordinated and sustained effort to overcome. The vision set forth during the NIBEC conferences remains as relevant today as it was in 1993. By continuing to build on this foundation, embracing innovation, and fostering partnerships, the Indigenous business community can achieve greater economic independence and contribute to the broader Australian economy.

It is time for a National Indigenous Business & Economic Conference (NIBEC 3) to convene, allowing the multifaceted business voices to discuss our future with the government, corporate, and community sectors.

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About the authors

Mr Rod Williams is a Bundjalung man from New South Wales with extensive private sector experience across multiple industries. He is the Founding Director and Owner of Gongan Consultancy Pty Ltd, and the developer of the Gongan Business Model and Gulgan Jugan Methodology, which provide culturally grounded frameworks bridging Western and Indigenous knowledge systems for community, government, and industry. Rod has held senior roles with organisations including the NT Confederation of Industry and Commerce, National Mutual Funds Management, Normandy Mining, the National Indigenous Development Alliance, the Australian Red Cross, and the Marthakal Homelands Resource Centre. He is a Lecturer at Southern Cross University and a PhD candidate at The University of Queensland.

Dr Samantha Cooms (Noonuccal, Quandamooka) is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Queensland Business School. Her research centres Indigenous management, leadership, and relational approaches to care, with a particular focus on disability, employment, and culturally safe service design. She works across academic, community, and policy contexts, advancing Indigenous-led methodologies and strengths-based approaches to organisational practice and social change.

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Appendix A: Names, Roles, and Contributions to NIBEC 1993 and NIBEC/QIBEC 1995

Year	Name	Role/Organisation	Contribution/Source
1993	Charles Perkins	Arrernte Council of Central Australia	President; NIBEC Conference Chairman
1993	Ted Hampton	Arrernte Council of Central Australia	Vice-President; NIBEC Conference Manager
1993	Ross Hampton	Arrernte Council of Central Australia	Administrator (NIBEC Conference)
1993	Colin Cowell	Arrernte Council of Central Australia	Marketing (NIBEC Conference)
1993	Rod Williams	NIBEC Volunteer	Conference Facilitator: Speaker
1993	Graham Atkinson	NIBEC Volunteer	Conference Facilitator: Speaker
1993	Martin Perkins Allan French William Bray Adeliade Chong Jenny Hampton Adam Perkins Heather Brown Chris Christie Sharon Firebrace	NIBEC Coordinators	Training Exhibition/Trade Displays Security Exhibition Communities Delegate Registration Workshops Women's Events Technology Media Liaison
1993	Loris O'Donoghue (Chair)	Chairperson ATSIC	Keynote: Leadership presence
1993	Gatjil Djerrkurra	Chairperson: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commercial Development Corporation (CDC) National Businessman of the Year	Keynote: Leadership presence
1993	Alf Bamblett	ATSIC: Melbourne Commissioner	Keynote: Leadership presence
1993	Ron Moroney	ATSIC: Manager Economic Development	Keynote: Leadership presence
1993	Yvonne Goolagong Cawley	NIBEC Guest	Dinner Speaker
1993	Hon. Robert Tickner	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs	Speaker
1993	Hon. Warren Snowdon	Member for Northern Territory	Speaker
1993	Rosemary Wanganeen	Owner Sacred Site Within Healing Centre	Speaker
1993	Marjorie Thorpe	Administrator: Lake Tyres Aboriginal Trust	Speaker
1993	Lorraine Liddle	Chairperson: Imparja Television	Speaker
1993	Joesph Elu	Vice Chairman: Island Coordinating Council/Director Ibis Stores, Torres Strait	Speaker
1993	John & Mary Williams Pecili Bolakaro Daniel Moya Ndumiso Ntshinga	Lil'Wat Nation, Canada Vatukarasa Village, Fiji Pueblo Indian, USA African National Congress, South Africa	International Speakers
1993	Noel Bridge	NIBEC Workshop Facilitator	Speaker, Workshop Facilitator or Observers
1993	Heather Brown	NIBEC Workshop Facilitator	Speaker, Workshop Facilitator or Observers
1993	Aunty Kathy Mills	NIBEC Workshop Facilitator	Speaker, Workshop Facilitator or Observers
1993	Steve Brennan	NIBEC Workshop Facilitator	Speaker, Workshop Facilitator or Observers
1993	Darrin Ballangarry	NIBEC Workshop Facilitator	Speaker, Workshop Facilitator or Observers
1993	Joanne Schmider	NIBEC Workshop Facilitator	Speaker, Workshop Facilitator or Observers
1993	John Martin	NIBEC Workshop Facilitator	Speaker, Workshop Facilitator or Observers
1993	Pastor Bill Hollingsworth	NIBEC Workshop Facilitator	Speaker, Workshop Facilitator or Observers
1993	Robyn Rioli	NIBEC Workshop Facilitator	Speaker, Workshop Facilitator or Observers
1993	Kim Bridge	NIBEC Workshop Facilitator	Speaker, Workshop Facilitator or Observers
1993	Sharon Clark	Scribe/Charles Darwin University Student	Workshop notes; daily summaries
1993	Yvette Carolin	Scribe/Charles Darwin University Student	Workshop notes; daily summaries
1993	Noel Morich	Scribe/Charles Darwin University Student	Workshop notes; daily summaries
1993	National Indigenous Business Week	National Indigenous Business & Economic Council (NIBEC) working group that consisted of Indigenous business representatives from across Australia	Nominated at NIBEC 1993 in Alice Springs and state consultations
1993	Rod Williams Graham Atkinson	NIBEC National Coordinators	NIBEC Representatives
1993	Pat Williamson Lance Moran Lee Madden Margret Campbell Ray Morrison	New South Wales/ACT	NIBEC Representatives
1993	Rod Williams Victor Jose Allen Lee	Queensland	NIBEC Representatives
1993	Graham Atkinson Sharon Firebrace Paul Briggs Charles Wolf Duncan McGuinness	Victoria/Tasmania	NIBEC Representatives
1993	Doug Turner	South Australia	NIBEC Representatives

	Richard Young Rick Callaghan		
1993	Kim Bridge Noel Bridge Shirley McPherson Criag Somerville John Hanson	Western Australia	NIBEC Representatives
1993	Ted Hampton John Patterson Robyn Rioli Loyota Pearce	Northern Territory	NIBEC Representatives
1994	QIBEC	Queensland Indigenous Business and Economic Corporation Limited (QIBEC) formulated a bid to host the 2nd NIBEC event in Brisbane	The QIBEC Board decided to execute the idea of having a young Indigenous secretariat to organise the 2nd NIBEC that was supported by mentors and specialist event organiser mentors
1995	Charles Perkins	Deputy Chair/ATSIC	Worked with NIBEC working group, QIBEC, national coordination team; ATSIC major sponsor NIBEC 95
1995	Rod Williams Sandra (Georgiou) King Glen Miller Garth Terare	Chair/QIBEC Board Secretary/ QIBEC Board Director/QIBEC Board Director/QIBEC Board	Company performance and conference governance
1995	Carlyn Waters Gael Duff Rachael Weldon Ruth McNally Fiona Tyson Natasha Gordon Christine James	General Manager QIBEC Conference Coordinator Project Officer Awards Officer Trade Exhibition Assistant Training and Research Officer Receptionist	NIBEC Secretariat: Increased the number of causal Indigenous staff prior and during conference
1995	Debra Rose Terry Kappen David Saunders William Glenbar	QIBEC Mentors	QIBEC Mentors
1995	Tracy Watts Ashley & John Gordon Michael Rynne Alan Reese Brendan Greaney	Indigenous Management Australia Carillon Conference Management Darvall & Rynne Legal Rochester, White and Malone Accountants Postgraduate marketing student (Silvio's Pizza)	Specialist Mentors
1995	Tammy Pope	Telstra Australia	Major Sponsor at NIBEC 95; Telstra Indigenous Business Awards
1995	Hosts: Stan Grant and Michelle Tauhine Performances: Kamballa Aim 4 More Garth Terare	Telstra Indigenous Business Awards Night	Hosts and Performers at the Awards
1995	Sandra (Georgiou) King and Aaron Pedersen Shelley Monkland: Fashion Designer Delvene (Delaney) Cockatoo-Collins: Fashion Model	NIBEC Fashion Parade	Hosts
1995	Wayne Quilliam	Wayne Quilliam Photography	Conference Photographer
1995	Lyn Vickerman	Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland	Chamber supported and promoted the event across its Queensland network
1995	Neville Bonner Wenten Rubuntja	Jagera Elder Arrernte Council Elder	Conference handover from Alice Springs to Brisbane
1995	Te Taru White Ronald Scrimshaw Jaime Pinkham Dame Georgina Kirby Diana Kemege Hans Matthews	Te Puni Kokiri, Ministry of Māori Development, NZ Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce Dept Natural Resources, Nez Perce Tribe, USA Māori Women's Development Fund, NZ Development Specialist, Suquamish Tribe, USA President, Canadian Aboriginal Minerals Association	International Guests
1995	Hon. Robert Tickner Hon. Warren Snowdon Senator Cheryl Kernot Hon. Ernie Bridge Cr Jim Soorley	Minister Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for Employment, Education and Training Leader of the Democrats MLA Western Australia Lord Mayor, Brisbane City Council	Speakers

1995	Lois O'Donohue Professor Colin Bourke MBE Ian Spicer Peter Switzer David Ross Commissioner Mick Dodson Tracker Tilmouth Jackie Huggins Tiga Bayles Christine Donnelly Steve Comeagain Kerry Blackman Robin Bryant Darryl Kickett Eileen Torres Dallas Donnelly Murray Chapman Les Melzer Merv Shipp Getano Lui Jnr Barry Ingram Eddie Fry Kate Ross Andrew Mason John Hanson	Chairperson ATSIC University of South Australia Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Australian Small Business magazine Indigenous Land Corporation Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Com Central Land Council Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 4 AAA Aboriginal Dance Theatre Redfern SOCOG (Olympics 2000) Indigenous Marketing Just Too Deadly Consultant CreditCare Koorie Mail ATSIC FAIRA Merv Shipp Repairs (20 years in business) Torres Strait Regional Authority Sunseeker Homes Normandy Mining Group Australian Bureau of Statistics Elders Insurance Yawony Building Company	Speakers
1995	Terri Janke Adam Perkins	Youth Forum Co-Lead	Youth Forum leadership

Moments in Time: A Systematic Review of Indigenous Business Research 1999–2019

Skye Akbar (Waljen)[1], Alex Brown (Yuin)[2], Deirdre Tedmanson[1], Janine Williamson[1]

[1] Adelaide University, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia
[2] Australian National University, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, Australia

Abstract: Industry based studies show that Indigenous participation in business is increasing worldwide and academic research shows that Indigenous businesses successfully operate in both local and national markets, making significant economic and social contributions to their economies. However, Indigenous businesses are differentiated from mainstream businesses by many attributes, including close connection to community and inclusion of cultural heritage and values within business practices. These cultural values may at times conflict with mainstream perceptions of business. This paper adds to the discourse arguing that Indigenous business research is taking place in business schools, therefore there is a need for Indigenous business researchers within business schools to provide Indigenous business stakeholders with alternatives to western-based perspectives that currently dominate the field. This systematic review, undertaken in 2020, examines the field of Indigenous business research for the period 1999–2019 to identify what progress the field has made towards providing these alternatives, and what business schools need to do in the future to enable Indigenous business owners and business people worldwide to use research included within this review to make evidence-based arguments and decisions about their businesses. This review uses quality indicators perpetuated by business schools to guide which papers are included in the analysis. It identifies key trends in research to date and related gaps in the field, presents a conceptual framework for consideration by business schools of future directions in Indigenous business research, and proposes recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Indigenous business, Indigenous entrepreneurship, systematic review, Indigenous methodologies, etic-emic perspectives

Terminology Statement

Lower case in western is used intentionally to decentre colonial linguistic dominant discourse (Lenette, 2022).

Introduction

Indigenous participation in business is increasing worldwide (Supply Nation, 2018). Business schools teach that business ownership provides many opportunities for Indigenous people (Hindle & Moroz, 2010), including the opportunity "to take part in national and international level political economies while negotiating and asserting self-determination" (Bunten, 2011, p. 61). Indigenous business are differentiated from mainstream business by many attributes, including a close connection to community and the inclusion of cultural heritage and values within business practices (Dana, 2015), and, while these cultural values may at times conflict with mainstream theories of business, Indigenous business successfully operate in local and national markets (Bélanger Baur, 2019) and make significant economic and social contributions to their economies (Supply Nation, 2018). While this systematic review includes papers from only 1999 to 2019 our paper draws from discourse before and after this period to contextualise this study.

Although skipped over in the content of many business schools, many Indigenous groups have a long history of conducting business and have engaged in trade—including international trade—long before interactions with western peoples (Macknight, 1972). However, these Indigenous economies experienced great interruption during colonisation,

and Indigenous businesses, like Indigenous people, have been systematically eroded by colonial processes which is evident in many business school curricula. One outcome of this has been the devaluing of Indigenous knowledges, including business knowledge. Mainstream business research is often considered “theory-sensitive and practice-led” (Tranfield & Starkey, 1998, p. 349), with research outputs providing relevant knowledge which can be applied by educators, and also managers and policymakers, to assist in decision-making (Hindle, 2005; Toffel, 2016). To support students receiving a well-rounded education, and Indigenous business in their day-to-day interactions, there is therefore a need for researchers and educators to provide alternatives to the current dominant, western-based perspectives (Bruton et al., 2018; Hindle & Moroz, 2010). Given Indigenous business academics are an underrepresented population, this work must be taken on by all business education stakeholders.

There is an ongoing debate in the management literature regarding the desirability of developing either universal or Indigenous theories (Bruton et al., 2018; Jack et al., 2013), with perspectives grounded in alternative etic-emic orientations (Jack et al., 2013). The etic perspective, commonly associated with universal knowledge, is used to explain phenomena across nations and cultures (Tsui, 2004); however, research grounded in this approach can ignore nuances of culture (Sinkovics & Ghauri, 2008). Consequently, two alternatives for the development of Indigenous theory have been identified: working with existing theory and creating completely new theory based on alternative philosophies (Bruton et al., 2018).

Past studies (Dana, 2015) have utilised systematic reviews to bring together extant literature on Indigenous business research, with research questions focusing on business people (Croce, 2017; Hindle & Moroz, 2010; Morley, 2014), tourism (Carr et al., 2016; Weaver, 2010), training (Miller, 2005), mining (Horowitz et al., 2018), and conservation (Popova, 2014). However, no comprehensive review has to date mapped the development of the field of Indigenous business research, nor considered to what extent it has contributed to outcomes that have influenced business school content or supported Indigenous business development and ongoing management. This systematic review, therefore, evaluates research publications and their ability to support Indigenous business owners’ endeavours, building on earlier work (Croce, 2017; Hindle & Moroz, 2010) to highlight trends within Indigenous business discourse used by business schools; though the identification of significant gaps in the literature, it provides a theoretical contribution to management and Indigenous business fields; and through the development of a framework for the future direction of Indigenous business research, it contributes to the process of moving Indigenous business research from rhetoric to action (Carr et al., 2016; Hindle & Moroz, 2010). The approach taken turns the questions around to ask, “What are business researchers, schools and educators contributing?”. Finally, it provides recommendations for future research to ensure that it meets Indigenous business stakeholders’ needs.

Research Questions

We initially posed the following research questions:

1. What have the salient trends within Indigenous business research been, and what are their implications for Indigenous business?
2. How have methodologies developed to support the growth of discourse and research outputs?
3. What are the current trends in relation to research areas in Indigenous business research, and how do the research outputs contribute to the development and management of Indigenous business?
4. What may the future research trends for Indigenous business research be?

This paper provides a detailed summary of the approach applied, followed by a discussion of key findings aligned with the research questions. Examples of relevant publications are used to support the discussion. The findings are then used to develop both a framework for future Indigenous business research, which emphasises the importance of including Indigenous voices in the development of future research agendas and discourse, and recommendations for future research.

Methodology

Systematic literature reviews have been used to answer a multiplicity of research questions in both mainstream and Indigenous business research contexts (e.g., Bowen et al., 2010; Croce, 2017; Hindle & Moroz, 2010; Parris & Peachey, 2013). The systematic review for this study applied the phases identified by Kitchenham (2004). To ensure that our methods were rigorous and transparent (Victor, 2008), we developed a review protocol including the overarching research questions and five discrete stages (Kitchenham, 2004). We created a flow diagram (see Figure 3 in Appendix

1) to provide a structured guide for the researchers. Publications collated during the identification and screening stages were collated in Excel files recording article title, author/s, publication source, publication year, publication type, and empirical method.

Keyword Search

The search strategy combined keywords using Boolean operators, with search strings adapted based on database or journal syntax rules. To identify trends in Indigenous business research both in Australia and internationally, it was imperative that the keyword search include the diversity of Indigenous peoples in both contexts. Therefore, it began with "Aboriginal" OR "Indigenous" OR "Torres Strait Islanders" OR "First Nations" OR "Native Nations" OR "Native American" OR "Metis" OR "Inuit" OR "American Indian" OR "Native People" (Croce, 2017).

A range of terms was then added, including "entrepreneur" OR "commercial business" OR "Aboriginal business" OR "business" OR "community business" OR "business organisation" OR "business centre" OR "business governance" OR "small business" OR "SME" OR "micro-business" OR "medium business" OR "large business" OR "hybrid economy".

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were included in the protocol (Table 1). Publications were classified during the planning stage as: original research – papers containing data or a new analysis of existing data; reviews – critical summaries of work in the field; discussion papers – papers containing no original data, such as letters or conceptual or editorial papers; and case studies – studies of a phenomenon in a real-life context (Foley & O'Connor, 2013). As the research question necessitated the review of empirical studies, only publications classified as case studies or original publications were included. For the purposes of the review, original publications were then further classified as journal articles, conference papers, theses, reports, and book chapters. All Indigenous business models were included within the selection, i.e., land, community, cultural, social, and commercial business. As mainstream business research encompasses diverse subject areas, including marketing, human resource management, and organisational behaviour (Bell et al., 2018), there were no restrictions placed on the subject areas included in the review.

Table 1: Selecting Studies: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Selection criteria	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Language	English language	Not in English language
Scope	Connection to Indigenous business	Non-Indigenous business
Population	Indigenous peoples	Non-Indigenous peoples
Methodology	Based on empirical research	No data reported in the publication
Publication type	Original or case study research	Discussion, theoretical, conceptual
Date of research	1999–2019	Pre-1999
Geography	Australian; international	n/a
Accessibility of publications	Full access	Limited or no access

Identification and Screening Stage Results

Considering the multidisciplinary nature of Indigenous research (Dana & Anderson, 2007) and its underrepresentation in mainstream research (Hindle & Moroz, 2010), a range of sources, including some outside of conventional academic sources (e.g., Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) ranking), were included in the search (see Appendix 2). Four identification and screening phases were undertaken in an iterative process (Kitchenham, 2004), providing a structured approach to identifying publications. For all data sources, where keyword strings returned a large number of results, the first 100 publications were reviewed for relevance and practicality (Bainbridge et al., 2014). A summary is provided in Table 2.

Phase 1

We used Google Scholar due to its capacity to identify both scholarly and "grey literature" (Godin et al., 2015; Hall, 2011; Hindle & Moroz, 2010; Horowitz et al., 2018), and SCOPUS for its wide journal coverage (Hall, 2011). As the use of electronic databases is not sufficient (Kitchenham, 2004), specific journals and websites were also included. Thirty-eight A*, A and B journals were selected from the ABDC list based on their focus on management, tourism, or business research, aligning with business school ideals of quality publications. Keyword strings were adapted to meet journal syntax rules (Kitchenham, 2004), with search terms from alternative studies (Carr et al., 2016) applied. Consequently, for journals which produced limited returns using the keyword search identified above, the beginning of the keyword search was reduced to "Aboriginal" or "Indigenous", and all results were screened.

Phases 2–4

Thirteen industry and government website searches were completed. While some websites provided a "search" option, others required exploration of website pages. Following the protocol applied by Croce (2017), a manual review of publications was conducted in Phase 3, with six additional journals, two websites and one search engine identified as new sources. This approach proved effective, with *n* = 143 publications meeting the inclusion criteria identified; this represented 11% of records screened, being the highest proportion from all phases. In Phase 4, Google and Business Source Complete were used to locate any gaps in the identification of publications.

Table 2: Summary of the Publications Screened and Selected during Stage 1 of the Systematic Review

Phase	Records	Duplicates	Screened	Included	% Included from screened
1	16,154	11,740	4,414	272	6%
2	479		479	35	7%
3	1,315	26	1,289	143	11%
4	579		579	20	3%

A total of 18,527 records were found (see Figure 3 in Appendix 1). After excluding duplicate documents, and applying inclusion criteria, 434 publications remained for full text assessment in the eligibility stage.

Eligibility Stage

In this stage, full text records were reviewed using two weights of evidence (see Appendix 3): relevance of the study in relation to the research questions and quality of the study (Miller, 2005).

Following this review, 127 records were retained. Of these, 80% were journal articles and 13% were research reports, predominantly from the Centre for Indigenous Economic Policy Research (47%) and Australian government-funded research (47%), e.g., Cooperative Research Centres. The sample size was assessed against those of comparable methodological studies: Croce (2017): 25; Morley (2014): 30; Miller (2005): 67; Popova (2014): 101; Hindle and Moroz (2010): 102; Weaver (2010): 200; and Carr et al. (2016): 403. Compared to the average of 132 records, the sample for this study was considered appropriate. Nevertheless, despite applying Croce's (2017) recommendation to include a range of non-mainstream sources, the majority of excluded publications did not meet the study's criteria for quality, which required detailed methodological transparency. This was particularly evident in industry and government reports, which commonly cited data but provided limited or no information on methodology. Inclusion of methodology, particularly in Indigenous research contexts, is valuable for determining appropriateness of research and related findings. Criteria defining high-quality publications as practiced by business schools, which rely on international rankings, means that many papers by impactful Indigenous business scholars were not included.

Analysis

A coding schema was developed to support the analysis (see Appendix 4). Analysis for salient trends was conducted using Excel, while research outputs were analysed using NVivo (Version 12).

Results and Discussion

Salient trends and implications for Indigenous business

The first research question provided an opportunity to assess general trends within Indigenous business research over the past 20 years and consider their implications. Overall, there has been a growth in Indigenous business research publications, with 70% of the studies included in the systematic review published in the past 10 years (see Figure 1). However, as business research outputs are commonly connected to the context of relevant studies (Bell et al., 2018) and Indigenous business are not a homogenous phenomenon (Croce, 2017; Dana, 2015), an analysis of publications across continents, countries, and locations (urban, regional, and remote) was conducted, and this identified disparities in the geographic focus of studies. While Indigenous peoples reside in some 90 countries (United Nations, 2009), the studies were mainly focused on two continents: Oceania (over 50%) and North America (25%). In Oceania, the majority were focused on Australia (73%) and New Zealand (21%). In North America, they mainly focused on Indigenous peoples in Canada (59%) and the USA (25%).

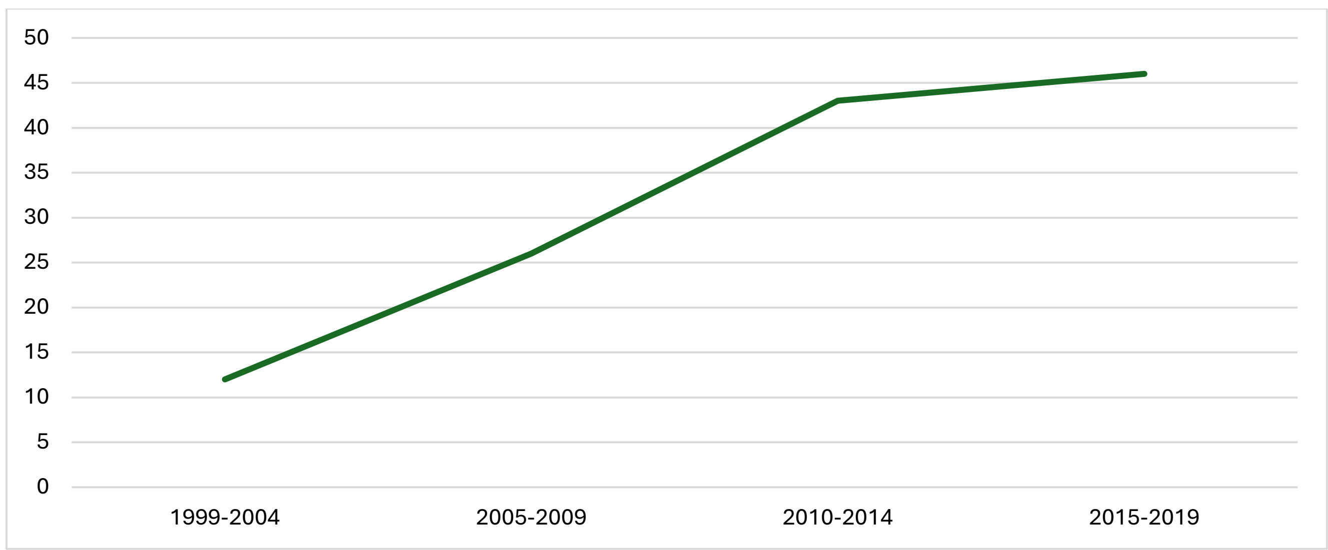

Figure 1: Trends in Indigenous Research Publications

This highlights the fact that Indigenous business research is predominantly focused on high-income countries, the impact of this phenomenon on business school content is yet to be investigated. Practical and policy recommendations from studies focusing on Oceania and North America may, therefore, not be transferable to many African, Asian, Latin American, and Caribbean countries, which have experienced limited economic growth (Drysdale, 2018) and include multiple Indigenous worldviews on business (Dana, 2015). While there has been a promising growth in studies focusing on Asia and South America, with research publications quadrupling in the past 10 years, the number of studies focused on Africa has decreased. And studies which compared two or more countries represented only 2% of research publications reviewed (e.g., Hindle & Lansdowne, 2005; Meis Mason, 2015). Finally, in the publications studied, a strong bias towards research in remote locations was evident, with 60% focused on remote locations, compared to 6% focused on regional and 10% focused on urban locations, while 15% included businesses from a combination of remote, regional, and/or urban areas. The importance of conducting research in regional and urban areas, where the majority of Indigenous people reside, was highlighted over 15 years ago (Foley, 2006; Hunter, 2004). Yet, during the past 10 years, the proportion of studies incorporating regional and urban locations has reduced from 37% to 27%.

Defining Indigenous Business

The diverse definitions applied to Indigenous business have been noted within the discourse. These definitions impact on calculations relating to the number of businesses defined as Indigenous (Hunter, 2013), the contribution of the Indigenous business sector to local and national economies (Supply Nation, 2018), and the ability of Indigenous business owners to access support (Foley, 2004). However, this review highlighted a further issue in relation to the range of definitions for Indigenous business: only 44% of the publications reviewed provided an explicit definition for this unit of analysis, while the remaining publications commonly combined a number of attributes. While earlier discussions have noted the different applications of tangible attributes such as levels of ownership (Foley, 2004; Hunter, 2013; Supply Nation, 2018) to define Indigenous business, this review identified an additional range of intangible attributes that were applied, including cultural heritage (Barr et al., 2018; Cahn, 2008; Foley, 1999, 2006, 2008; Hindle & Lansdowne, 2005), Indigenous values, and sense of community (Austin & Garnett, 2011; Boyd & Trosper, 2010; McInnis-Bowers et al., 2017). However, as it is an intangible attribute, the level of integration of Indigenous culture in a business cannot be specified, with variations in the depth of integration evident across business (Cahn, 2008). This reflects the reality of Indigenous business and the diversity of approaches across and within Indigenous groups (Dana, 2015).

The complexity of defining Indigenous business based on tangible and intangible aspects is therefore apparent, with the multiplicity of definitions impacting the ability to compare findings with earlier studies. This is further confounded when studies do not define the unit of analysis.

Trends in Research Methodology

Our second research question aimed to examine methodologies across the study's 20-year period. The prevailing use of qualitative studies in emerging research fields has been highlighted in previous systematic reviews (Carr et al., 2016;

Hindle & Moroz, 2010), but, while research in the context of Indigenous business needs to apply methodologies guided by Indigenous peoples and cultures (Carr et al., 2016; Hindle & Moroz, 2010; Munro et al., 2019), only limited evidence of the application of Indigenous methodologies was identified. Further, although some studies noted that research was conducted as a collaborative partnership, they did not make explicit reference to use of Indigenous methodologies (Banerjee & Tedmanson, 2010). Even in those publications that explicitly noted the application of Indigenous methodologies, only limited details were provided (Abascal, 2019; Amoamo, 2011; Haar et al., 2019). Evidence of more detailed application of Indigenous methodologies was provided in some publications (see Barr et al., 2018; Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2014), but, while these studies highlighted the positive aspects of applying Indigenous methodologies, including the ability to design studies that provided direct benefits to participants (Barr et al., 2018), they also noted issues such as conflicts with the timeframes imposed on researchers (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2014). A lack of positionality disclosure in papers makes it difficult to identify which scholars of Indigenous business research are themselves Indigenous, which may impact how Indigenous methodologies are considered, enacted, and reported.

Further analysis of the methodologies applied was then undertaken. Forty-one per cent of studies were qualitative, with this method also having the largest overall growth (244%), from 11 in 1999–2009 to 38 in 2010–2019. Case studies represented 37% of publications, with the application of this method constant over the 20-year period. However, a substantial growth in quantitative and mixed-methods approaches was evident in the period 2010–2019, which may indicate that the field is beginning to mature. There was a 57% increase in quantitative studies during this period compared to 1999–2009. Consistent with mainstream business research (Bell et al., 2018), mixed-methods approaches also increased, from zero to 14 cases, with the majority of mixed-methods approaches applying a quantitative-qualitative sequence.

Trends in Subject Areas and Research Outputs

As scholars have noted the need for research with holistic and actionable outcomes (Carr et al., 2016), we analysed the subject areas of research publications and the distribution and content of studies across industry sectors to understand trends in research outputs. Research publications were open-coded based on subject areas, and axial coding was conducted to examine the themes evident within subject areas and across industry sectors (see Appendix 4 for codes). Studies were coded based on whether they were focused on an individual entrepreneur on a new business start-up, which could be either an innovative start-up which disrupted existing markets or filled a current gap in the market, or innovation within an organisation (Hindle & Moroz, 2010).

Trends in Subject Areas

Although business research encompasses a broad range of subjects (Bell et al., 2018), our results show that current research is still focused on two key areas (see Table 3): 75% of publications explored topics connected to entrepreneurship and organisational design. Gaps in marketing knowledge are beginning to be addressed (Akbar & Sharp, 2020), with marketing perhaps becoming an emerging field of study in Indigenous business research as 14% of publications examined topics in this area. To a lesser extent, management studies have also seen some growth, with an increase in leadership studies over the past 10 years, and an increase in organisational behaviour and human resource studies during the past five years.

Table 3: Summary of Research Topics in Indigenous Business Research 1999–2019

Subject area	Number of publications	Specific topics investigated in the area
Organisational design	49	Governance; planning; partnerships; development opportunities; success factors; barriers to success; institutional structures; measuring performance; sustainability; social capital; knowledge
Entrepreneurship	46	Motivations to establish business, e.g., self-determination, resilience, economic; entrepreneurial traits; drivers and barriers to entry; culture; social capital; cultural capital; value systems; Indigenous knowledge; managing drivers and barriers to entry; enabling factors; business people trends
Marketing	18	Product demand; promotion; product design; visitor codes
Leadership	7	Indigenous values and leadership; Indigenous management styles and organisational success; Indigenous management and international business
Organisational behaviour	5	Reaffirming cultural identity within the workplace
Accounting	1	Impact of culture on accounting methods
Human resource management	1	Recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees

A further disparity in Indigenous business research was evident in the distribution of studies across industry sectors. The majority of publications (70%) focused on one industry sector only, with the largest proportion being focused on

the tourism sector (34%). The agriculture sector featured in 16% of publications, followed by the art sector in 8%. The remaining industry sectors were represented in between 1% and 3% of studies.

Subject areas researched were not evenly distributed across industry sectors (see Table 4), with the broadest range being within the tourism and art sectors. The majority of marketing studies focused on the tourism sector (78%) and the remainder on the art sector. Marketing research focused on the tourism sector predominately examined demand-side issues (e.g., Abascal, 2019; Ashwell, 2015; Holder & Ruhanen, 2019; Pettersson, 2002), although some have recently broadened their research scope to include the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems and marketing decisions (Espeso-Molinero et al., 2016; Kausar & Gunawan, 2018). Compared to organisational design and entrepreneurship research, marketing studies included the highest proportion of quantitative studies (33%), which may reflect the dominant paradigm in mainstream marketing discourse.

Although there were comparable numbers of organisational design and entrepreneurship studies, differences between the studies were evident. While there was a significant growth in the number of organisational design studies published in the past 10 years, with 75% of studies published between 2010–2019, entrepreneurship studies showed a more even distribution over the 20-year period of this study, with 54% published in the past 10 years. The development of this field of business study is evident. During the period 1999–2009, Indigenous business research focused on differentiating Indigenous entrepreneurship from mainstream business people by providing definitions (Foley, 1999; Hindle & Lansdowne, 2005). Studies examined the characteristics of successful Indigenous entrepreneurship (Foley, 2003; Frederick & Dzisi, 2008; Lituchy et al., 2006) and the role of culture in entrepreneurial success (Cahn, 2008; Foley, 2008; Lee-Ross & Mitchell, 2007). A final stream of research was focused on the drivers (Ndemo, 2005; Swinney, 2008) and barriers to establishing successful business, such as levels of education and access to finance (Cachon, 2000).

Table 4: Summary of Indigenous Business Research Areas and Industry Sectors

Industry sector	**Subject areas**							**Total**
	ENT	MAR	ACC	HR	ORGB	LEA	ORD	
Agriculture	8						11	19
Art	2	4		1		2	2	11
Health							1	1
Manufacturing	1					3		4
Mining							3	3
Tourism	8	14			5		16	43
Transport							1	1
Education/training							1	1
IT							1	1
Finance							1	1
Multiple stated	14		1			1	5	21
Multiple not stated	13					1	7	21
Total	46	18	1	1	5	7	49	127
Percentage	37	14	1	1	4	5	38	100

Note: ENT: Entrepreneurship; MAR: Marketing; ACC: Accounting; HR: Human resource management; ORGB: Organisational behaviour; LEA: Leadership; ORD: Organisational design, including governance, networks, capital; knowledge (incl. transfer)

During 2010–2019, the field of Indigenous business research began to mature, with the scope of studies broadening to include the incorporation of Indigenous knowledges into business development (Dana & Waata Jr, 2011; Fleming et al., 2015; Fordham et al., 2013; Mason et al., 2012). Studies have examined how alternative business models that embody collective worldviews (Gordon et al., 2017) may be used to overcome barriers to Indigenous business development. Case studies focusing on cooperatives (Islam & Berkes, 2017) and community business (Giovannini, 2016) have provided examples of how these models may overcome barriers and provide a range of economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental benefits including the development of social capital (Giovannini, 2016), which is essential for business development (Fernandes, 2013), and of opportunities to build bridges between Indigenous and western cultures (Murphy & Harwood, 2017). In contrast, however, one case study argued that a focus on achieving multiple goals may limit a social business' capacity to undertake business development strategies and profitability (Brueckner et al., 2016). The conflicting results within these case studies reflect differences across multiple variables, including geographic location, type of business, and industry sector.

Although entrepreneurship research has predominately applied case study (37%) or qualitative (33%) approaches, studies using mixed (11%) and quantitative (19%) methods began to emerge in the mid-2000s. Although comparable numbers of case study and qualitative methods were applied in these publications, a growth in qualitative studies was

evident, with twice as many publications reporting using this method during the period 2010–2019. Conversely, case study approaches declined by 30%.

Compared to entrepreneurship publications, over half of which focused on business in multiple sectors, organisational design studies maintained a strong focus on single industries. They also had the greatest distribution across industry sectors, although they were still primarily focused on the agriculture and tourism sectors. Half of organisational design studies examined organisational structures, such as institutional structures, planning, and governance (e.g., Austin & Garnett, 2011; Banerjee & Tedmanson, 2010; Boyd & Trosper, 2010; Brueckner et al., 2016), and organisational drivers and constraints (Fuller et al., 2005). However, others examined connections between aspects of culture and organisational design (Fernandes, 2013; Kawharu, 2018). Studies in the organisational design field were dominated by case study approaches (47%) and qualitative methods (45%). Quantitative or mixed-methods approaches were only used in 8% of publications.

Management publications were separated into leadership, organisational behaviour, and human resources management studies. Leadership studies is an emerging field of study in the Indigenous business context, and, while the relative numbers included in this review were small, (n = 7), 50% focused on the manufacturing sector. To date, these studies have focused on developing an understanding of the cultural dimensions of Indigenous management styles and their impact on management practices, employee wellness, and organisational success (Balbinot et al., 2012; Haar et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2008; Madichie et al., 2008). Some studies have also begun to examine the interactions between Indigenous and western business value systems (Balbinot et al., 2012; Henry, 2011), exploring how Indigenous leaders' reconciliation of these value systems contributes to organisational success (Henry, 2011). Similar to studies in Indigenous entrepreneurship, these studies identify differences between western and Indigenous management practices (Jackson et al., 2008), with Indigenous managers' focus extending beyond the internal success of the organisation to encompass benefits to the broader community through community support and increased employment opportunities (Hunter, 2015; Jackson et al., 2008).

Human resource management topics only appeared in one study that focused on the recruitment and retention of workers in an art centre (Seet et al., 2021). Given that Indigenous business employs a higher proportion of Indigenous peoples (Jackson et al., 2008; Supply Nation, 2018), further studies in new industry/business contexts would be valuable. Early organisational behaviour studies focused on the tourism sector, and particularly on cultural aspects of Indigenous peoples' engagement in tourism and methods of maintaining power in the host–guest relationship (Campo & Turbay, 2015), and on the strengthening of cultural identity through performance (Amoamo, 2011; Hunter, 2013).

Research Outputs

To examine the contribution of research outputs to the development and management of Indigenous business, we applied open coding under two themes: theoretical and practical outputs. As the importance of conducting Indigenous business research underpinned by Indigenous theory has been noted (Bruton et al., 2018), we conducted axial coding on the theoretical outputs to determine if the theory developed was western, Indigenous or a hybrid of both. A quarter of publications were coded western, with 43% coming from the marketing disciplines. As previously noted, marketing publications included a high proportion of quantitative studies, which, when combined with the lack of positionality disclosure as accepted practice in business research, suggests that studies in this area may be predominantly applying an etic perspective to Indigenous business discourse. While these studies appear to contribute findings with practical relevance (Toffel, 2016), the limited engagement (or stated engagement) of Indigenous researchers and business during both the research process and the development of recommendations reinforce dominant western-based perspectives that business schools must question.

In contrast to this approach, the majority of studies contributed to the development of Indigenous theory using hybrid approaches. However, a notable difference between publications in this category was noted, with two separate themes identified. In the first, Indigenous theory was developed by comparing research findings with western literature to identify similarities or differences (e.g., Foley, 2004). These findings provided policy recommendations in relation to key areas such as education and training. In the second, researchers explicitly aimed to develop Indigenous theory by combining western theory with Indigenous knowledges. These studies examined areas including developing competitive advantage (Barr et al., 2018), understanding tourist demand (Munro et al., 2019), creating product development frameworks (Espeso-Molinero et al., 2016), defining Indigenous value chains (Kawharu, 2018), and applying an Indigenist worldview (Rigney, 1999) to marketing Indigenous products to postcolonial populations (Akbar, 2016) and to Indigenous business models (Amoamo et al., 2018). In these studies, the application of collaborative approaches that incorporate and respect Indigenous knowledges developed Indigenous theory to be used in the development and operation of Indigenous business.

Thematic analysis of the practical implications of these findings identified that the majority of recommendations related to two key areas: policy and planning, and education and training. A broad range of policy recommendations was connected to creating an enabling environment (Hunt, 2018) for the establishment and ongoing sustainability of Indigenous business. These included recommendations on education and training, finance, business support, infrastructure, and procurement. Further, the importance of Indigenous participation in the development of policies connected to Indigenous business development was highlighted (Banerjee & Tedmanson, 2010; Melubo & Carr, 2019).

Education and training recommendations demonstrate the importance of tailoring programs to meet the social, cultural, and economic subtleties of Indigenous business (Collins et al., 2017; Yong, 2019). As educational levels are connected to entrepreneurial success (Foley, 2004), recommendations for educational and training programs have included identifying methods to overcome lower levels of education (Hunter, 2004), whether through formal education (Foley, 2004), within Indigenous business (Flamsteed & Golding, 2005), or through mentorship programs which provide personalised support (Fisher & Rola-Rubzen, 2011; Hunter, 2004). Specific training requirements are highlighted, including skills and knowledge connected to capacity building (Fuller & Cummings, 2003; Yong, 2019), and the self-efficacy and self-confidence building required for entrepreneurial success (McInnis-Bowers et al., 2017).

Based on these findings, a conceptual framework was developed to guide future research and discourse directions in Indigenous business research (see Figure 2). However, while significant opportunities exist for researchers and educators to extend and develop Indigenous business theory, in order to conduct ethical research, collaborative approaches will be required (Munro et al., 2019). Further, the role of business schools in engaging with quality Indigenous business discource must be considered. In particular, who defines the term "quality" in the context of Indigenous business research needs examination.

Indigenous researchers and Indigenous peoples driven development of relevant business

Geographical focus	Industry focus	Methodologies	Subject areas
Expansion of countries and continents Extend studies to regional and urban contexts Comparative studies between and within countries	Expansion of industries to reflect the diversity of Indigenous business Comparative studies between industry sectors Increased generalisability of studies to increase practical relevance	Development of Indigenous business research methods Development of studies which can be generalised	Expand topic areas in management and marketing fields Develop Indigenous theory

Define Indigenous business research

Development of best-practice guidelines for Indigenous business research

Figure 2: Future Research Directions within Indigenous Business Research: A Conceptual Framework

This framework proposes possible pathways forward to advance the interests of Indigenous business research and how it is used to inform business education in higher education. It is designed to be collaboratively developed and improved as part of future research conducted with Indigenous business stakeholders to ensure pursuit of fit-for-purpose Indigenous business discourse and impactful Indigenous business education, including in mainstream business content. This framework serves as a call to Indigenous business researchers to advocate for a collaborative, self-determined re-defining of Indigenous business research, and how it will be used, in future. Following further work

to define Indigenous business research, maybe the development of best-practice guidelines for Indigenous business research will reinforce the need for Indigenous business research stakeholders driven development of relevant business. Rethinking of what (and who) defines quality research in this space is vital as Indigenous scholars seek inclusion in the outlets their institutions term higher quality. Indigenous business researchers should not be stuck waiting for a special issue to gain entry to the journals they are required to publish in. Indigenous business is every day, not special days. A wholistic approach to these developments could lead to a systematic improvement of higher education business content to be more inclusive of Indigenous business for the benefit of all people.

Limitations

Several limitations in the study were identified, and strategies for overcoming these in future research have been developed.

This systematic review adopted quality indicators commonly used by business schools in higher education, being institutional rankings, as guidance on what papers could be included. This means that some pertinent publications have been overlooked. This does not mean that those works are not of great value, only that the narrow version of what is considered quality business research, as perpetuated by many business schools through publishing requirements, means that many credible works are systematically going under cited. For example, currently there is no Field of Research code relating to Indigenous business research in use by business research and education institutions. Future research may overcome these limitations with strategies such as contacting the authors of conference presentations to access the papers, contacting the authors of non-mainstream sources to request details of the methodology, and developing new approaches to selection criteria, such as assessment of impact factors.

A further limitation was that the use of non-Indigenous sources and English language publication as selection criteria in this study minimised the contribution of “Indigenous voices”. In addition, as the study was limited to papers written in English, it was outside of its scope to determine drivers or barriers to Indigenous business research in Africa and South America. Future research, perhaps to be undertaken by multilingual teams to support wider inclusion of languages, into these factors would help to increase the inclusion of global Indigenous voices in a study like this, including works that are not in English and those from non-colonised countries (Gorbuntsova et al., 2019), as well as those whose “Indigenous status” is not recognised by their governments (Berger, 2019). Such a study would also open opportunities for a more global defining of Indigenous business from a self-determined perspective, which would enhance clarity and comparability for future research. With an increase in the practice of including positionality in high-quality academic publications, it may even be possible for future research to investigate the differences in work undertaken by Indigenous, non-Indigenous, and diverse research teams.

Additionally, the study was limited in its capacity to assess the impact of practical recommendations on Indigenous business and business school educators. Indeed, it became apparent that, to assess the relevance of these findings, future research focusing on examining if, and how, the recommendations have been implemented and what the outcomes were will be required. Further, as emerging fields of research are providing recommendations in relation to areas such as ethical leadership (Haar et al., 2019), future research could examine how these knowledges are being incorporated into business school content, education, and training programs, and what the outcomes of those programs are. Such research is of paramount importance to ensure that studies conducted with Indigenous peoples have value to the people they claim to support.

And, finally, this systematic review was undertaken in 2020. Since 2020 the researchers have revised and resubmitted this paper to four journals considered high quality by business schools, with one journal taking 23 months and multiple resubmissions to ultimately reject the paper based on “fit”. This means that the data is older than ideal for a current publication but also demonstrates the challenges Indigenous business research faces in being published in journals considered high quality by business schools.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This systematic review attempts to flip the lens onto academia, and asks not only what has happened in the field of Indigenous business research and education to date, and what contribution this has made to business knowledge, but also what needs to happen in the future to enable Indigenous business stakeholders from all places to use research to make evidence-based arguments and decisions about their businesses and trust that graduates understand Indigenous business. Using the parameters considered high quality by business schools means that there is considerable scope for this work to be done in a different way in future.

To answer the questions of this study, we undertook a systematic review of empirical Indigenous business research published over a 20-year period in places considered high quality by business schools. This review identifies trends in subject areas and research outputs, and, in doing so, highlights significant gaps in the field. Although there has been growth in the amount of Indigenous business research being conducted during this period, failure to clearly define the unit of analysis (i.e., Indigenous business) and a lack of engagement with Indigenous business models have undermined its effectiveness. Regional and urban Indigenous businesses in developed countries, and Indigenous businesses in developing countries, are underrepresented in the research, and Indigenous voices are underrepresented in English-language research. There has been little research to date on the extent to which recommendations previously published in the literature have been applied by Indigenous business stakeholders, and what their impact has been. There has also been little research into how Indigenous business research is incorporated into business school content and how educators ensure meaningful discourse on this topic.

The following recommendations aim to address these gaps.

First, studies should give explicit definitions of their units of analysis (i.e., "Indigenous business"), and highlight similarities and differences when defining these in their discussions. This will increase the usefulness of their findings and enable comparisons.

Second, researchers need to explore and identify areas of best practice for the application of Indigenous methodologies within Indigenous business research, and standards for reporting this in research publications.

Third, as etic and emic approaches can be complementary, with the insider perspectives generated in emic studies being transformed into items for application in quantitative research (Sinkovics & Ghauri, 2008), mixed-methods research on generating Indigenous theory should consider applying this approach.

Fourth, further research is needed on developing a deeper understanding of Indigenous business models, including areas of best practice for teaching and implementation. As Indigenous business employs a higher proportion of Indigenous peoples (Jackson et al., 2008; Supply Nation, 2018), there is a particular need to extend or develop research on human resources, management practices, and management focus in the Indigenous leadership space, especially in new industry/business contexts. And as the industry structures within which Indigenous business operates influence competition and profitability (Porter, 2008), and businesses owned and operated by Indigenous peoples traverse multiple sectors (Supply Nation, 2018), research with a multiple-industry focus is also required.

Fifth, research methodologies such as quantitative assessment of processes in the area of organisational design studies need to be developed to enable the identification of best-practice measures which can be implemented by Indigenous business.

Sixth, in order to increase the utility of future research, research tracking the extent to which previous recommendations have been taken up, and what their impact has been, is needed.

Seventh, in order to negate the standardised approaches of neo-liberal government policies on Indigenous peoples and businesses (United Nations, 2009) in both developed and developing countries, and provide evidence that can usefully inform the decisions of Indigenous business people and policymakers, future researchers need to broaden the focus of their research in both geographic and community terms. Researchers also need to increase their engagement both with Indigenous business people in non-Anglophone and developing countries and with Indigenous business people in urban and regional areas of Anglophone and developed countries.

Indigenous realities vary between and within geographic locations (United Nations, 2009), and a business' location—urban, regional, or remote—impacts on the entrepreneurial models it uses. Studies that both consider (Akbar & Hallak, 2019; Croce, 2017) and compare these diverse contexts are therefore needed. And as the inclusion of data from more than one geographic location provides opportunities for comparative analysis and also enables recommendations that account for diversity within Indigenous business models, such studies will allow researchers to gain more insight into Indigenous business practices and offer more useful information to Indigenous business stakeholders in all contexts.

Finally, the movement we have identified away from etic and universal theory and towards etic-emic and mixed-methods research needs to be expanded on through the adoption of research methods that prioritise Indigenous voices and create benefits for the businesses and communities that participate in the research; the resulting research should be disseminated through quality business school content. The conceptual framework presented in Figure 2 of this paper provides a pathway for doing so.

These strategies will enable researchers and educators to not only address current gaps in the field, but also begin to identify, and answer, the questions that Indigenous business stakeholders want answered in order to help their businesses succeed.

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About the authors

Dr Skye Akbar, Enterprise Fellow at UniSA Business, University of South Australia, is a Waljen woman, Mum, Sister and Aunty. As an Aboriginal academic, business researcher and educator, she supports evidence-based decision-making that strengthens contextually and culturally informed solutions for Indigenous businesses. Her work focuses on enabling local responses to local challenges by centring Indigenous knowledges, community priorities and practical pathways for sustainable economic development.

Professor Alex Brown (B.Med, MPH, PhD) is Professor of Indigenous Genomics at the Kids Research Institute and The Australian National University. An internationally recognised Aboriginal clinician researcher from the Yuin Nation, with family connections to Nowra, the Illawarra and Wallaga Lake on the south coast of NSW, he focuses on understanding and overcoming health inequalities as experienced by Indigenous communities, with a primary focus on clinical, epidemiological and genomic research into diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Professor Deirdre Tedmanson, Dean of Work Integrated Learning at UniSA Business, University of South Australia, is a non-Indigenous academic with extensive experience working alongside Aboriginal colleagues and communities. Her research focuses on critical reflexivity about the dominating impacts of whiteness and is strongly committed to centring Aboriginal methodologies and voices in practice, teaching and scholarship.

Janine Williamson combines broad leadership experience in education, commercial, and non-profit organisations with applied research at the intersection of leisure studies, tourism management, and social sustainability. Her recent work examines how leisure and community events foster social inclusion, particularly regarding refugee settlement. Utilising stakeholder-engaged methodologies, she bridges the gap between academic theory and practice to inform policy. Additionally, Janine explores sustainable tourism practices within regional development and SMEs, alongside the scholarship of teaching and learning, specifically Work-Integrated Learning (WIL).

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Appendix 1

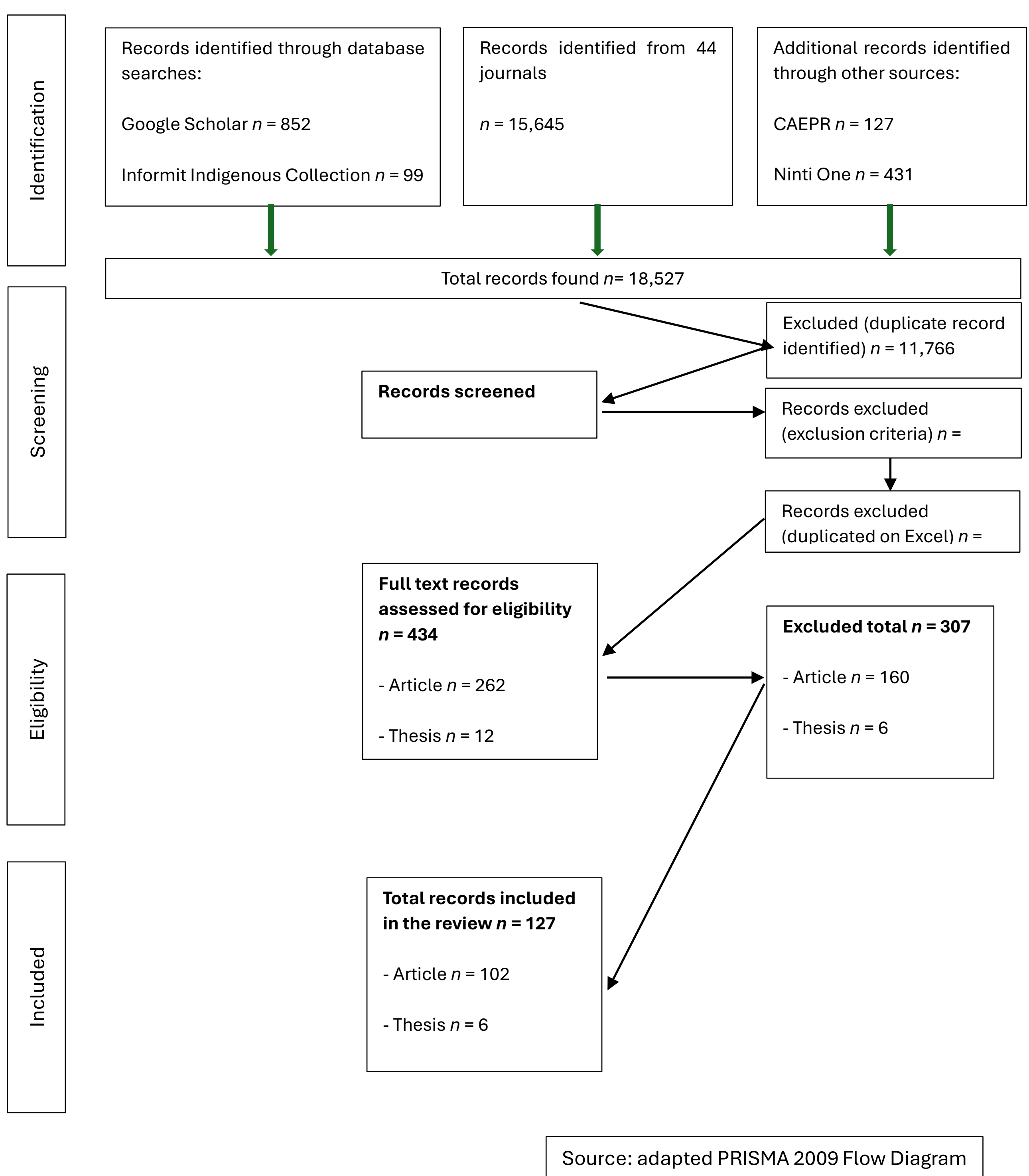

Figure 3: Structured Guide for Researchers

Appendix 2: Proposed data sources

Electronic online databases

EBSCO
SCOPUS

Web search engines

Google <https://www.google.com>
Google Scholar <https://scholar.google.com>

Websites

Australian Bureau of Statistics <https://www.abs.gov.au>
Business.gov.au <https://www.business.gov.au>
Indigenous Business Australia <https://www.iba.gov.au>
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet: Indigenous Affairs <https://www.pmc.gov.au/Indigenous-affairs>
Australian Chamber of Commerce <https://www.australianchamber.com.au>
Swinburne University, Library, Infogates, Small Business <http://www.swin.edu.au/lib/ infogate/smallbus.htm>
Small Business Association of Australia and New Zealand <https://www.seaanz.org>
Small Business Association <https://smallbusinessassociation.com.au>
Indigenous Business Council of Australia <https://www.bca.com.au/Indigenous>
Supply Nation <https://supplynation.org.au>
GEM Global Entrepreneurship Monitor international website <https://www.gemconsortium.org>

Small business related websites

Council of Small Business Organisations <https://www.cosboa.org>
Family Business Australia <https://www.familybusiness.org.au>

Journals A*, A and B

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Academy of Management Review
Annals of Tourism Research
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice
International Journal of Research in Marketing
Journal of Business Venturing
Journal of Management
Journal of Marketing
Journal of Sustainable Tourism
Journal of Travel Research
Organizational Research Methods
Research Policy
The Journal of Business (Chicago)
Tourism Management
Business and Society
Business Ethics Quarterly
California Management Review
Cornell Hospitality Quarterly
Current Issues in Tourism
Entrepreneurship & Regional Development
Family Business Review
Harvard Business Review
International Journal of Tourism Research
International Small Business Journal
Journal of Business Ethics
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research
Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management
Journal of Small Business Management

Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing
Journal of World Business
Asia Pacific Business Review (Asia-Pacific Journal of Management Research and Innovation)
Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research
Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society
Entrepreneurship Research Journal
International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management
Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism

Appendix 3: Guidelines for review of screened publications at the eligibility stage

Table 5: Assessment criteria for weight of evidence A (relevance)

Focus of study	Rating
Unit of analysis	High Medium Low
Relevancy of research output	High Medium Low
Facilitators or constraints on research	High Medium Low
Overall weight of evidence A (relevance)	**High Medium Low**

Source: adapted from Miller (2005)

The *quality of the study* will be assessed based on the rules of evidence criteria: sufficiency, validity, reliability, authenticity, and currency.

Table 6: Assessment criteria for weight of evidence B (quality)

In this research study	Rating
Is the evidence valid?	High Medium Low
Is the evidence reliable?	High Medium Low
Is the evidence authentic?	High Medium Low
Is the evidence sufficient?	High Medium Low
Overall weight of evidence B (quality)	**High Medium Low**

Weight of Evidence A

How would you rate the relevance of the study to the review questions?

Consider the following in answering the question above:

Q1: Population of study

1. Are the research questions or objectives related to Indigenous business research or Indigenous business?
2. Is the unit of analysis relevant to the study?

Q2: How relevant are the findings to Indigenous business?

Consider the following in answering the question above:

1. Do findings extend theoretical knowledge in the context of Indigenous business?
2. Do findings have practical implications for Indigenous business?
3. Are recommendations made for application by Indigenous business owners/managers?
4. Are recommendations made to government/agencies?
5. Are recommendations made for future research?

Q3: To what extent are facilitators or constraints on research noted?

1. Are ethical constraints noted?
2. Are researcher constraints noted?
3. Are accessibility constraints noted?
4. Are institutional constraints, e.g., university processes, noted?
5. Are other constraints noted?
6. Are facilitators to the research process noted?

Weight of Evidence B

How would you rate the quality of the study in terms of trust that can be put into its findings for the research question posed?

Q1: In this research study is the evidence valid?

Consider the following in answering the question above:

1. research aims and variables or concepts measured
2. design and whether methods measure what was intended to be measured (i.e., validity)
3. efforts made to address the validity of data collection tools/methods, e.g., pilot-testing tools
4. efforts made at data analysis stage to address validity, e.g., limiting analyses where numbers are insufficient

5. efforts made in the analysis to control for bias from confounding variables whether links between data, interpretation, and conclusions are valid justification of conclusion drawn.

Q2: In this research study is the evidence reliable?

Consider the following in answering the question above:

1. efforts to determine that data collection methods and tools will yield same result each time (i.e., are reliable)
2. efforts to ensure data analysis can be repeated and yields the same result each time
3. any assumptions/theoretical perspectives that shape the form or the output of the research noted
4. any alternative explanations for stated findings.

Q3: In this research study is the evidence authentic?

Consider the following in answering the question above:

1. Whose voice it is in the report?
2. For whom and for what purpose the knowledge was being sought?
3. What are the sources of evidence: direct or indirect?

Q4: In this research study is the evidence sufficient?

Consider the following in answering the question above:

1. sample sizes, etc.
2. the author’s conclusions
3. whether there are any other possible explanations for the findings
4. that the evidence presented is enough to support the findings and conclusions,

Source: adapted from Miller (2005)

Appendix 4: Coding Schema

Item code	Description
Free text box Author(s) Year Title	**Bibliographic details** Author(s) name Year of publication Publication title
Free text box Publisher	**Publication source** Journal; Agency; NGO
Single code JOU CON REP THES OTH	**Publication type** Peer-reviewed journal article Peer-reviewed conference paper Report Thesis submitted for Masters or PhD Other free text next column
Single code AUS CAN NZ USA ASIA AFR EUR MIXG	**Geographical context** Australia Canada New Zealand North America Asia Africa Europe Combination free text
Single code QUAL QUAN MM CS	**Research method** Qualitative Quantitative Mixed methods Case study
Single code IND GR/FI MULTI INST COMM	**Unit of analysis** Individual Groups or firms Multiple units Institutions Communities
Single CON TOU HEA TRAN ART RET AGR MAN EDU OTH	**Industry sector** Construction Tourism and hospitality Health and social care Transport Arts Retail Agriculture Manufacturing Education and training Other: note in free text
Single ENT MAR ACC HR ORGB CSR FIN LEA ORGD	**Main research area** Entrepreneurship Marketing Accounting Human resources Impacts human behaviour on organisations Corporate social responsibility Finance, including micro-finance Leadership, e.g., leadership styles, motivation, teams Organisational design, governance, networks, social capital; knowledge (incl. transfer)
Single (main theme) CSN CAP LAND ORG OTH	**Field of study** Culture and social norms Skills, experience, education Land and resource Organisational drivers and constraints, institutions, and governance Other: note in free text
 URB RUR REM MIXL	**Location** Urban study context Rural study context Remote study context Combination free text
Free text box	Definition of Indigenous entrepreneur/business
Single or combination of codes ET PI PR RFR MIXRF	**Relevancy of findings** Extend theory Practical implications Practical recommendations business / managers / government / agencies Recommendations future research Combination free text

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Indigenous Enterprise Success: In Our Peoples' Voices

Mark Jones (Karajarri/Yawuru)[1], Admiral Manganda (Karanga/Shona)[1], Peter Musinguzi (Mugyeri / Mukiga – Uganda)[1]

[1]Dilin Duwa Centre for Indigenous Business Leadership, The University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Abstract: This paper showcases the diverse worldviews of First Peoples, Māori, and Indigenous Ugandan enterprise success. This scope highlights both historical and contemporary challenges related to colonial legacies and Indigenous knowledge systems. It discusses how First Peoples in Australia and Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand have utilised their unique cultural assets and traditional values to drive economic self-determination in a globalised economy. Similarly, Uganda's Indigenous entrepreneurship is highlighted through the lens of social enterprise, grounded in the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which emphasises relational accountability and communal prosperity. Secondary qualitative data is provided from three separate scholars' higher degree research, illuminating Indigenous entrepreneurs' culturally anchored conceptions of success. Indigenous methodologies, such as yarning and kaupapa Māori, are employed in two of these studies to weave worldviews into a fuller understanding of enterprise success. The other study reclaims Ugandan studied social enterprises as Indigenous enterprises and applies Ubuntu philosophy to situate their success. The literature remains dominated by Global North framings and industrial titans; our work repositions success as a tapestry of community values, intergenerational thinking, spiritual continuity, and cultural resilience. Success, refracted through frameworks such as the 7Ps (First Peoples), kaupapa Māori philosophy, and Ubuntu, encompasses the relational, spiritual, cultural, and economic aspects. Despite the enduring violence of colonial structures and deficit discourses, Indigenous entrepreneurship represents a resurgence: an affirmation of being, belonging, and becoming. Our findings offer a relationally grounded alternative to prevailing economic narratives in this time of global instability, one that is egalitarian in nature and speaks to the connection of both the spiritual and physical worlds. We contribute to the decolonisation of enterprise success by centring Indigenous epistemologies and affirming that the reinvigoration of Indigenous knowledge systems is essential to building sustainable, culturally responsive, and equitable economic futures.

Keywords: Enterprise success, Māori, First Peoples, Indigenous Ugandans, values, Ubuntu, social enterprise

Introduction

Indigenous entrepreneurship (IE) is a broad discipline encompassing the dearth of entrepreneurial practices among the many Indigenous groups worldwide. One could argue that the term "Indigenous entrepreneurship" is highly reductionist, considering its connotations of explaining entrepreneurial practice among the global population of over 476 million people, making up over 5,000 distinct groups (United Nations, 2021), as one amalgamated phenomenon. However, IE presents differently across diverse Indigenous cultures. To that effect, there are various definitions of IE, which tend to be either broad or context specific. For example, Hindle and Lansdowne (2005, p. 132) define IE as "the creation, management, and development of new ventures for Indigenous people by Indigenous people for the benefit of Indigenous people", whereas Foley (2000, p. 11) is more specific in describing IE in Australia as First Peoples "alter[ing] traditional patterns of behaviour by utilising their resources in the pursuit of self-determination and economic sustainability via their entry into self-employment, forcing social change in the pursuit of opportunity beyond the cultural norms of their initial economic resources". Awatere et al. (2017, p. 81) define a localised version of IE, Māori

entrepreneurship, as "the process by which a Māori person (or people) operating within a Māori worldview generates value by identifying and exploiting new products, processes or markets for economic, social and cultural purposes of benefit to themselves, their whānau (family), hapū (clan), iwi (tribe) and the wider community". While there has not been a specific and contextualised definition of IE in Uganda, researchers (Rooks et al., 2009; Tukamushaba et al., 2011) have instead described it through broader frameworks that emphasise communal values, local knowledge, and the Ubuntu philosophy. Although significant progress has been made in the theoretical development and mainstreaming of IE, the notion of what constitutes Indigenous enterprise success remains inconclusive (Mrabure, 2019).

Performance indicators such as profit and growth have come to dominate how success is defined within mainstream economic thinking. Economist Milton Friedman famously stated that firms exist to maximise profits (Friedman, 1970), an ideology still prevalent in contemporary enterprise circles. This neoclassical view of the firm prioritises profits over people, a concept that is incongruent with the holistic outlook of Indigenous worldviews (Cheung, 2008; Jones, 2023; Kyejjusa & Romijn, 2024). This holistic orientation extends to economic activity, influencing how Indigenous entrepreneurs approach their enterprise endeavours (Dana, 2015; Lindsay, 2005). While progressive mainstream ideas of holistic considerations have emerged, such as the triple bottom-line theory (Scholtz & Louw, 2024) and stakeholder theory (Miles, 2017), Indigenous concepts of relational accountability between the physical and the spiritual are glaringly omitted. A First Peoples' worldview is holistic, exuding connectedness to people and the natural environment, including the physical and spiritual worlds.

Indigenous worldviews significantly influence why and how Indigenous Peoples around the globe engage in economic exchanges (Jones, 2023; Manganda, 2022). This paper draws from research previously conducted by the authors to conceptualise Indigenous business success. The authors identify as First Peoples and African and work in an Indigenous-led research centre situated within a western academic setting. The frame of reference utilised for this paper is the lived experience of First Peoples, Māori, and Indigenous Ugandan entrepreneurs who lead, own, manage, and control enterprises engaging in market exchanges in pursuit of economic self-determination.

The First Peoples author is Karajarri Yawuru, and they acknowledge the 650 sovereign nations whose unceded lands, sky, oceans, and waterways, known as Country, represent an enduring relationship of 65,000 years or more with place. Place also represents our identity and, as such, is deemed the most respectful way to acknowledge the Founders' dialogical contribution to this research connected to Terra Cognita Australis, since 1901 known as Australia. The First Peoples author preferences the term "Founders" acknowledging Indigenous enterprise literatures have used the desciptors enterprisers (Gladstone, 2021), entrepreneurs (Colbourne, 2021) and owners (Mika et al., 2019). The application of Founder represents First Peoples' voices as a central tenet in research that is for, with, and by Mob (Jones et al., 2025). The second author is an African-New Zealander of Zimbabwean Shona descent and is connected to Māori culture through marriage. He acknowledges the more than 70 Indigenous ethnic groups of Zimbabwe as vana vevhu (children of the land) and Māori as the traditional owners of the treasures of Aotearoa New Zealand. The third author is a Mugyeri clan member of the Bakiga People of Uganda. The Bakiga are part of the larger Bantu ethnic group in Africa. He acknowledges the 65 ethnic Ugandan tribes as recognised by the country's constitution (Uganda Government, 2005).

In this paper, we employ the term "Indigenous" with considerable apprehension. The term is problematic as it further contributes to the erasure of the diversity of sovereign nations. Homogeneous and reductive explanations disrupt social and family structures, dismantle language and cultural constructs, and disturb life and being, while diminishing entrepreneurial opportunities (Rose, 2021). However, the term is utilised in this composition overtly in line with standard convention to refer to the collective while discussing lived experiences with nuance and respect. We also utilise the term "First Peoples" in reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Australian context, acknowledging there is no universally accepted terminology that fully embraces the diversity of the hundreds of sovereign nations, custodians of Terra Cognita Australis for 65,000 years or more, of the land relatively recently, since 1901, known as Australia.

No academic or practitioner language has universally encompassed Indigenous worldviews of enterprise success; more often than not, it is the imposed language of the coloniser, hegemonically positioned by the Global North's powerful elites (Phipps, 2019). First Peoples, Māori, and the Bantu of Uganda have differing lived experiences of the colonial project, both historical and in modernity. The only semblance of homogeneity is the shared lived experience of the brutality of British colonisation and the ongoing colonial load that continues to invade our being. This paper draws on primary data from Founders, managers, and leaders of enterprises in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Uganda. We present what an Indigenous worldview of enterprise success entails during a time of global economic crisis as "a mechanism that enables the transformation of the speech of the oppressed into the language of revolution" (Henry & Foley, 2018, p. 217).

First Peoples: A People of Entrepreneurial Genius

With mabu liyan (the aspiration in the Yawuru language meaning "good wellbeing") influencing my thoughts, I commence this composition vastly different from whence I commenced my doctoral studies within a colonised settler space (Kidman, 2020) some time ago. Searching keywords, "First Peoples enterprise" and "success" returned a somewhat barren literary landscape. I literally drowned in the considerable outpouring of deficit discourse research, outputs "on and about us, not with us". Tears would steadily stream down my cheeks as I sat isolated within the Business School's confines of an institution grappling with its own demons as to how best "be the beacons of light in delivering social justice agendas across its many curriculums and courses" (UA, 2022, p. 48). Despite the small number of First Peoples within Australian universities (UA, 2020; UA, 2023), our significantly outnumbered academic warriors within the enterprise disciplines battle the enduring vestiges of colonisation and capitalism in addition to the colonial load (Locke et al., 2022). Elevating the voices of Nilangany Ngarrungunil, "owners of knowledge" in the Yawuru language, goes someway to addressing the considerable imposition of colonisation. Approaching 250 years of imperialism, such is but a blip on the radar for the longest continuous living cultures in the world who are re-emergent in pursuit of political, intellectual, and economic self-determination.

A non-linear narrative necessitates commencing with historical truths, despite the reticence of the coloniser (see Messenger, 2024), if we are to understand the current First Peoples economic landscape. In Terra Australis Incognita, a falsely claimed British discovery, First Peoples custodians engaged in commerce and ceremony successfully in community, as well as across national boundaries (Tindale, 1974), for 65,000 years, or longer (Broome, 2010; Jones & Rose, 2018). Commerce, influenced by environmental advantage, among the 650 or more First Peoples sovereignties (Collins et al., 2017; Maddison, 2019) included items such as pearl, ochre, wooden implements, greenstone, and smoked eels (Indigenous Australia, 2018; UNESCO, 2019). Overseas international trading partners included the Qing Dynasty from China (La Canna, 2014), the Macassans (Peters, 2017), and the Baijini from the Indies (Gammage, 2012). A complex and well-orchestrated First Peoples economy flourished, traversing the entirety of the continent through a network of trade routes (Mowaljarlai & Malnic, 1993; Pascoe, 2018) well before the arrival of British invaders (Bodle et al., 2018). After Britain's illegal invasion in 1788, government policies deliberately excluded First Peoples from their resource-rich lands and meaningful inclusion in the economy (Altman, 2004).

More recently, Collins et al. (2017) decry that minimal advances have been made by the three tiers of Australian government in rectifying First Peoples' socio-economic disadvantage as portrayed annually in the Closing the Gap (CTG) reporting (Commonwealth of Australia, 2024). Successive research studies of the componentry of social determinants—the elements contributing to the aspiration of what it means to lead a good life—indicates the gap between First Peoples and non-Indigenous Australians is a gap too far (Biddle et al., 2018), and one that shows no ablation. An abyss, cultivated through marginalisation, has seen the disintegration of trans-generational enterprise knowledge, enterprise networks, employment opportunities, inter-generational fiscal wealth accumulation, and accompanying role models—all considerable impediments contributing to the maintenance of the current state whereby we are positioned as less than (Foley, 2012; Rose, 2021; Shirodkar, 2021).

Before the 1967 Referendum, Australian Government policy was one of assimilation, integration (Altman et al., 2005), and annihilation. A changing of the political guard post-1970, saw the Whitlam government's Indigenous Affairs Policy propagate at times with both self-determination (Carey & Prince, 2015; Thomas et al., 2014) and self-management agendas (Altman & Sanders, 1991), albeit within colonial hegemony. The current policy climate has evolved into one purporting the importance of recognising First Peoples' voices (Referendum Council, 2017), focused on economic independence through developing sustainable, for-profit, Founder-led enterprises so as to contribute to economic self-determination.

The aspiration of economic self-determination for First Peoples through led, owned, managed, and controlled for-profit enterprises provides a crucial opportunity to create a positive cycle of social and economic empowerment. "Indigenous businesses create outsized benefits for Indigenous Australians" (Supply Nation & First Australian Capital, 2018, p. 2); given such, the increased standards of living realised by First Peoples enterprise Founders and their families (Collins et al., 2017) contributes to social mobility (Côté & Evans, 2025). Further, there is a significant multiplier effect achieved through generating increased First Peoples employment opportunities (Eva et al., 2024), while contributing to the economic development and leadership within communities (Evans et al., 2021).

Māori Entrepreneurship: Influenced by Kaupapa Māori

Māori entrepreneurship is a distinct form of IE in Aotearoa New Zealand (Mika et al., 2024). As far back as AD 950, Māori have had a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation (Petrie, 2013; Spiller et al., 2011). With the arrival of Europeans

in the early 19th century, Māori were actively involved in national trade and commerce (Frederick & Henry, 2004; Wanhalla, 2007). The Māori economy is worth an estimated $70 billion and is projected to reach $100 billion by 2030 (PricewaterhouseCoopers New Zealand, 2024). Māori are renowned worldwide for their entrepreneurial streak and are one of the most entrepreneurial Indigenous groups in the world (Frederick & Henry, 2004).

Māori entrepreneurship is adjusting to political, economic, and social changes. Contexts include Māori aspirations for tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) (Mika, 2018) and treaty settlements for Crown breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi of 1840 (Wheen & Hayward, 2012). The breaches were justified by colonial narratives casting Indigenous people as being disinclined to commerce and resource exploitation for material gain (Mika et al., 2022).

Treaty settlements provide the foundation for iwi to build upon for economic growth through enterprise and investment (Katschner, 2005) and successive New Zealand governments recognise the potential for Māori enterprises to transform the New Zealand economy. Since 1987, the country has experienced extensive economic reforms to restore the competitiveness of Māori enterprise (Zapalska & Brozik, 2017) through policies and programs to stimulate and sustain Māori economic development (Reihana et al., 2007).

Kaupapa Māori (Māori philosophy) has increasingly been accepted as the basis for Māori-defined approaches to development in research, education, health, social, and economic spheres (Coleman et al., 2005; McIntosh et al., 2021; Smith, 2000). In Māori entrepreneurship, cultural context and values influence economic decisions (Cain & Spoonley, 2013; Henry & Dana, 2019; Houkamau & Sibley, 2019). Māori values and Māori enterprise ownership are the defining characteristics of Māori enterprise and economic activity (Mika et al., 2019; Tapsell & Woods, 2008). Contemporary Māori entrepreneurial activity, therefore, consists of a mix of mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) and a western worldview (Warren et al., 2017). The embeddedness of economic rationality and cultural elements has been proven effective (Henry et al., 2018; Mika, 2014).

Ugandan Indigenous Entrepreneurship: The Bantu's Ubuntu Perspective in Social Entrepreneurship

Uganda was ranked as the most entrepreneurial country in the world, with 30% of adult Ugandans (aged 18–64) owning an enterprise (Balunywa et al., 2013). However, despite this high rate of entrepreneurship, many challenges persist. Success and failure are influenced by a combination of social, economic, political, and cultural factors (Mpeera Ntayi et al., 2013).

A recent United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) entrepreneurship policy review of Uganda notes gaps in entrepreneurship education through the formal educational system (UNCTAD, 2023). The report indicates that "current training programmes [on entrepreneurship] have not been successful due to inadequacies of their curricula, which are considered too theoretical and not in touch with the realities of the entrepreneurial activities in Uganda" (UNCTAD, 2023, p. 6).These shortcomings reflect the lingering influence of colonial-era systems, as Uganda's entrepreneurship policies, like those of many other African countries, remain aligned with colonial frameworks, raising concerns about neo-colonialism and coloniality (Irene et al., 2025; Lange, 2004; Mwanika et al., 2021; Olaitan & Oloruntoba, 2023; Othieno, 2024; UNCTAD, 2023). Uganda gained independence from British colonial rule in 1962, after colonisation began in 1894. Unlike settler-colonial states such as Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, Uganda was governed as a British protectorate through indirect rule using existing traditional leadership, with the primary objective of economic exploitation (Lange, 2004; Mwanika et al., 2021). Though there is a desire for Uganda to distinguish itself from westernisation, this process remains "incredibly complex and problematic, causing a continued subjugation of dominance rather than a liberation from the colonial legacy" (Armitage, 2015, p. 1).

The current entrepreneurial ecosystem, including social entrepreneurial organisations, reflects colonial influences. It still heavily depends on foreign funding, which has shifted the priorities of Ugandan Entrepreneurial Support Organisations (ESOs) (UNCTAD, 2023). The social entrepreneurship sector, which is closely linked to the African philosophy of Ubuntu (Du Toit, 2021), is still emerging, and it lacks a guiding policy framework and a national social enterprise body (Musinguzi, Baker, et al., 2025; Tamale et al., 2020; Turyakira et al., 2021), as well as a focus on Indigenous worldviews (Musinguzi, Baker, et al., 2025; Tamale et al., 2020; Turyakira et al., 2021).

In Uganda, emerging research points to the need for an Indigenous-focus in entrepreneurship development (Kyejjusa & Romijn, 2024; Musinguzi, Mukembo, et al., 2025; Mutya & Ilankadhir, 2024). IE (including social entrepreneurial organisations) in Uganda continues to receive limited attention, with entrepreneurs facing significant challenges such as restricted access to capital, low market patronage, high competition, and minimal government support (Mutya & Ilankadhir, 2024; Tamale et al., 2020; Turyakira et al., 2021).

These issues underscore the broader problem: the persistent dominance of western and European frameworks that do not accommodate Indigenous African philosophies (Crawford et al., 2021; Kupangwa, 2024; Mangaliso et al., 2022). Western and European perspectives marginalise Indigenous African philosophies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018); Metz, 2018; Muchie et al.,2016; Nyoni, 2019), yet these are essential for Africa's socio-economic transformation.

Research Methodology

Jones (2023) enacted an Indigenous research approach utilising yarning, a cultural form of conversation underpinned by relationality, in elevating the perspectives of Founders, who are Nilangany Ngarrungunil, "owners of knowledge" in the Yawuru language. This qualitative study, thematically analysed, represents 24 First Peoples Founders of for-profit enterprises predominantly working off-Country in partnerships and small to medium enterprises in urban locations across Australia. The research was grounded in Indigenous standpoint theory, which is both a theory and a practice (Jones et al., 2024) in demonstrating for, with, and by Mob (Jones et al., 2025).

The Māori entrepreneurship study (Manganda et al., 2023) was part of a PhD thesis (Manganda, 2022) that applied a methodological weaving of kaupapa Māori, Indigenous standpoint theory, and western approaches. The data for the (Manganda et al., 2023) study was collected through semi-structured interviews with people from 10 Māori enterprises on the east coast of Aotearoa New Zealand. An inductive approach was then utilised to thematically analyse the data. Kaupapa Māori precepts were utilised in the research process to meet the requirements for culturally responsible research, for example, having Māori research supervisors and kaitakawaenga (facilitators) in engaging Māori entrepreneurs. A raranga (Māori weaving) metaphor was then used to integrate these diverse paradigms, producing a whāriki (woven mat) that represents the synthesis of Indigenous and western worldviews in enterprise research.

The Ugandan study (Musinguzi, Baker, et al., 2025) was a component of a PhD thesis (Musinguzi, 2022) that applied semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions for data collection. While the study was initially framed through a western lens, in this current paper, the third author re-centres the African Indigenous philosophy of Ubuntu (Mugumbate et al., 2025; Wamara et al., 2023) and reclaims the social entrepreneurial organisations studied as African Indigenous enterprises. Ubuntu is presented not as a theoretical adornment but as a lived philosophical anchor for the Ugandan conceptualisation of social enterprise success. In doing so, the study actively reclaims and elevates Indigenous Ugandan knowledge, challenging the dominance of colonial perspectives that have long underpinned academic and policy discourses in Africa (Ochonu, 2018). This is an initial step in the third author's process of "purposeful return to the past in order to reclaim, reinterpret, and reapply valuable cultural knowledge for the present" (Dumavor, 2025, p. ii), an inspiration from the Akan People's philosophical concept of Sankofa (Ahmed & Gyamerah, 2025; Dumavor, 2025; Slater, 2019).

Across the three distinct research studies, common philosophical threads emerged. Each situates Indigenous entrepreneurship within relational, collective, and spiritually grounded paradigms that contrast with western perspectives centred on individuality and profit maximisation. These convergences highlight the need for an integrative framework that articulates Indigenous enterprise as a multidimensional and relational construct.

We utilise a Triadic Relational Model (TRM) as an analytical framework for bringing together how Indigenous business success was conceptualised in the three studies. TRMs have been used in social science research to explain complex, multi-context phenomena by integrating interdependent cultural, social, and economic dimensions, rather than isolating them. For example, Moore (1995) employed a strategic triangle to examine value creation within public governance systems; Shove et al. (2012) used a triadic social practice model to interpret how social change occurs through the integration of materials, competences, and meaning.

The Triadic Relational Model of Indigenous Enterprise Success offers a meta-framework for comparing and dialoguing about Indigenous entrepreneurship across distinct epistemological foundations. It highlights the aspirations of success, emphasising the uniqueness of each community, shaped by their land.

We contend that Indigenous methodologies are not an afterthought. They are central to epistemic justice and critical for disrupting extractive research logics. We affirm that relational ethics, cultural protocols, and community-grounded knowledge must shape not only what we study, but how we study it, and why.

Indigenous Worldviews of Enterprise Success: Posited as New Knowledge

First Peoples Enterprise Success: The Aspiration of Mabu Liyan

First Peoples research on enterprise Founders has asked, Do entrepreneurs view, value, and measure success differently than their non-Indigenous counterparts? (Austin & Garnett, 2018; Collins et al., 2017; Manero et al., 2022; Nikolakis, 2008). Findings suggest that, in addition to enterprise survivability and being informed by the past, success is contingent on the unique community values of First Peoples, which comprise multiple non-market considerations. First Peoples' worldviews are influential predicators and contribute to the understanding of why and how Indigenous Peoples globally engage in economic exchanges (Jones, 2023; Manganda, 2022). A First Peoples' worldview is holistic, exuding connectedness to people, the natural environment, and spiritual worlds. Jones (2023), in elevating the voices of Founder aspirations of success, represented such thematically as a First Peoples' Worldview of Economy, the 7Ps, summarised in Table 1. The 7Ps are further expanded upon as considerations to a differentiated value system contributing to economic self-determination.

Table 1: First Peoples' Worldview of Economy: The 7 Ps (Jones, 2023)

The 7 Ps	Description
Purpose	First Peoples' lived experiences continue to be influenced by British colonial legacies underpinned by continuing racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Moved to the fringe, excluded from our resource-rich lands, designated as sub-human, subjugated to assimilation policies with genocidal intent, we were meant to die out. This re-emergent Founder generation spoke of impoverished upbringings and how they have benefited from the political activism of those who walked before them. A major motivation was demonstrating to the Australian populous that we are "more than".
Place	Place, Country, is our cultural inheritance. "Country is centrally about identity" (Dodson, 2008, p. 6). Founders expressed the importance of place and one's identity being emmeshed into the enterprises' "ways of doing" while also recognising cultural protocols.
People	Founders are committed to sharing opportunities with First Peoples as employees or within their supply chains, a multiplier effect positively contributing to self-determination in addressing the CTG indicators.
Partnerships	Founders networking with First Peoples and non-Indigenous enterprises through partnerships to expand First Peoples' economic opportunities is considered a growth imperative.
Prosperity	Profit, while important, is only one factor contributing to a far broader conceptualisation of prosperity which is influenced by cultural values.
Perpetuity	Founders focused on the prosperity of future generations. Demonstrated by a range of "giving back" practices demonstrated through financial endowments, mentoring, and sharing knowledges.
Power	Leading, owning, managing, and controlling a First Peoples for-profit enterprise facilitates the opportunity for Founders to self-determine individual and collective priorities in addressing the socio-politico-economic status of the day among immediate family and the elements comprising the enterprise ecosystem of First Peoples.

The 7 Ps are the values, customs, and practices that Founders enact within the enterprise ecosystem, creating, sustaining, and expanding the economic landscape of First Peoples, and contributing to economic self-determination and the continuance of the world's longest living cultures.

Māori Enterprise Success

Māori enterprise success goes beyond the profit motive and is related to the success factors that facilitate it. This relationship is not causal but synergistic—the exploitation of success factors enabling "objective" success and success measured against the economic activity's impact on the preceding success factors. For example, a Māori entrepreneur may utilise whakawhanaungatanga (build relationships) within Māori enterprise networks to gain strategic information. As they become more successful, they will have a net positive impact on the quality of the enterprise network, for example, through mentoring and resource sharing.

Due to the dynamism of culture, Māori's success factors comprise cultural heritage and values while adopting western enterprise concepts to be competitive in the market. This strategising is not new; Hargreaves (1959) posits that Māori adopted new agriculture methods to their benefit when the European settlers first came to New Zealand. Māori contributed greatly to the large agricultural export of the invaded lands. Hybridity is evident in contemporary Māori enterprises, with both cultural and commercial success factors helping guide firm decisions and stakeholder relationships, fostering adaptability, innovation, and skills development.

Applying kaupapa Māori philosophy to enterprise practice ensures cultural preservation and perpetuation, thereby paralleling cultural priorities with commercial objectives. Cultural artefacts, language, systems, and symbolism are leveraged to create competitive advantage, differentiation, and long-term resilience, for example, Māori media, which is instrumental in language revitalisation and nurturing of Māori journalists who may later influence mainstream media institutions (Daubs, 2021). In a study of 10 Māori entrepreneurs, Manganda et al. (2023) found that, in the balancing of cultural and commercial imperatives, tikanga (Māori practices and values) was a mediating factor for success (see Table 2).

Table 2: Examples of Tikanga that Mediate Māori Entrepreneurial Success

Tikanga	English equivalent
Whakawhanaungatanga	Establishing relationships
Taonga tuku iho	Treasures handed down (generational wealth)
Mahi tahi	Working together
Kotahitanga	Oneness / Unity to achieve common goals
Whakaute	Respect
Kaitiakitanga	Guardianship
Manaakitanga	Hospitality
Māhaki	Showing humility when sharing knowledge
Titiro, whakarongo, kōrero	Look, listen, then speak (seek understanding first)
Mana	Power, dignity, respect (Do not trample on the mana / dignity of a person)
Kia tūpato	Cautiousness (politically savvy, reflexive, culturally safe)

Māori enterprises create a distinctive synergy by incorporating cultural values such as tikanga into their business practices. This blend promotes resilience, innovation, and long-lasting success. Furthermore, the enterprises highlight that success encompasses not just financial results but also the enhancement and preservation of Māori culture, familial relationships, community wellbeing, and legacy.

Ugandan Enterprise Success: An Ubuntu Social Enterprise Perspective

As in education and social work (see Kaya, 2014; Mugumbate et al., 2025), western theories, concepts, and worldviews still dominate social entrepreneurship, especially in defining success (see Sharir & Lerner, 2006). While IE research is emerging in Africa (Adeola, 2023; April & Itenge, 2020), including Uganda (Kyejjusa & Romijn, 2024; Musinguzi, Mukembo, et al., 2025; Mutya & Ilankadhir, 2024), most studies continue to apply western frameworks to analyse Indigenous enterprises (Musinguzi et al., 2023; Musinguzi, Mukembo, et al., 2025).

Given Africa's postcolonial context, there is a growing need for Afrocentric understandings of social enterprise success (Mofokeng, 2023) rather than a purely western view (Musinguzi, Baker, et al., 2025). One such framework is Ubuntu, a philosophy found across Africa (see Mugumbate et al., 2025; Wamara et al., 2023), which promotes relationality, shared humanity, and interconnectedness. Ubuntu challenges dominant paradigms by offering culturally relevant, context-specific understandings. As Wamara et al. (2023, p. 1398) note, "The goal of Ubuntu is to bind people together and enhance connectedness between all peoples at all levels."

Incorporating Ubuntu in social entrepreneurship encourages the use of local knowledge alongside formal institutions to support inclusive market activity (Farhoud et al., 2023). This contributes to building decolonised, Ubuntu-Afrocentric Indigenous social enterprises, disrupting western dominance and advancing Indigenous knowledge production (Crawford et al., 2021).

Although the original study by Musinguzi, Baker, et al. (2025) employed a western analytical lens to examine Ugandan social enterprise success, this paper argues that Ubuntu offers a more legitimate framework for interpreting success as narrated by Indigenous communities. Seven Ubuntu concepts (see Table 3) offer a meaningful way to categorise the success factors identified in that study.

Table 3: Application of Ubuntu Philosophy Concepts to Social Enterprise Success (adapted from Musinguzi, Baker, et al., 2025)

Ubuntu concept	Equivalent social enterprise success
Compassion	frugal innovation, human capital
Survival	entrepreneurial orientation, strategic planning, frugal innovation, social enterprise marketing, technology, external financial support, government support
Group solidarity	leadership, community engagement, social salience
Respect	leadership, community engagement
Dignity	leadership, community engagement
Collectivism	leadership, community engagement
Stewardship and accountability	social impact measurement, triple bottom-line planning

The Ubuntu framing shifts the emphasis from the individualistic and profit-focused western and European models to a more holistic view grounded in community, dignity, and collective wellbeing, which are essential for sustainable success in the Ugandan context.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

To integrate the findings from the Jones (2023), the Manganda et al. (2023), and the Musinguzi, Baker, et al. (2025) studies, we use the TRM (see Table 4) to conceptualise Indigenous entrepreneurship as a dynamic equilibrium among people, place, and purpose, maintained through relational ethics, spirituality, and collective wellbeing.

Table 4: Triadic Relational Model of Indigenous Enterprise Success

Core dimension	Conceptual description	Analytical function	Illustration across the three contexts
People	Reflects the centrality of relationships, kinship, and collective wellbeing as the foundation of enterprise activity.	Highlights social connectedness and reciprocity as the ontological basis of Indigenous entrepreneurship.	**First Peoples:** Kinship networks and multiplier effects supporting self-determination. **Māori:** Whakawhanaungatanga (building relationships), mahi tahi (working together). **Ugandan:** Community solidarity, compassion, and dignity.
Place	Anchors identity, belonging, and purpose in land, Country, and environment, linking the physical and spiritual realms.	Positions enterprise as an extension of ecological and cultural responsibility.	**First Peoples:** Country as identity and source of wellbeing. **Māori:** Kaitiakitanga (guardianship) and whenua (land) as living ancestors. **Ugandan:** Stewardship and accountability to community and environment.
Purpose	Represents self-determination, spirituality, and intergenerational continuity as measures of success beyond profit.	Defines success through the regeneration of culture, autonomy, and sustainable futures.	**First Peoples:** Economic self-determination and empowerment of future generations (7Ps: Purpose, Power, Perpetuity). **Māori:** Tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) and taonga tuku iho (heritage transmission). **Ugandan:** Shared prosperity, stewardship, and collective survival.

The model recognises relationality as the ontological foundation linking community to the physical and metaphysical realms (Jones et al., 2024), self-determination as the political and economic expression of Indigenous agency (Manganda et al., 2023), and intergenerational continuity (Jones et al., 2024; Manganda et al., 2023; Musinguzi, Baker, et al., 2025) as the measure of enduring success. Our collective lived experiences, continuously impacted by the ongoing violence of British colonisation, still influence our peoples' economic trajectories. Whether in profit-driven or social enterprises, First Peoples, Māori, and Indigenous Ugandans embed values into their ways of knowing, being, and doing that have supported us since time immemorial.

Indigenous enterprise success is not reducible to conventional metrics. It is a contextually anchored, relationally rooted, and spiritually informed pursuit of intergenerational prosperity, community uplift, and cultural continuity. We assert that, within Indigenous entrepreneurship, success represents a living, dynamic interplay of cultural, spiritual, ecological, and economic imperatives.

In a period of global economic vulnerability, arguably triggered by capitalist extractivism, Indigenous knowledges present an alternative path forward. They offer worldviews that prioritise harmony, responsibility, and reciprocity, both in tangible and intangible realms. These perspectives are vital for imagining and building sustainable futures. Indigenous knowledge, still often called new knowledge in the western academy, contains the means to help humanity re-centre itself. By emphasising relationality, spirituality, and self-determination as key aspects of Indigenous enterprise success, the Triadic Relational Model of Indigenous Enterprise Success encourages further comparative research into how Indigenous worldviews can guide more sustainable and equitable enterprise systems. Everything is connected.

Limitations

The Founder samples do not speak for all First Peoples, Māori, and Ugandan Indigenous enterprisers. What has been shared is a rich and thick source of qualitative data as an alternative to the academy of the west's prevailing deficit discourse and extractive intent in preferencing research on and about, not for, with, and by.

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About the authors

Dr Mark Jones, is a sovereign Karajarri Yawuru man whose Country abounds the Indian Ocean, in, around and to the south of Rubibi, Broome, remote far North, Western Australia. Mark is the Senior Programmes Lecturer at Dilin Duwa, Centre for Indigenous Business Leadership, Faculty of Business and Economics at the University of Melbourne. He is the Program Director of the MURRA Indigenous Business Masterclass and Course Coordinator of the Masters in Indigenous Business Leadership. He has also completed Graduate Certificates in Indigenous Research, Indigenous Business Leadership, University Teaching and is an Associate Fellow (Indigenous Knowledges) of the Higher Education Academy.

Dr Admiral Manganda (PhD) is a Karanga man of the Shona people from Zimbabwe and is based at the Dilin Duwa Centre for Indigenous Business Leadership at the University of Melbourne. His research interests span Indigenous entrepreneurship, economic development, public policy, and International Political Economy. His research examines Indigenous entrepreneurship and the intersections between the private sector and public policy, with particular attention to Indigenous economic development in post-colonial contexts. Drawing on lived and research experience across Zimbabwe, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Australia, his work brings a comparative Indigenous perspective to questions of economic development and institutional change.

Dr Peter Musinguzi (PhD) is an Indigenous African scholar from Uganda. He identifies as a *Mugyeri* (clan) and a *Mukiga* (tribe) within the broader Bantu peoples of Africa. His scholarship advances management research on Indigenous entrepreneurship and economic self-determination. His research interests include Indigenous entrepreneurship and Indigenous economies, Indigenous participation in truth-telling, healing, and future-making. He is also interested in researching Indigenous business ecosystems, social entrepreneurship, and sustainability. His work is grounded in rigorous and engaged research. He aims to improve outcomes for poor and marginalised (Indigenous) communities. Through this contribution, he supports democratic capacity and community resilience.

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Beyond Compliance: Black Cladding, Indigenous Procurement, and the Realising of Economic Sovereignty

Gaala Watson (Gangalu/Birri Gubba)[1]

[1]The University of Queensland Business School, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Abstract: This paper examines Black cladding, the fraudulent or superficial representation of Indigenous ownership and control used to access economic opportunities intended for genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. Through a Relational Indigenist Framework that integrates Bryant's (2024) Indigenist Critical Policy Analysis with Aboriginal Terms of Reference, the paper analyses how procurement systems such as Australia's Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP) reproduce settler-colonial logics of control by privileging compliance and efficiency over Indigenous governance, cultural legitimacy, and self-determination. The analysis reveals that Black cladding is not an accumulation of individual acts of fraud but a structural outcome of policy designs that translate Indigeneity into administrative categories rather than a lived identity grounded in relation to community and Country. It explores how these structures enable economic and cultural harm, including the erosion of Indigenous business models grounded in relationality, reciprocity, kinship, and custodianship. Drawing on international comparisons and Indigenous policy scholarship, the paper demonstrates that embedding Indigenous authority, oversight, and definitional control within procurement policy strengthens legitimacy, integrity, and outcomes for all stakeholders. It concludes that procurement reform must move beyond symbolic inclusion toward Indigenous-led systems of governance aligned with Aboriginal Terms of Reference and the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), repositioning procurement as a mechanism of economic sovereignty and structural justice.

Keywords: Black cladding, Indigenous Procurement Policy, Aboriginal Terms of Reference, Indigenous governance, economic sovereignty

Introduction: Black Cladding and the Politics of Economic Participation

Black cladding refers to the fraudulent or superficial inclusion of Indigenous people or entities in business structures, often designed to exploit economic benefits intended for genuine Indigenous enterprises (Supply Nation, n.d.). In Australia, this practice has emerged as a serious threat to the integrity of Indigenous economic empowerment initiatives, particularly the Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP) (McGlade, 2025). Introduced in 2015 to address historical exclusion by mandating that a portion of government contracts be awarded to Indigenous businesses (NIAA, 2024a), the IPP has proven to be vulnerable to exploitation. Black cladding exploits systemic loopholes that enable non-Indigenous businesses to present as Indigenous-owned, typically through tokenistic appointments or strategic partnerships that do not involve genuine Indigenous control, benefit, or cultural accountability (Hinaki, 2021; McGlade, 2025; Supply Nation, 2020).

While procurement policies aim to support structural self-determination for Indigenous peoples, Black cladding represents a new frontier of economic dispossession. These practices not only divert resources away from Indigenous communities but actively displace legitimate Indigenous businesses from both public and private markets (Kinaway Chamber of Commerce, 2020). The harms are multifaceted, financial, cultural, and systemic, undermining trust in procurement systems and making it increasingly difficult for governments and consumers to distinguish between authentic and deceptive claims of Indigeneity. Parallel to Black cladding is a related but distinct phenomenon often described as

"Blackfishing" or "Blackface" business (Stevens, 2021; Trading Blak, 2022), which involves companies or individuals intentionally adopting the appearance or branding of an Indigenous entity without any actual Indigenous ownership, control, or leadership (Butler & Kellaway, 2024; Chalmers, 2021; Hinaki, 2021), enabling non-Indigenous entities to profit from Indigenous culture and identity while marginalising the voices and participation of actual Indigenous peoples. A prime example of a "Blackfish" business is Youpla (formerly Aboriginal Community Benefit Fund), a company that used Indigenous branding to sell predatory funeral insurance to Aboriginal families, highlighting the tangible harms caused by commercial misrepresentation (Butler & Kellaway, 2024; Florance & Wellauer, 2024). In this way, Blackfishing mirrors the dynamics of Black cladding: both emerge where Indigenous identity is detached from cultural foundations, allowing others to trade on culture while undermining Indigenous economic participation. In response, Indigenous communities, entrepreneurs, and consumers have increasingly called for accountability and structural reform to prevent the commodification of Indigenous identity in the absence of Indigenous agency and control (Hinaki, 2021; Singh, 2025; Trading Blak, 2022). Public scrutiny has exposed these tactics across various sectors, a reliance that reflects the persistent absence of effective, culturally grounded oversight mechanisms, where media exposure and community activism often serve as the only viable forms of accountability. Fraudulent exploitation of Indigenous identity in business is not exclusive to Australia; similar practices include "fronting" in South Africa, and "pass-through" and "pretendian" businesses across North America. These examples demonstrate how equity-driven policies can be undermined by fraudulent compliance, ultimately reproducing exclusion under the guise of inclusion. In each case, weak regulatory oversight and a lack of culturally appropriate verification mechanisms have enabled such practices to persist, rarely subject to scrutiny or consequence (Boultilier & Ridgen, 2024; Butler & Kellaway, 2024; Du Plessis, 2022; Indianz.com, 2019).

This analysis adopts a Relational Indigenist Framework[1] that integrates Bryant's (2024) Indigenist Critical Policy Analysis (ICPA) with Aboriginal Terms of Reference (Watson, 2025; Watson & Graham, 2016). ICPA provides a rights-based structure for evaluating whether public policy upholds Indigenous authority, participation, and accountability, while Aboriginal Terms of Reference articulate the cultural and philosophical foundations that define legitimate governance and practice in Aboriginal worldviews. Together, they establish a relational lens through which the IPP is examined, centred on obligation, care, and the interdependence between people, Country, and policy.

Viewed through this framework, the paper argues that Black cladding is not an accumulation of isolated acts of deception, but a systemic outcome of policy designs that prioritise procedural compliance over cultural integrity. The analysis interrogates how procurement frameworks translate Indigeneity into administrative categories, shaping who holds authority, how legitimacy is recognised, and how policy success is defined and measured, revealing that the persistence of Black cladding reflects broader institutional preferences for efficiency, ownership, and scale. The aim of this paper is not to reject procurement as a mechanism for Indigenous economic development but to reform it, centring Indigenous governance, community legitimacy, and cultural integrity as the basis for policy success.

Unless procurement and policy frameworks are paired with enforceable accountability mechanisms and Indigenous-led oversight, Black cladding will continue to erode the possibility of economic justice. In response, this paper asks, how can procurement verification systems be redesigned to eliminate Black cladding while fostering Indigenous economic development and preserving distinctive Indigenous business models? This paper offers a new interpretation of Black cladding as a structural expression of procurement systems that govern Indigeneity through compliance and control rather than cultural legitimacy. It demonstrates that the current policy enables participation without Indigenous control and inclusion without genuine community benefit, resulting in the displacement of genuine Indigenous enterprises and the erosion of culturally informed business practice. The analysis shows that meaningful reform requires shifting the locus of decision-making from bureaucratic oversight to Indigenous governance grounded in Aboriginal Terms of Reference.

Methodology and Positionality

The methodological approach to this paper is grounded in Indigenous research practices and ontological frameworks that inform both the structure of the inquiry and the positioning of the author. As an Aboriginal researcher, my analysis is shaped not by neutrality or detachment, but by a conscious commitment to Aboriginal Terms of Reference[2] (Watson, 2025; Watson & Graham, 2016). Aboriginal Terms of Reference do not function as a method in a conventional sense, but

[1] The term Relational Indigenist Framework is used here to describe the integration of Bryant's (2024) Indigenist Critical Policy Analysis with Aboriginal Terms of Reference (Graham, 2023; Watson, 2025; Watson & Graham, 2016). This paper does not propose a new theoretical model but applies these established frameworks in combination to guide analysis.

[2] Aboriginal Terms of Reference refer to the values, philosophies, and ways of being, knowing, and doing that are grounded in Aboriginal Law, Country, and kinship. The term was first developed by Dr Lilla Watson in the 1980s and has since been further theorised by Elders and scholars to describe a cultural framework that informs governance, ethics, and everyday life from an Aboriginal worldview (Graham, 2023; Watson, 2025; Watson & Graham, 2016).

rather as a methodological precursor, a deeply embedded cultural positioning that informs how I see, relate, and engage with knowledge production. The approach is further informed by Martin-Booran Mirraboopa (2003) Indigenist research framework, which emphasises the centrality of Indigenous ontologies (our ways of knowing, being, and doing[3]) as both valid and vital to academic research. This approach insists that Indigenous research must be grounded in relational ontologies, recognising interdependence with community, Country, and spirit as foundational. The analysis privileges Indigenous definitions of value, legitimacy, and success over those imposed by settler-colonial logics. Consistent with this approach, the literature review was guided by relevance and critical alignment with the research aims, drawing on academic publications, policy documents, community-authored works, and media investigations that reflect Indigenous realities and perspectives. Rather than relying on algorithmic search or institutional hierarchies of knowledge, sources were selected for their engagement with economic sovereignty[4], cultural harm, and policy distortion from Indigenous standpoints. Rather than treating the topic as an abstract or purely academic concern, it is understood as a lived, relational issue, one that directly affects Indigenous economies, business identity, and cultural continuity. By rejecting the colonial assumptions embedded in dominant research and policy frameworks, this work aligns with Rigney's (1999) call for Indigenous intellectual sovereignty and with Smith's (2021) assertion that Indigenous peoples must not only be participants in research, but also its architects, theorists, and custodians. This work speaks from within the Indigenous community, not about it, and it centres self-determination as both a research stance and a political imperative.

Building on the methodological foundations outlined above, the analysis operationalises a Relational Indigenist Framework that integrates elements of Bryant's (2024) Indigenist Critical Policy Analysis (ICPA) with Aboriginal Terms of Reference (Watson, 2025; Watson & Graham, 2016). While ICPA provides a rights-based structure for evaluating how policy enacts or diminishes Indigenous authority, participation, and accountability, Aboriginal Terms of Reference provide the ontological and epistemological grounding from which those concepts acquire meaning. Aboriginal Terms of Reference describe the cultural logic of Aboriginal civilisation, the obligations, relationships, and ethics that underpin all forms of social, political, and economic life. They encompass principles such as the sacredness of land, the custodial responsibility to care for Country and all living species, the ethic of sharing and caring, accountability as one another's keeper, decision-making through consensus, maintaining harmony between people and Country, and the respectful seeking and sharing of knowledge. Together, these values provide guidance for how authority and governance are understood and enacted within Indigenous worldviews.

Taken together, these approaches offer complementary ways of understanding policy and governance. ICPA provides the political and procedural lens for assessing whether policy upholds Indigenous rights, while Aboriginal Terms of Reference supply the cultural and philosophical grounding for evaluating how those rights are enacted, particularly whether they maintain balance between people and Country, uphold obligations of care and custodianship, and strengthen collective wellbeing. This synthesis keeps the framework both relational and rights-based, grounded in Indigenous worldviews while critically engaging the policy architecture of the IPP.

Indigenous Procurement Policy: Promise and Exploitation

The IPP was introduced by the Australian Government in July 2015 to address the underrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses in Commonwealth procurement contracts (NIAA, 2024b). It emerged from mounting recognition that Indigenous enterprises were being structurally excluded from government markets and from political momentum to leverage procurement as a tool of economic development. Inspired in part by international models such as the United States Small Business Administration's 8(a) Program and Canada's Indigenous procurement strategies, the IPP was positioned as a targeted mechanism to create equitable economic opportunities by facilitating Indigenous participation in government supply chains (NIAA, 2024a; Panezi, 2020). The policy was established in response to a longstanding structural failure, where Indigenous businesses secured only a fraction of Commonwealth procurement opportunities due to systemic barriers in access, recognition, and participation (NIAA, 2024b).

The primary purpose of the IPP is to support Indigenous entrepreneurship, stimulate economic development, and improve employment outcomes through the creation of sustainable economic opportunities (IPP, 2025). The policy further aims to shift procurement beyond purely economic assessments by incorporating social value criteria such as employment and training opportunities, intergenerational business capacity, and contributions to community

[3] Martin-Booran Mirraboopa (2003) conceptualises Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing as the interrelated foundations of an Aboriginal worldview. *Knowing* refers to the systems of knowledge grounded in Country, story, and relationships; *being* reflects the ontological position of relatedness, how identity and existence are defined through connection to people, place, and spirit; and *doing* encompasses the practices and obligations that sustain these relationships through action, ceremony, and responsibility.

[4] Economic sovereignty, as articulated by Watson (2023), refers to the right and responsibility of Indigenous peoples to define and govern their own economic systems according to cultural values and law. Distinct from western notions of financial independence, it is relational, grounded in collective wellbeing, reciprocity, and the balance between social, spiritual, and ecological responsibilities (Watson, 2023).

wellbeing (Denny-Smith et al., 2024; NIAA, 2024b). At its core, the IPP seeks to ensure that procurement aligns with community priorities, which may include both economic objectives, such as business growth and local job creation, and non-economic goals, such as cultural continuity and strengthened community networks, rather than being assessed solely on narrow financial metrics (Kelly & Woods, 2021; NIAA, 2024c).

The influence of the IPP extends beyond the federal level, with several Australian states and territories implementing their own Indigenous procurement initiatives (Supply Nation, n.d.). For example, Western Australia's Aboriginal Procurement Policy mandates progressive targets for awarding contracts to Aboriginal businesses and, from December 2023, to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) [5], with an updated policy effective from July 2025 (Government of Western Australia, 2025). Similarly, New South Wales has adopted the Aboriginal Procurement Policy, requiring each NSW Government agency and cluster, including portfolios such as health, education, and transport, to direct 1% of their addressable spend to Aboriginal businesses and award 3% of the total number of goods and services contracts to these enterprises (NSW Government, 2021). South Australia has also introduced its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Procurement Policy, establishing eligibility requirements [6] and participation targets intended to strengthen Indigenous involvement in public contracting (Government of South Australia, 2023). In addition to government initiatives, the private sector in Australia has increasingly embraced Indigenous procurement strategies (Hudson, 2016), with major corporations such as Rio Tinto implementing sustainable procurement practices that prioritise engagement with Indigenous suppliers and acknowledge the importance of fostering economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Rio Tinto, n.d.). Furthermore, organisations like the Business Council of Australia (BCA) have launched initiatives such as Raising the Bar, encouraging member companies to commit to specific targets for Indigenous procurement and employment [7]. These private sector efforts complement federal and state policies, collectively contributing to the broader goal of enhancing Indigenous economic participation (BCA, 2023; Fry, 2023; NIAA, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c).

According to the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA, 2025), the IPP has significantly increased both the number and total value of Commonwealth contracts awarded to Indigenous enterprises, supported by mandatory set-asides, participation targets, and improved reporting mechanisms. The 2025 IPP reforms tightened eligibility criteria and introduced stronger verification and reporting measures, aiming to strengthen integrity across procurement processes (NIAA, 2025). These changes have expanded entry points for Indigenous enterprises, particularly small to medium businesses operating in construction, service delivery, and regional procurement. Yet the same structures that enable access have also left the system vulnerable to exploitation. The government's own reform documents acknowledge the ongoing risk of Black cladding, where non-Indigenous entities obtain contracts through superficial ownership or control. While no precise public estimate quantifies the percentage of contracts affected, NIAA's decision to strengthen eligibility rules, to require at least 51% Indigenous ownership and control by 2026, signals that the problem is material enough to warrant regulatory intervention. Thus, the policy's merits lie in its capacity to stimulate Indigenous participation, but its demerits emerge from weak verification, allowing appropriation and identity misuse to undermine its redistributive intent.

While the IPP has expanded Indigenous participation in Commonwealth contracting, and similar initiatives are emerging across state and private-sector procurement, questions remain about how effectively these frameworks transfer authority, accountability, and long-term benefit to Indigenous peoples and communities. The policies have undoubtedly created commercial opportunities and raised the visibility of Indigenous enterprise, yet their design continues to locate decision-making power within bureaucratic and corporate structures rather than within Indigenous governance systems.

Analytical Framework: Indigenist Critical Policy Analysis and Aboriginal Terms of Reference

Guided by Bryant's (2024) Indigenist Critical Policy Analysis (ICPA) and Aboriginal Terms of Reference (Watson, 2025; Watson & Graham, 2016), the IPP can be read as a mechanism that frames Indigenous economic participation through

[5] An Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) is a not-for-profit service entity that is initiated, governed, and operated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, with a majority Indigenous governing body ensuring accountability to the community it serves (NSW Government, 2020).
[6] In South Australia, an "eligible Aboriginal business" is defined as one that is registered on the South Australian Aboriginal Business Register, certified by Supply Nation, or registered with an Aboriginal Regional Authority or Aboriginal Landholding Authority, and generally requires at least 50% Aboriginal ownership or demonstrable ongoing economic benefit to Aboriginal people in the state (Government of South Australia, 2023).
[7] The Business Council of Australia (BCA) launched the Raising the Bar initiative in 2019, in partnership with Supply Nation, to drive corporate commitments to Indigenous procurement and employment. By 2023 the program had exceeded its $3 billion cumulative spend target, though participants noted challenges in adapting procurement systems and overcoming internal resistance to supplier diversity (BCA, 2023; BCA & Supply Nation, 2019; Programmed, 2019; Westpac, 2019).

managerial and transactional logics rather than through cultural or rights-based foundations. The 2025 IPP reforms were introduced "to provide more opportunities for First Nations businesses and advance First Nations economic empowerment" by tightening ownership requirements, increasing procurement targets, and addressing Black cladding (NIAA, 2025, p. 1). While these reforms mark progress in accountability and transparency, they are not grounded in the philosophical and relational principles that constitute Aboriginal Terms of Reference, such as obligation, custodianship, reciprocity, respect, and balance between people and Country.

When read through Bryant's (2024) ICPA, the IPP's orientation is revealed as primarily administrative and economistic. It does not reference the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (United Nations, 2007), nor the principles it enshrines: self-determination, participation in decision-making, respect for and protection of culture, and equality and non-discrimination. Instead, it draws legitimacy from the Commonwealth Procurement Rules, where success is measured by contract volume and value—value defined through western economic logics. In the absence of Aboriginal Terms of Reference, the policy frames Indigenous participation as an outcome to be counted, not as a relationship to be maintained. This absence signifies the persistence of settler-colonial governance, where Indigenous people may participate in processes yet remain subject to non-Indigenous definitions of legitimacy and success.

Decision-making and authority under the IPP remain firmly centralised within the Commonwealth. The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) administers the policy, sets portfolio targets, defines what constitutes an "Indigenous enterprise", and monitors compliance (NIAA, 2025). Verification of Indigeneity depends on state-endorsed registries such as Supply Nation and the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, rather than on community-based or cultural authority. While the policy notes that reforms were informed by "feedback from the First Nations business sector", such engagement is consultative rather than decisional (NIAA, 2025, p. 1). Read through the lens of both ICPA and Aboriginal Terms of Reference, this reflects a continuing disjuncture between participation and power; Indigenous voices are invited but not authorised to govern, a notion that contravenes the UNDRIP principle of self-determination.

The policy's mechanisms, the Mandatory Set Aside (MSA), the Mandatory Minimum Indigenous Participation Requirements (MMR), and the incremental portfolio targets create new access pathways and economic benefits; however, they operate within what Bryant (2024) describes as the "settler-state control" of policy architecture, where Indigenous engagement is conditioned by bureaucratic compliance rather than authority. This is reflected in the policy's articulation of obligations to report rather than obligations to community or Country. Participation is advanced through the market but detached from the moral and cultural responsibilities that sustain Indigenous governance. Through the lens of Bryant's (2024) Indigenist Critical Policy Analysis and Aboriginal Terms of Reference, this pattern exemplifies how settler-state policy reframes responsibility to community and Country as accountability to bureaucracy, privileging metrics of performance over ethics of relationship.

When interpreted through Aboriginal Terms of Reference, these omissions are not incidental; they signal the exclusion of key foundations of Aboriginal governance: relationality, custodial ethics, and consensus decision-making. Aboriginal Terms of Reference insist that governance must emerge from the primacy of place, the soft authority [8] of Elders, and the maintenance of harmony between people and land (Graham, 2023; Watson, 2025). The absence of these principles in the IPP's design and implementation transforms what could be an instrument of self-determination into a mechanism of managed inclusion, one that measures Indigenous presence but not Indigenous authority.

In Bryant's (2024) terms, the IPP performs well on participation but poorly on Indigenous inclusion, representation, and authority. Drawing on Aboriginal Terms of Reference as a guiding framework could shift the policy's foundation from participation in markets to participation in governance, enabling procurement to operate with structural integrity and in alignment with cultural values. Until such alignment occurs, the IPP remains an important yet partial reform—a policy that widens access for Indigenous enterprises while continuing to reproduce the asymmetry between state administration and Indigenous self-determination.

Systemic Failures in Indigenous Procurement

The structure of the IPP embeds several mechanisms that, while designed to advance Indigenous participation, also produce systemic vulnerability: ownership thresholds based on numerical criteria can be met in form but not in substance, compliance targets emphasise volume and value over the legitimacy of participation, and verification processes rely on documentation rather than community authority or cultural accountability. Together, these features

[8] Watson (2025) describes *soft authority* as influence derived from knowledge, credibility, and moral responsibility rather than positional power. Exercised by Elders and respected community members within a *soft hierarchy*, it sustains balance and accountability through respect and consensus rather than coercion.

privilege bureaucratic compliance over genuine Indigenous control, creating conditions in which representation can be simulated and exploitation normalised.

The scale of Black cladding remains difficult to quantify, yet Supply Nation has reported persistent concerns from its members about opportunistic structures and misrepresentation, and legal commentators identify it as an enduring integrity risk in Indigenous procurement (Corrs Chambers Westgarth, 2024; Supply Nation, 2020). While the IPP reports billions of dollars in contracts awarded to Indigenous businesses since 2015 (NIAA, 2024c), parliamentary inquiries have questioned the transparency of these figures and how much of this value reaches genuinely Indigenous-owned and controlled enterprises (Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee, 2016). The result is an ecosystem weakened by misdirection of public and private investment, where the promise of economic advancement is compromised by the absence of rigorous verification and culturally grounded evaluation frameworks. Without these safeguards, the IPP risks remaining a vehicle for shallow compliance rather than a genuine tool for economic justice (Denny-Smith et al., 2024).

Comparable patterns of identity-based exploitation have emerged globally, exposing systemic gaps in equity-focused procurement frameworks. In South Africa, “fronting” schemes allow companies to appear compliant with Black Economic Empowerment[9] targets by appointing Black partners in name only while maintaining white ownership and control (Du Plessis, 2022). In North America, “pass-through” firms and “pretendians”[10] similarly exploit Indigenous identity to secure government contracts and benefits intended for genuine Indigenous enterprises (Du Plessis, 2022; Kolopenuk, 2023; Nagle, 2019). These practices share a common cause: verification systems that emphasise technical compliance and documentary proof rather than Indigenous-determined verification processes. Where Indigenous or minority authority is excluded, identity becomes a tradable market asset, weakening public confidence in equity policies and displacing those with rightful entitlement (Bryant, 2024; McGlade, 2025; Singh, 2025). The global evidence underscores that eliminating Black cladding requires more than technical reform; it demands Indigenous-led verification and oversight grounded in Indigenous governance.

The consequences of Black cladding are both material and cultural, diverting capital, visibility, and opportunity from legitimate Indigenous enterprises into non-Indigenous hands (Denny-Smith et al., 2024). By exploiting gaps in procurement design, inauthentic operators access contracts reserved for Indigenous suppliers, transforming mechanisms of redress such as the IPP into channels for economic extraction (Supply Nation, 2020). The funds diverted through these practices, estimated in the millions, represent lost employment, skills transfer, and community investment, as Indigenous businesses are significantly more likely to employ Indigenous staff and reinvest locally (Eva et al., 2023; Hudson, 2016). Beyond financial loss, the prevalence of such exploitation corrodes institutional trust. As Singh (2025) observes, repeated exposure to fraudulent claims has produced a culture of suspicion within procurement systems, forcing genuine Indigenous enterprises to continually prove their legitimacy instead of focusing on innovation and growth. This displacement of credibility, from Indigenous businesses to regulatory gatekeepers, undermines the very policy frameworks intended to support Indigenous economic development (Kelly & Woods, 2021).

The existing compliance metrics fundamentally undermine the purpose of the IPP, which is to foster genuine Indigenous business growth and long-term economic development. When entities exploit gaps in design and oversight through practices such as Black cladding, they may satisfy the policy’s formal requirements yet subvert its ethical intent. The result is a system that counts participation statistically but weakens the very foundations of Indigenous enterprise, displacing legitimate businesses and eroding trust within communities.

Erosion of Indigenous Business Models

Beyond its financial impact, Black cladding accelerates the erosion and erasure of distinctive Indigenous business models grounded in relationality[11], reciprocity[12], and collective prosperity (Watson, 2025). In the context of Indigenous

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[9] South Africa’s Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) framework is a government policy introduced to redress the inequalities of Apartheid by promoting the economic participation of Black South Africans. It sets out a scorecard system that measures businesses against criteria such as Black ownership, management control, skills development, enterprise and supplier development, and socio-economic contributions, with higher scores linked to preferential access to government contracts and other opportunities (Du Plessis, 2022).

[10] In Canada and the United States, the term pretendian has emerged to describe individuals that falsely claim Indigenous identity for social or economic benefit (Kolopenuk, 2023).

[11] Relationality refers to the network of relationships that binds Indigenous people to land, place, people, and community (Watson, 2025). This holistic worldview begins with land and extends through complex moral, spiritual, and social obligations, emphasising the interconnectedness of all beings as a pattern of interwoven threads where each is equal and integral to the whole (Kwaymullina, 2005).

[12] Reciprocity arises from the relationship to Country and is understood as a continuous exchange of care and respect that sustains both people and land (Graham, 2023). It recognises that giving and receiving are mutual obligations that maintain balance between people, spirit, and Country.

enterprises, such concepts are not abstract values but organising principles that determine how business is conceived, governed, and operated. As Manganda et al. (2023) explain, Indigenous entrepreneurship is inseparable from kinship obligations and collective governance, where decision-making is relational and outcomes are measured by their contribution to community wellbeing and the care of Country. Similarly, Altman (2005) show that many Indigenous businesses operate within a hybrid economy that blends customary, market, and public systems, allowing cultural practice and economic activity to reinforce one another rather than exist in tension. Foley and Hunter (2013) add that this cultural orientation in business practice challenges western assumptions of enterprise as an individual pursuit, demonstrating instead that profitability, cultural continuity, and social obligation can coexist within the same organisational logic. Together, these examples illustrate that Indigenous business models enact economic sovereignty as practice; they exercise control over resources and relationships in ways that uphold cultural norms and values.

Black cladding specifically undermines this ethos by elevating conventional capitalist businesses that emulate extractive, competitive, and individualistic frameworks; what Watson (2025) refers to as mainstream models divorced from spirit, land, and community. These businesses may succeed on paper within procurement systems but, in doing so, they reinforce a narrow model of enterprise that marginalises culturally grounded Indigenous ways of doing business. In this way, the IPP inadvertently rewards enterprises that conform to western measures of efficiency and ownership, while disadvantaging those structured around culture. This distortion is especially damaging in sectors where cultural authority, community consent, and connections to Country are central—sectors such as construction, mining, land management, and the arts, which are often overlooked by commercial procurement logic (Denny-Smith et al., 2024). When procurement systems prioritise commercial scale over cultural integrity, they incentivise the replication of colonial business structures and disincentivise Indigenous-led, culturally informed alternatives.

Furthermore, this erosion of Indigenous business identity is amplified by the lack of visibility and articulation of Indigenous business models in mainstream literature and policy frameworks. As Watson (2025) argues, the failure to codify Aboriginal Terms of Reference into business discourse deprives Indigenous enterprises of the legitimacy and recognition afforded to western models and closes off pathways for meaningful cross-cultural dialogue across business theory. This epistemic erasure is also a governance failure; when Aboriginal Terms of Reference are not embedded within policy design, Indigenous economic systems are rendered invisible. Without institutional space for Indigenous definitions of value, relational forms of entrepreneurship are systematically marginalised and rendered illegible within dominant economic frameworks.

The broader cultural cost of Black cladding, then, is the normalisation of economic assimilation, where Indigenous business is valued only insofar as it conforms to dominant capitalist frameworks, and cultural identity is reduced to an aesthetic tool for market advantage (Stevens, 2021; Watson, 2023). This not only sidelines Indigenous governance and Indigenous business models but gradually reshapes public and institutional expectations of what an “Indigenous business” should look like. By privileging businesses that mimic dominant frameworks, procurement systems implicitly devalue Indigenous business models. This dynamic not only disregards the world’s oldest continuous economic and cultural systems (Brigg & Graham, 2020; Watson, 2023), but also limits what is imagined as a viable, ethical business. As Supply Nation (2021) and Fry (2023) explain, Indigenous enterprises offer not just economic returns, but holistic value via employment, cultural continuity, and innovation informed by deep cultural knowledges of Country and kinship (Denny-Smith et al., 2024). To enable Indigenous enterprises to thrive, policies must do more than include; they must affirm and protect Indigenous business models from being overwritten in the pursuit of inclusion.

Another long-term impact is the obstruction of intergenerational wealth creation within Indigenous communities. Black cladding contributes to this by diverting contract income and assets away from genuine Indigenous businesses, reducing their ability to accumulate capital, reinvest in growth, and pass enterprises on to the next generation. Black cladding also limits training and employment pathways for Indigenous youth and disrupts the transmission of cultural economic knowledge through family and community-led business practices (Denny-Smith et al., 2024; Watson, 2025).

As articulated in Article 5 of the UNDRIP (United Nations, 2007), Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social, and cultural institutions. Viewed through the lens of Bryant’s (2024) ICPA, this right extends to the preservation of Indigenous economic systems and business models as legitimate sites of self-determination. Yet procurement frameworks such as the IPP remain misaligned with this principle, replacing the protection of Indigenous enterprise with mechanisms of procedural inclusion. In doing so, they privilege market conformity and bureaucratic performance over the continuity of Indigenous business models.

The erosion of Indigenous business models, therefore, is not a peripheral effect of Black cladding but a significant consequence; it dismantles the governance and cultural logics that sustain Indigenous economies. When Indigenous

business is reduced to a matter of compliance or market performance, its role as a living expression of Aboriginal Terms of Reference is lost. This dislocation reveals a broader failure of policy to protect Indigenous systems of value, continuity, and intergenerational care. Preserving Indigenous business models is then not a question of cultural preference but of structural justice. It requires procurement frameworks that recognise Indigenous enterprise as a site of self-determination, where accountability flows laterally through community relationships rather than vertically through bureaucratic oversight. Only by embedding these foundations can the procurement ecosystem move beyond symbolic inclusion and become a mechanism for economic sovereignty.

Governance Failures and Structural Gaps

The continued presence of Black cladding within the IPP realm reflects systemic barriers embedded in governance design rather than isolated policy oversights. These barriers arise from the failure to translate Indigenous governance principles into institutional practice, leaving accountability mechanisms detached from Indigenous authority and community oversight. Reforming procurement, therefore, requires a deeper reckoning with the structures that enable exploitative practices to persist—structures that privilege procedural inclusion and bureaucratic control over Indigenous leadership and verification.

At the heart of the problem is a compliance culture that values administrative efficiency above cultural legitimacy. Procurement systems frequently prioritise ownership thresholds, registration status, or other technical criteria that are easy to verify but fail to demonstrate genuine Indigenous control or community accountability (Kinaway Chamber of Commerce, 2020; Supply Nation, 2020). These mechanisms reflect a risk-averse bureaucratic mindset and a limited understanding of Indigenous governance and business practice. Verification remains procedural rather than relational, assessing compliance through documentation instead of community endorsement or cultural protocols.

This problem is intensified by the absence of an independent auditing framework or national public register capable of investigating or exposing fraudulent claims. Despite longstanding concern among Indigenous business leaders and sector advocates, there is still no mandated process for cross-checking claims through community-controlled bodies or cultural authorities (Singh, 2025). By contrast, other domains of public expenditure, such as corporate reporting and taxation, are subject to rigorous external oversight. The lack of equivalent safeguards in Indigenous procurement creates a policy vacuum in which identity fraud can thrive, protected by legal ambiguity and institutional inertia. It also consolidates state control over the definition of Indigeneity in business, contravening the principle of self-determination articulated in Article 3 of the UNDRIP (United Nations, 2007).

Equally concerning is the culture of silence that surrounds these practices. Whistleblower protections remain weak, particularly in the private sector where most Indigenous procurement fraud occurs. Indigenous peoples who suspect misconduct often face untenable risks; speaking out can mean professional exclusion or reputational harm, while silence allows exploitation to continue unchecked (Butler & Kellaway, 2024; SBS Insight, 2023; TallBear, 2021). The power imbalance is further compounded by non-Indigenous businesses or figureheads with significant political and financial influence who can intimidate or discredit those who challenge their claims. This dynamic perpetuates a colonial pattern in which Indigenous voices defending cultural integrity are marginalised, while those exploiting identity are empowered to define legitimacy.

The result is a persistent policy blind spot, and without robust protections, investigative infrastructure, or Indigenous-led oversight, the true scale of Black cladding remains obscured by the very systems designed to prevent it. Left unaddressed, this invisibility produces not only economic loss but epistemic damage, eroding trust, erasing Indigenous business models, and constraining the growth of Indigenous economies. Addressing these structural gaps requires more than technical reform; it demands a realignment in which Indigenous governance is not peripheral to procurement but foundational to its legitimacy and success.

Reimagining Procurement Through Indigenous Frameworks

Reimagining procurement requires more than procedural reform; it calls for a realignment of governance grounded in Aboriginal Terms of Reference—principles such as relationality, reciprocity, respect, custodianship, and obligation that can guide ethical relationships between people, policy, and Country. This approach must also be consistent with the rights affirmed in the UNDRIP (United Nations, 2007), particularly self-determination, participation in decision-making, and cultural protection. Addressing Black cladding requires more than bureaucratic tightening or better reporting; it demands a reimagining of how procurement systems understand value, legitimacy, and accountability (Kelly & Woods, 2021).

At its core, this shift must centre Indigenous worldviews not simply as external considerations but as the foundation upon which procurement is designed and evaluated. This is not a call for uniform reform, but for an approach that

recognises diversity across Nations, geographies, and governance systems. A one-size-fits-all solution cannot account for the distinct social, political, and cultural contexts of Indigenous communities, each of whom must determine for themselves what legitimacy, accountability, and economic success look like. Frameworks such as Ngaa-bi-nya (Williams, 2018) offer a model of what culturally grounded evaluation can look like, embedding Indigenous values into procurement to ensure it serves community priorities, not just economic metrics. Co-design or collaboration in policy reform would also offer the opportunity to create mechanisms of shared responsibility between government and community, grounded in ongoing relationships rather than episodic consultation.

Such a shift requires Indigenous businesses to be viewed as not merely suppliers within a broader economy, but rather as expressions of sovereignty, culture, and survival (Watson, 2025). Many Indigenous enterprises draw upon longstanding systems of culturally informed governance—systems that prioritise relationality, responsibility to Country, and continuity across generations (Watson, 2023). When procurement frameworks fail to recognise these cultural foundations, they undermine the conditions essential for Indigenous economic sovereignty.

To move forward, procurement systems must transfer definitional authority to Indigenous peoples and communities; this means not just consulting but enabling Indigenous peoples to define the criteria of eligibility, benefit, and legitimacy on their own terms. Indigenous-led verification bodies, community-controlled assessment processes, and region-specific cultural impact criteria must become the norm, not the exception. Within an emerging Indigenous procurement paradigm, value is not determined by scale, speed, or financial return alone, but by impact on community, Country, and culture. This shift from transactional compliance to community-defined compliance offers a more expansive and just economic vision—one that centres Indigenous aspirations and ethics rather than merely accommodating them. Transforming procurement in this way is not just an administrative exercise; it is an act of decolonisation. It involves reimagining business as a tool not only for inclusion but for restoration, sovereignty, and cultural preservation. If done properly, it can return power to where it belongs: with Indigenous Nations, who must be free to define, build, and protect their economic futures in ways that are aligned with their own values and governance, in alignment with the UNDRIP (United Nations, 2007).

The case for Indigenous-led governance in procurement is reinforced by extensive international evidence demonstrating that economic and social outcomes improve when Indigenous peoples exercise genuine control over policies that affect them. The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development found that, when Indigenous nations in the United States governed their own affairs, they achieved stronger, more sustainable economic growth than when external agencies retained control (Cornell & Kalt, 1993). Subsequent research confirms that the critical factor is not external technical expertise or favourable policy settings, but the transfer of decision-making power itself; self-determination is the decisive condition for long-term success (Cornell, 2006, 2019; Cornell & Kalt, 2010). The same principle applies to procurement: when Indigenous peoples define eligibility, verify authenticity, and oversee compliance, policies become more legitimate, effective, and enduring. As Shirodkar (2021) notes, however, achieving this shift in practice remains challenging due to persistent bias and institutional resistance, which continue to constrain Indigenous authority even within reforms intended to empower it. Embedding Indigenous control within the IPP would not only guard against misuse but, as the evidence suggests, generate stronger outcomes for both Indigenous communities and the national economy.

Conclusion: Beyond Compliance, Toward Justice

This paper has shown that Black cladding is not simply the result of individual misconduct but the predictable outcome of policy structures that fail to embed Indigenous authority, ethics, and accountability. Through a Relational Indigenist Framework, integrating Bryant's (2024) Indigenist Critical Policy Analysis and Aboriginal Terms of Reference (Watson, 2025), the analysis revealed how the IPP privileges bureaucratic compliance over cultural legitimacy, participation over power, and inclusion over self-determination. Black cladding, therefore, exposes the deeper structural logic of settler-colonial governance—one that measures Indigenous participation through contracts and quotas, rather than through legitimacy and impact.

This analysis demonstrates that Black cladding is not a marginal or accidental flaw in the procurement system; it is a systemic and structural failure that enables the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples across the economic domain. Black cladding allows non-Indigenous individuals and companies to extract value, resources, and opportunity intended for Indigenous communities, and, in doing so, it not only undermines the integrity of policies like the IPP, but it also corrodes trust, distorts data, and deepens the structural barriers faced by legitimate Indigenous enterprises.

The evidence presented here shows that these failures carry both material and cultural consequences. Materially, they redirect contracts, resources, and opportunities away from genuine Indigenous enterprises and into non-Indigenous

hands, compounding economic inequity. Culturally, they erode the integrity of Indigenous business models by rewarding enterprises that replicate western, capitalistic frameworks, where success is measured through competition and profit rather than relationality and reciprocity. This displaces enterprises that operate on Aboriginal Terms of Reference, where economic practice is inseparable from community and Country.

The dynamics of Black cladding are not unique to Australia but part of a wider global pattern in which equity-focused policies are distorted by the same structural imbalance, where Indigenous identity becomes a commodity rather than a spiritual and relational way of being. Across jurisdictions, from Canada's procurement reforms to other state-led initiatives, the absence of Indigenous-led verification and community authority enables exploitation to occur under the appearance of inclusion. Recognising this continuity underscores that embedding Indigenous governance is not a matter of cultural preference but a structural imperative essential to ensuring that policies designed in the name of equity achieve their purpose.

The solution is not to abandon procurement reform, but to transform it—radically, respectfully, and in collaboration with Indigenous communities. This begins with rejecting the myth of universal solutions. Indigenous Nations are not homogenous, and their governance structures, values, and visions of prosperity vary widely; a single, compliance-driven model cannot meet the needs of diverse communities (Watson, 2025). Procurement systems must therefore shift power to Indigenous communities, enabling them to define the standards of participation, legitimacy, and value through their own governance and cultural frameworks. Reimagining procurement in this way requires positioning Aboriginal Terms of Reference not as supplementary considerations but as the starting point for evaluation and policy design. It means privileging Indigenous values over transactional efficiency and shifting the focus from what can be extracted from Indigenous identity to what can be restored, protected, and nurtured through Indigenous economic participation (Watson, 2023). As Watson (2025) and Kelly and Woods (2021) argue, the goal is not simply to include Indigenous peoples within existing markets, but to regenerate economic systems grounded in culture.

To meaningfully confront Black cladding, governments and corporations must move beyond symbolic reform and establish enforceable, Indigenous-led mechanisms for oversight, whistleblower protection, and community verification. They must be prepared to challenge the assumptions that underpin western capitalist enterprise and create space for economies grounded in Aboriginal Terms of Reference. The struggle against Black cladding is therefore not only about procurement, but also about economic justice, cultural integrity, and political sovereignty. It is about ensuring that Indigenous peoples are not merely included within the economy, but are free to define, govern, and sustain it in accordance with their own values, laws, and aspirations (Watson, 2023). As long as identity can be appropriated without consequence, the promise of reconciliation remains hollow. But when Indigenous power, knowledges, and authority are centred in policy and governance, procurement can become a site of repair, resurgence, and self-determination. Reframing procurement through the Relational Indigenist Framework advanced in this paper shows how Indigenous governance can be operationalised within public policy. When Aboriginal Terms of Reference guide evaluation and reform, procurement evolves from a mechanism of distribution into an instrument of economic sovereignty.

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About the author

Dr Gaala Watson is an Indigenous business and governance scholar whose works spans Indigenous enterprise ecosystems, economic self-determination and the interface between Indigenous knowledge systems and organisational design. She completed her PhD at the University of Queensland, where her thesis developed a theoretical and applied framework of Aboriginal Governance. Gaala has contributed to interdisciplinary research across economics, social enterprise, health and finance, producing evidence that informs policy, capability-building and sector-wide systems reform. Her publications include empirical studies of Indigenous management, analyses of structural constraints on Indigenous enterprise, and contributions to Indigenous research methodology. Her work is grounded in Indigenous standpoint theory, Indigenous knowledges and applied, community-engaged research, with a focus on translating knowledge that advances theory while creating real-world impact.

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Between Culture and Context: What Shapes Māori Perspectives on Capitalism and Government Regulation?

Carla Houkamau (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tahu and Pākehā)[1], Kieren Lilly[2], Kiri Dell (Ngāti Porou)[1], Amber Nicholson (Ngāruahine)[1], Nimbus Staniland (Ngāti Awa, Ngāi Tūhoe)[1], Jason Mika (Tūhoe, Ngāti Awa, Whakatōhea, Ngāti Kahungunu)[1], and Chris Sibley[1,3]

[1] University of Auckland Business School, University of Auckland, New Zealand
[2] Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland, Australia
[3] School of Psychology, University of Auckland, New Zealand

Abstract: This study examines the way Māori (Indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand) attitudes toward capitalism and government regulation of business vary across the population, challenging homogeneous representations of a single "Māori perspective". While previous research has explored Indigenous economic models (Anderson et al., 2008) and emphasised the tensions between Indigenous values and market economics, these studies often imply a monolithic Indigenous economic perspective. Using data from Wave 2 of the 2020 Māori Identity and Financial Attitudes Study, we examined 3,241 Māori participants through multiple regression analyses to assess the way cultural identity (iwi importance, cultural efficacy) and employment type (self-employed, paid worker) influence attitudes toward capitalism and government regulation of business. Our findings revealed significant associations between cultural identification, employment position, and economic attitudes. Māori with stronger iwi (tribal) affiliations expressed greater opposition to capitalism and support for business regulation. At the same time, self-employed Māori showed more favourable views toward capitalism and decreased support for government regulation of business. These patterns persisted after controlling for demographic factors. The findings moved beyond homogenising characterisations and towards a more nuanced understanding of the influence of individual circumstances on economic attitudes among Māori.

Keywords: Indigenous economics, Māori, capitalism, government regulation

Introduction

Cultural values represent shared conceptions of what is good, right, and desirable in society (Mead, 2003; Schwartz, 1999). Cultural identity denotes one's sense of belonging to a cultural group and the emotional significance of that membership (Phinney & Ong, 2007). It encompasses shared history, traditions, language, beliefs, and practices distinguishing one group from another, forming the foundation for how individuals and communities understand themselves in relation to others and navigate social contexts (Hall & du Gay, 1996; Mead, 2003). Cultural values and identity fundamentally shape economic development (Polanyi, 1944; Weber, 1930), profoundly influencing attitudes towards success, materialism, and resource utilisation (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010). This relationship becomes particularly important when examining capitalism within different cultural contexts.

Capitalism is an economic system defined by private ownership of capital and means of production for profit (Piketty, 2014). Scott (2011, pp. i–xxxv) describes it as a three-level governance system: political authority, compliance-monitoring institutions, and competing firms. While nearly all major economies exhibit capitalism's hallmarks, they vary significantly in institutional arrangements, regulatory frameworks, and degrees of government intervention.

The shortcomings and excesses of capitalism have become apparent through rising inequality, environmental damage, and stagnating living standards for many across the world (Henderson, 2020; Jacobs & Mazzucato, 2016). Yet, capitalism can exist in many forms, from purely profit-maximising models to more socially conscious approaches that

consider wider stakeholder interests (Baumol et al., 2007; Hall & Soskice, 2001; Mackey & Sisodia, 2014; Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Aotearoa New Zealand's economic system exemplifies this complexity, having evolved from a highly regulated welfare state in the mid-20th century to one of the world's most liberalised economies following economic reforms in the 1980s (Kelsey, 1995). The country now operates as a mixed-market economy, blending free market principles with significant government involvement through regulation (Te Tai Ōhanga│The Treasury, 2024), state-owned enterprises, and social welfare provisions, while maintaining a strong commitment to open international trade (Manatū Aorere│Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2025).

This economic framework provides the backdrop against which Māori perspectives on capitalism and business unfold.

Williams (cited in Moran, 2015, pp. 60–65) challenges both economic determinism, which relegates culture to a secondary position behind economic forces, and idealism, which treats ideas as independent drivers of change. Instead, Williams' approach positions culture as actively shaping social life while remaining embedded in historical and material conditions. Consequently, capitalism operates not simply through markets but through complex social behaviours, institutions, and ways of thinking that naturalise its logic (Polanyi, 1944). Culture thus functions as a material force that helps to shape, sustain, or challenge capitalist society.

In discussions of Māori economic participation, cultural narratives often mask four critical dimensions. First, they essentialise Māori culture and identity, presenting it as uniform despite evidence of significant diversity in values, priorities, and levels of cultural engagement (Houkamau & Sibley, 2019). Second, they obscure growing class divisions within Māori communities, particularly the emergence of a professional middle class (Keane, 2011). Third, they downplay how poverty and inequality in Aotearoa New Zealand cut across ethnic communities, where class remains a vital analytical concept that should be considered alongside, rather than subsumed by, cultural and ethnic factors (van Meijl, 2020). Finally, they limit recognition of the way individuals navigate fluidly between cultural identification and economic realities.

Within this landscape, capitalism's tendency to commodify cultural identity creates further complexity. For example, the Māori haka—a traditional performing art that embodies "the passion, vigour and identity of the Māori race" and serves as a repository of iwi history and ancestral knowledge—has been transformed into commercial entertainment for global audiences (Wilson, 2020, p. 529). Companies worldwide have appropriated haka performances for advertising campaigns, from Italian car commercials to Irish beer promotions, stripping away Māori cultural protocols and spiritual significance while generating profits that flow to corporations rather than Māori communities (Wilson, 2020).

As Moran (2015) argues, market forces transform the struggles of marginalised groups into consumable products, repackaging differences as consumer choice rather than political resistance. This process simultaneously celebrates cultural distinctiveness while maintaining existing economic hierarchies, often individualising structural inequalities rather than systemically addressing them.

Our study examines variations in Māori attitudes toward capitalism and government intervention, revealing significant connections between cultural identification, employment status, and economic perspectives. This analysis moves beyond homogenising notions of "the Māori perspective", offering a nuanced understanding of how individual circumstances influence economic viewpoints. Following a review of Māori engagement with capitalism and Indigenous economic development, we present findings demonstrating meaningful associations between identity, employment, and attitudes towards capitalism and government regulation. These insights have significant implications for policy development and theoretical frameworks concerning Māori economic participation.

Changing from a Tribal Economy

Māori, who comprise approximately 17.3% of Aotearoa New Zealand's population today (Tatauranga Aotearoa│Stats NZ, 2023), navigated to Aotearoa from Eastern Polynesia in the late 13th century. Before European contact in the late 18th century, diverse iwi (tribes) had developed unique social structures, spiritual traditions, political systems, and economic practices (Anderson, 2016). As tribal people, Māori operated within a complex social milieu and maintained sophisticated trade networks among iwi. The traditional Māori economy operated through a mixture of socially constrained reciprocal exchanges and pragmatically oriented barter trades, with economic activities deeply embedded within and regulated by higher-level social and cultural practices. Unlike the British economy, which had undergone the "Great Transformation" that separated economic activity from social constraints, the Māori economy was rooted in kinship obligations. Exchanges served the dual purpose of strengthening social bonds through reciprocal obligations

while facilitating the interchange of goods and services, governed by intricate tikanga (values and practices) (Hēnare, 2009, 2014; Tau & Rout, 2018).

Research on the "economy of mana" (meaning authority/prestige), a term first coined by eminent Māori academic Mānuka Hēnare (2009), describes the traditional Māori economic model as one that prioritised collective prosperity by centring on human dignity and relationships (Dell et al., 2018; Dell et al., 2022). An economy of mana emphasises wealth distribution over accumulation, with mana enhanced through sharing rather than hoarding resources for individual benefit (Scobie & Sturman, 2020).

Reid and Rout (2016) challenge romanticised views of the traditional Māori economy. They demonstrate that pre-European Māori maintained a sophisticated economic system with several key features: property rights managed by chiefs (rangatira) who functioned as title-holders, allocating resource rights to individuals and families rather than through purely communal ownership; reciprocal obligations (utu) that required surpluses to be returned with equivalent or greater value, creating economic circulation while strengthening social bonds; extensive trade networks spanning Aotearoa New Zealand to exchange valuable resources such as jade and obsidian, with evidence of specialised traders serving as intermediaries; and a culture valuing industrious leadership and openness towards beneficial new technologies. Importantly, the authors argue that colonisation distorted these economic traditions through "reactionary traditionalism" (Reid & Rout, 2016, p. 84), whereby Māori internalised colonial narratives that characterised Indigenous cultures as inherently non-commercial and spiritual, rather than entrepreneurial.

Corporate Colonisation, Economic Marginalisation

Māori were colonised by the British, after the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) in 1840, fundamentally altering the economic landscape that had existed in New Zealand for centuries. Prominent New Zealand historian J. C. Beaglehole characterised the colonisation of Aotearoa as "chiefly an example of the expansion of British or Western capitalism" (cited in Hilliard, 1997, p. 103). Recent analysis by Comyn (2022) emphasises the way finance was at the centre of every stage of the colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand. Comyn (2019) describes the way the New Zealand Company was chartered in the United Kingdom (UK) in the first half of the 19th century and focused on the systematic colonisation of New Zealand via financial instruments. In particular, it made use of the joint-stock system and speculation, rather than direct state power, to enable colonisation, with British capitalists collaborating to raise funds for colonial ventures when parliamentary support was initially denied in the period 1838 to 1839.

Land Loss and Economic Disruption

As settlers flowed from the UK to Aotearoa New Zealand seeking land, Māori society was transformed radically, with land and resources lost in varying ways across different iwi (Houkamau & Pouwhare, 2025; Tau, 2016; Williams, 1999). The Native Land Court's systematic conversion of collective land holdings to individual titles facilitated widespread land alienation, undermining Māori economic sovereignty and fracturing traditional economic structures that had sustained iwi for generations (Boast, 2008; Williams, 1999).

For Māori, the period between 1880 and 1980 was marked by significant economic marginalisation and cultural disruption. Māori land ownership declined precipitously, from approximately 27 million hectares in 1840 to less than 3 million by 1920 (Walker, 2004). Economically, Māori were increasingly relegated to rural areas and constrained to low-wage labour and seasonal work (Pool, 1991). Urban migration intensified from the 1950s onwards, with approximately 70% of Māori living in urban centres by 1980, often in conditions of economic deprivation, creating generational disconnection from traditional cultural knowledge and governance systems (Durie, 1998; Walker, 2004)

Economic Restructuring and Emerging Māori Development (1980s–2000s)

Aotearoa New Zealand underwent significant economic restructuring in the 1980s. This period marked a transition from a highly regulated economy towards one based on market principles (Evans et al., 1996). The rapid privatisation of state assets and elimination of government subsidies led to widespread job losses in sectors where Māori were heavily represented, particularly in forestry, railways, and manufacturing (Kelsey, 1995). Unemployment among Māori reached 25% by the early 1990s, more than triple the rate for Pākehā (New Zealand Europeans) (Te Puni Kōkiri | Ministry of Māori Development, 2000).

As Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document, Te Tiriti has two versions: te reo Māori (the Māori language) and English. Significant differences between the versions have created ongoing tensions over land rights, cultural recognition, and the interpretation of both documents (Orange, 2011, 2013; Walker, 2004). In recent decades, efforts to address these differences and acknowledge breaches of the Treaty by the Crown have seen Treaty settlements return

significant assets to Māori. These settlements typically include historical acknowledgements, formal Crown apologies, financial compensation, and cultural redress (Hill, n.d.). Major settlements include the 1992 "Sealord" fisheries agreement ($170 million and shares in fishing companies) (Houkamau & Pouwhare, 2025), the 1995 Waikato–Tainui land settlement ($170 million), the 1998 Ngāi Tahu settlement ($170 million) for claims over 34.5 million acres, and the 2008 "Treelords" agreement returning $196 million worth of forest land plus $223 million in accumulated forestry rentals to seven central North Island iwi (Hill, n.d.).

In the years following these settlements, Māori-led economic development and collaborative networks grew with the goal of building prosperity in the face of ongoing inequalities. However, Consedine (2007) notes:

The paradox of this period was that while Māori organisations and iwi groups were increasingly seeking and developing Māori-led economic and social solutions, the result of economic reform within the economy meant the experience of individual Māori generally was negative. (p. 3)

The emergence of iwi corporations following Treaty settlements eventually created significant economic entities (Bargh, 2012), representing a shift toward local-level solutions and self-determination that has continued to evolve.

While the Crown frames settlements as an acknowledgement of historical grievances, high-profile Māori academic Professor Margaret Mutu (2019) notes that settlements typically return less than 1% of stolen lands, with the Crown dictating non-negotiable terms that divide communities. Bargh (2012) observes that although some iwi have gained significant economic ballast post-settlement, general Māori wellbeing indicators remain poor, with many Māori organisations developing their own initiatives while also advocating for constitutional change aligned with international Indigenous rights standards. Webb (2023) describes this as the "rangatiratanga paradox" (p. 1), where Māori must negotiate self-determination within the systems that have historically constrained it.

The Māori Economy – Te Ōhanga Māori

Defining Te Ōhanga Māori

While the term "Māori economy" has become a media (e.g., Andrews, 2025) and government (e.g., Manatū Aorere | Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.) catchphrase in New Zealand, its definition remains complex. Since 2010, private company Business and Economic Research Limited (BERL) has been funded by government entities—including the Reserve Bank of New Zealand, Hīkina Whakatutuki | Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, and Te Puni Kōkiri (the government's principal policy advisor on Māori development)—to provide regular reports on the economic value of the Māori economy, or te ōhanga Māori. BERL has utilised a multidimensional framework, measuring the Māori economy as encompassing all self-identifying Māori economic entities, extending beyond Treaty settlement assets to include individual entrepreneurs, employers, self-employed individuals, and the wage contributions of Māori employees. This definition is operationalised through three key measurement dimensions: the total asset base (calculated through examining Māori self-employed assets, employer enterprises, and collectively owned entities); income and GDP contributions; and interconnections with the wider Aotearoa New Zealand economy (Nana et al., 2015). This methodology, which combines direct reporting with imputations where data gaps exist, provides quantifiable metrics for economic analysis (Nana et al., 2011; Nana et al., 2015).

BERL's definition of the Māori economy has evolved substantially over time. Initially defined through financial metrics in the period 2010 to 2011, by 2018 it had expanded to view the Māori economy as an integrated component of the wider Aotearoa New Zealand economy. The updated definition recognises Māori fulfilling multiple roles across paid and unpaid sectors, incorporating the Treasury's Living Standards Framework and a "people, planet, profit" approach with culture at the centre, acknowledging non-market activities, cultural values, and kaitiakitanga (guardianship, stewardship) as legitimate economic contributions (Nana et al., 2020).

Economic Growth and Disparities

BERL's most recent Te Ōhanga Māori 2023 report reveals significant expansion of the Māori economy, with its economic contribution nearly doubling from $17 billion (6.5% of GDP) in 2018 to $32 billion (8.9% of GDP) in 2023. The Māori asset base has grown 83% to $126 billion, comprising $66 billion in business assets, $41 billion in collective assets, and $19 billion in self-employed assets. Professional services now outpace primary industries as key contributors, with Māori workers holding more high-skilled jobs (46%) than low-skilled jobs (40%) for the first time since 2006. Despite these advances, disparities persist in Māori households, with lower home ownership (52% versus 67% for non-Māori) and greater reliance on government support (33% versus 9% for non-Māori) (Schulze et al., 2025).

Contested Definitions and Critiques

These figures show divergent economic realities. While Māori business entities, collectives, and skilled workers are making significant economic advances, many Māori households remain economically vulnerable. Hence, the term "Māori economy" has been contentious, with some arguing that it creates a misleading impression of widespread Māori economic success while ignoring the inequalities and institutional barriers that limit Māori self-determination. For example, Tau and Rout (2018) assert that there is no genuine Māori economy today because Māori enterprises operate within, and are regulated by, the settler economy, with profits ultimately recirculating back into and reinforcing the dominant economic system.

In their article "Framing the Māori Economy", Amoamo et al. (2018) note that current definitions of the Māori economy focus on financial statistics and capitalist norms, obscuring the social, cultural, and environmental values that shape Māori business. Meanwhile, Dell et al. (2017) emphasise that Māori have increasingly integrated traditional economic principles into their contemporary business practices. More recently, Rout et al. (2025) have advanced a comparative analysis of the literature on Māori economic principles to identify the principles that are distinctively Māori (i.e., embedded, collective, empathetic, reciprocal, balanced, and localised) as contrasted with capitalist orientations (i.e., abstract, individual, rational, competitive, growth-oriented, and universal).

These different analytical frameworks reflect the complex historical trajectory of Māori history. Colonisation fundamentally transformed Māori economic systems (Comyn, 2022), and scholars have approached this from different analytical angles: quantitative approaches measure economic assets and growth metrics (Schulze et al., 2025); institutional analyses examine structural constraints within the settler economy framework (Tau & Rout, 2018); values-based perspectives highlight the distinctive cultural principles guiding Māori business practices (Amoamo et al., 2018; Rout et al., 2025); and integrative approaches document the way traditional Māori economic principles are being adapted within contemporary business settings (Dell et al., 2017).

Beyond a Singular Māori Worldview

Across discussions of the Māori economy, experiences, and people, Māori viewpoints are often presented through a cultural lens; however, the concept of a singular "Māori world view" simultaneously masks internal diversity and economic stratification. The term "Māori" itself serves an important function in cultural recognition and political advocacy, but it simultaneously masks the rich diversity of experiences, perspectives, and identities within this ethnic community (Durie, 1995; McIntosh, 2005). Bidois (2013) critiques traditional binary oppositions between Māori and Pākehā in Aotearoa New Zealand, arguing that both colonial structures and postcolonial resistance have reinforced portrayals of Māori as a homogeneous group with uniform perspectives and values, obscuring the significant internal diversity.

The Emergence of a Māori Middle Class

While statistical aggregation shows Māori facing disproportionate socio-economic challenges as an ethnic group (Easton, 2018), individual Māori hold diverse perspectives on economic development (Houkamau & Sibley, 2019). Keane (2011) identifies the late 20th-century emergence of a Māori middle class through several pathways: the Waitangi Tribunal creating professional opportunities; iwi settlements establishing a corporate Māori infrastructure requiring professionally trained managers; increased representation in public service; and expanded educational attainment leading more Māori into professional fields. Himona (2013) demonstrates through demographic analysis that most Māori live urban lives that are deeply influenced by global culture, with approximately only 21% of them speaking te reo Māori and many confronting genuine financial challenges that may take precedence over cultural considerations.

This diversity is evident in patterns of Māori identification. Kukutai (2004) reveals that, while 93% of those who identify as Māori claim Māori ancestry, 20% of those with Māori ancestry do not identify ethnically as Māori. Moreover, those who have stronger Māori identification experience comparatively poorer socio-economic outcomes than those who identify primarily as European despite having Māori ancestry—differences that persist even when controlling for other variables.

The dynamic nature of Māori identity is captured in Rata's (2015) Māori Identity Migration Model, which conceptualises identity as being fluid rather than fixed. This research demonstrates the way urban Māori youth navigate between identity positions based on contextual and individual factors, and it acknowledges their agency in identity construction.

Political engagement patterns further illustrate this heterogeneity. Aotearoa New Zealand maintains two electoral rolls: a General roll for all voters and a separate Māori roll to ensure Māori parliamentary representation, with eligible Māori

voters able to choose between them. Vowles and Gibbons (2022) document a gradual shift since 2006 in Māori registration on the electoral roll—away from the Māori roll and towards the General roll—with roll choice strongly predicted by factors including proximity to te reo Māori speakers, household composition, and occupational status. The impact of strong Māori identity on roll choice is counterbalanced by weaker identification among those who also identify as Pākehā and an increasing number of people acknowledging Māori descent without necessarily having a strong Māori identity.

Empirical research illuminates heterogeneity within Māori economic perspectives. Houkamau and Sibley (2014) document considerable variation within Māori communities regarding economic circumstances, geographical location, education levels, and engagement with both te ao Māori (the Māori world view) and mainstream economic systems. Their subsequent work (Houkamau & Sibley, 2019) leverages data from the longitudinal Māori Identity and Financial Attitudes Study (MIFAS) with 7,019 Māori participants, employing the Multidimensional Model of Māori Identity and Cultural Engagement (MMM-ICE3) to measure Māori cultural identity across eight dimensions (Matika et al., 2020; Sibley & Houkamau, 2013).

Through multiple regression analysis with demographic variables and identity dimensions, Houkamau and Sibley (2019) identified significant patterns predicting economic attitudes. They found that Māori with stronger cultural identification have a greater likelihood of expressing economic attitudes aligned with traditional Māori values, including preferences for protecting iwi assets rather than risking them for profit maximisation, and preferring workplaces that respect Māori values despite potential financial trade-offs. Specifically, those with higher scores on spirituality, socio-political consciousness, and authenticity beliefs were significantly more likely to favour asset protection over commercialisation, while those with stronger cultural engagement across seven of the eight identity dimensions preferred employment that promoted Māori development even when it offered lower pay. Crucially, while confirming the persistent influence of traditional cultural values on contemporary economic decision-making, the study also revealed significant heterogeneity in economic attitudes among Māori, providing empirical evidence that challenges monolithic characterisations of the Māori perspective (Houkamau & Sibley, 2019). These findings directly prefigure our own research, which extends this analysis by examining how employment position and demographic factors interact with cultural identity to shape attitudes toward capitalism and government regulation.

However, despite this empirical evidence of diversity within Māori economic perspectives, public discourse continues to be shaped by oversimplified narratives. This paradox is further reinforced by problematic media representations of Māori economic activities. McCreanor et al. (2011) identify extreme under-representation of Māori business stories in New Zealand newspapers—less than 3% of all Māori-related news coverage. The researchers characterise this as “symbolic annihilation” (McCreanor et al., 2011, p. 51) of Māori commercial endeavours. This media environment creates additional challenges for Māori navigating economic systems, as both Māori and non-Māori audiences are exposed to distorted representations that shape public perceptions of Māori economic capabilities.

Moran (2015, pp. 139–154) argues that capitalism repackages differences in personal identity as expression through consumption rather than activism. This consumer-choice emphasis obscures class struggles, individualising inequality rather than recognising it as being systemic. This creates a dynamic tension where Māori individuals and communities engage with capitalism in varied ways: some becoming part of the middle class, others maintaining different relationships to the economic system, and many navigating complex positions in between.

Wāhine Māori (Māori Women)

The diversity in Māori economic perspectives is profoundly shaped by gender dynamics, with wāhine (i.e., women) Māori voices notably under-represented in research and discussions on Māori economic development (Simmons-Donaldson et al., 2018). Kuokkanen (2011) observes that contemporary Indigenous economies often function as “mixed economies” (p. 219) where traditional subsistence activities coexist with participation in the market economy. Within these frameworks, wāhine Māori economic contributions are systematically rendered invisible—despite their fundamental role in sustaining cultural, social, and economic life within their communities, particularly through unrecognised voluntary and community work (Simmons-Donaldson et al., 2018).

Traditional Māori society recognised complementary societal roles for wāhine and tāne (men), with wāhine holding significant economic authority in many contexts (Mikaere, 2017; Simmonds, 2011). While Māori entrepreneurship has been widely examined in contemporary research (Manganda et al., 2023), existing models, such as the “Māuipreneur” framework, predominantly focus on male experiences and perspectives. Although wāhine Māori have maintained entrepreneurial roles both historically and today, their specific contributions to the economy remain critically understudied (Simmons-Donaldson et al., 2018).

The recent BERL Māori women's economy report (Schulze et al., 2024) begins to address this gap by quantifying the economic contributions of wāhine Māori to the Aotearoa New Zealand economy between 2013 and 2022, examining both formal economic participation and previously undervalued unpaid work. The findings reveal that wāhine Māori generated $5.9 billion in production GDP (1.9% of national GDP), primarily in business and social services, with unpaid work contributing substantially more—an additional $6.6 billion.

The report further highlights persistent structural challenges: wāhine Māori earn on average 20% less than non-Māori women; they experience lower full-time work participation; and a quarter of them lead single-parent households. While entrepreneurship among wāhine Māori grew by 31% between 2013 and 2018 (compared to only 7% for non-Māori women), they remain significantly under-represented in business ownership and receive disproportionately less entrepreneurial income. Given these documented disparities and their marginalised position within capitalist structures, it follows that wāhine Māori could hold more critical perspectives on capitalism and mainstream economic models than those Māori who have benefited more directly from the current Aotearoa New Zealand economic systems. This critical stance may also be influenced by iwi affiliation/cultural identity, as wāhine Māori are more likely to be knowledge holders and intergenerational cultural champions, placing greater importance on values of culture and spirituality that often stand in contrast to mainstream economic paradigms (Manatū Wāhine│Ministry for Women, 2024).

Employment Type and Economic Attitudes

Employment position—as employer, self-employed, or employee—shapes people's experiences within economic systems and may influence their attitudes toward those systems, with research suggesting that those who benefit from a system are more likely to support it (Jost & Banaji, 1994). Research conducted by Houkamau, Lilly, Newth et al. (2024) with 2,378 Māori workers reveals that those who were employers reported higher satisfaction with living standards, future security, personal relationships, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and finances, when compared with employees and sole traders. They suggested that self-employment provides Māori with greater autonomy, flexibility, and alignment with values such as tino rangatiratanga (self-determination), potentially liberating them from hierarchical structures that have historically disadvantaged Māori. This indicates that economic positioning significantly influences people's perspectives on capitalism, with entrepreneurial success potentially fostering more positive views of market-based systems.

Iwi Affiliation

Iwi (tribal) affiliation represents a fundamental aspect of Māori identity that is rooted in traditional social organisation. Research consistently confirms the profound significance of iwi affiliation to Māori identity (Tatauranga Aotearoa│Stats NZ, 2020; Tūhono, 2004). Recent studies have begun to reveal the way the strength of this tribal identity connection directly shapes Māori political and economic attitudes. Houkamau, Bahamondes, Osborne et al. (2024) reveal that Māori with stronger iwi affiliations—those who consider their tribal connections central to their self-concept—show significantly lower levels of system justification, meaning they are less likely to endorse Aotearoa New Zealand's existing social and political systems as being legitimate or fair. This finding suggests that tribal connection shapes political consciousness and attitudes towards mainstream institutions.

Building on this relationship between identity strength and systemic attitudes, additional empirical analysis by Houkamau, Bahamondes, Osborne et al. (2024) shows that Māori with more conservative political views tend to express lower intentions to engage in collective action for Māori political causes, evaluate their Māori identity as less central to their sense of self, and report less belief in their ability to effect political change. Together, these studies establish a clear pattern: the strength of Māori tribal identity significantly influences the way individuals relate to and engage with mainstream economic and political systems, with stronger iwi identification associated with greater critical consciousness of systemic inequities.

Government Regulation of Business

Research examining Māori attitudes towards government regulation reveals how colonised peoples view state intervention in economic affairs. Despite research on tensions between Māori and the New Zealand Government regarding governance authority (Elias, 2017) and mechanisms, such as the Treaty of Waitangi, that give Māori greater political voice (Morris, 2014), there is only limited work specifically examining Māori perspectives on business regulation. Research by Grimes et al. (2015) finds that Māori hold distinctly different views compared to non-Māori; Māori are more likely to oppose businesses being run solely by owners or managers, more likely to view capitalists negatively, more supportive of government intervention, and more likely to favour environmental protection over economic growth. These differences persist after controlling for socio-economic factors, suggesting genuine cultural

differences. However, Māori interests are multifaceted, encompassing both environmental protection and development concerns. For example, Māori responded negatively to Sir John Key's 2015 proposal to create a Kermadec Ocean Sanctuary because it impinged on Māori commercial fishing rights, resulting in its eventual abandonment by the current government (Houkamau & Pouwhare, 2025). This nuanced position demonstrates the way Māori economic perspectives balance cultural, environmental, and economic development considerations.

Exploring Diversity in Māori Economic Perspectives

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on Indigenous economic perspectives by examining the demographic factors that shape Māori attitudes toward capitalism and government regulation of business in Aotearoa New Zealand. Our central research question is: How do Māori attitudes towards capitalism and government regulation vary across the population, and what factors influence these attitudes? Building on previous research that has identified tensions between Indigenous values and market economics (Grimes et al., 2015; Houkamau & Sibley, 2019), our research specifically investigates the way three key variables—cultural identity, employment position, and demographic characteristics—influence economic attitudes within Māori communities.

Method

Sampling Procedure

This study drew on the existing data from Wave 2 in 2020 of Te Rangahau o Te Tuakiri Māori me Ngā Waiaro ā-Pūtea│The Māori Identity and Financial Attitudes Study (MIFAS), a nationwide longitudinal panel study of Māori identity and financial attitudes and behaviour (see Houkamau et al., 2019, for a comprehensive outline of the MIFAS research methodology).

Sampling for the MIFAS occurred in two waves. The inaugural wave in 2017 randomly sampled 100,000 people who had identified as Māori on the 2017 New Zealand electoral roll, yielding 7,019 participants (response rate = 7.02%). Participants were followed up for Wave 2 in 2020, resulting in a sample of 3,241 respondents (retention rate = 46.2%). Participants completed the MIFAS via a postal pen-and-paper questionnaire, with the option to complete the questionnaire online in either English or te reo Māori (te reo n = 23).

Participants

For this current study, we used all available data from Wave 2 in 2020 of the MIFAS (N = 3,241). Of this sample, 64.4% were women, 35.5% were men, and 0.2% were gender diverse. Most participants were born in Aotearoa New Zealand (98.2%) and employed (71.5%), and the average age was 52.61 years (SD = 14.13, range: 21–85). The participants resided in both rural (48.3%) and urban (51.7%) dwellings. In terms of ethnicity, most participants (61.5%) reported another ethnic affiliation besides Māori, including New Zealand European (58.7%), Pasifika (3.2%), and Asian (1.5%).

Measures

Independent Variables

Employment Type

Employment type was assessed by asking participants whether they were (1) a paid employee (n = 1,839), (2) self-employed and NOT employing others (n = 284), (3) an employer of persons in their own business (n = 121), or (4) working in a family business without pay (n = 27). For our analyses, we excluded participants working in a family business without pay, and we created dummy codes (0 = no, 1 = yes) for paid employees, sole traders, and employers. In our analyses, we used paid employees as the base for comparisons.

Iwi Importance

Iwi importance was assessed by asking participants, "How important is/are your iwi to how you see yourself?" on a 7-point scale from 1 (not important) to 7 (very important).

Cultural Efficacy and Active Identity Engagement

Cultural Efficacy and Active Identity Engagement (CEAIE) was measured using the revised Multidimensional Model of Māori Identity and Cultural Engagement scale (MMM-ICE3; Matika et al., 2020). The MMM-ICE3 is designed to assess the subjective experiences and different facets of identity for Māori. The CEAIE dimension measures the extent to which an individual perceives that they have the personal resources required to engage appropriately with other Māori in Māori social and cultural contexts. For this aspect, the scale uses the mean of 5 items rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7

(strongly agree): (a) "I don't know how to behave on a marae" (reverse-scored); (b) "I try to kōrero (speak) Māori whenever I can"; (c) "I can't do Māori culture or speak Māori" (reverse-scored); (d) "I know how to behave the right way when I am on a marae"; and (e) "I have a clear sense of my Māori heritage and what it means for me" (ω = .77).

Demographic Covariates

We controlled for eight core demographic variables: gender, age, sole Māori ethnic affiliation, household income, education, conservatism, and whether participants were employed (0 = no, 1 = yes) or living in rural or urban areas (0 = rural, 1 = urban). For gender, we asked, "What is your gender?" (open-ended), which was dummy coded for our analyses (0 = woman, 1 = man). We measured age using participants' reported date of birth. To assess ethnic affiliations, we asked, "Which ethnic group(s) do you belong to?", with participants able to select one or more responses from Māori, New Zealand European, Samoan, Cook Islands Māori, Tongan, Niuean, Chinese, Indian, and Other (such as Dutch, Japanese, Tokelauan). Responses were dummy coded based on whether or not participants identified with multiple ethnic groups or as solely Māori (0 = sole Māori, 1 = Māori and another ethnicity).

We measured household income by asking participants, "Please estimate your total household income (before tax) for the year 2020". Because of the high variance in responses, we divided household income by $100,000 for our analyses. For education, we asked, "What is your highest level of qualification?" and coded the responses into an 11-level ordinal variable according to the New Zealand Qualifications Framework, from 0 (no qualification) to 10 (doctoral degree or equivalent). Finally, we assessed conservatism by asking participants, "Please rate how politically liberal versus conservative you see yourself as being", on a scale of 1 (extremely liberal) to 7 (extremely conservative) (Jost, 2006).

Dependent Variables

Opposition to Capitalism

Opposition to capitalism was measured using a single item, "Capitalism has generally had a negative impact on the way that we live", rated on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Support for Government Regulation

Support for government regulation was measured using the mean of three items: (a) "Government regulation of business is needed to stop business owners from becoming too greedy"; (b) "Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off"; and (c) "Government regulation of business usually does more harm than good" (reverse-scored). Items were rated on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (ω = .77).

Results

We examined attitudes among Māori towards capitalism and government regulation, specifically investigating differences between employment types (sole traders, employers, and paid employees) and the influence of cultural identity factors. Using multiple regression analyses in SPSS 29.0 statistics software, we tested whether "iwi importance to identity" and "cultural efficacy (CEAIE)" predicted (1) opposition to capitalism and (2) support for government regulation, while controlling for demographic variables.

Descriptive Statistics

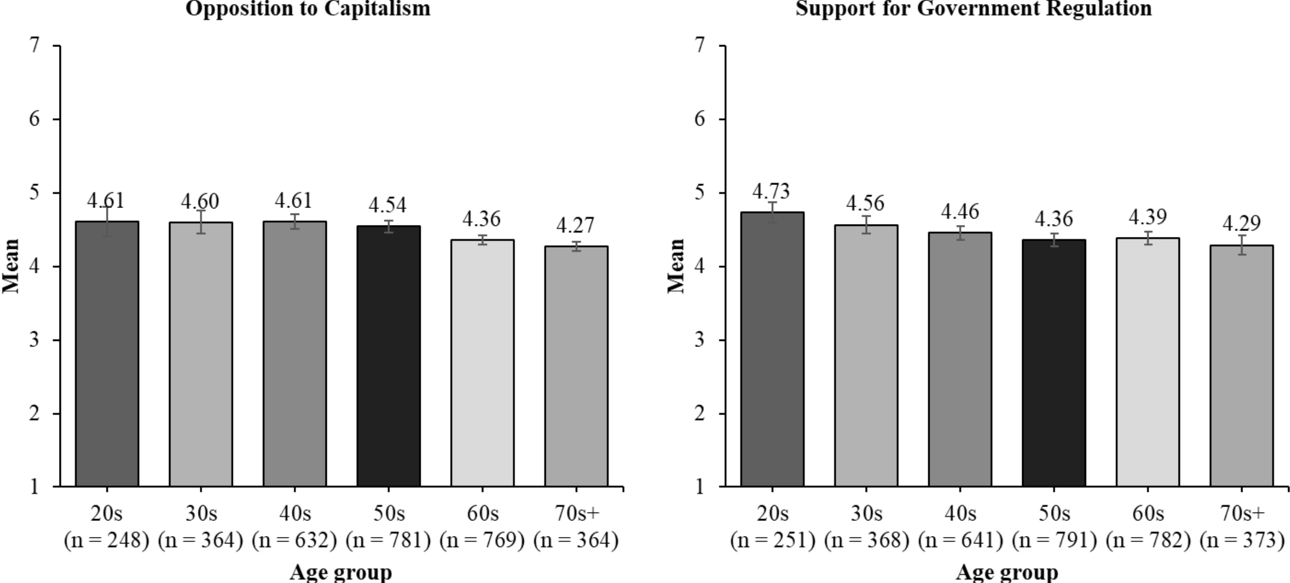
Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all variables and shows that, on average, participants reported moderate opposition to capitalism (M = 4.49, SD = 1.64) and support for government regulation (M = 4.43, SD = 1.22; i.e., above the midpoint on a 1–7 scale). Figure 1 compares the mean levels of our focal outcomes across gender, urban and rural dwellings, and ethnic affiliations.

Women reported greater opposition to capitalism ($t(1906.44) = 4.38$, $p < .001$; Cohen's $d = 0.18$) and support for government regulation ($t(1927.08) = 3.38$, $p < .001$; $d = 0.13$) than their male counterparts, suggesting gender-based differences in economic perspectives. This gender gap may reflect broader patterns wherein women often advocate for economic systems that prioritise community wellbeing and social equity.

Māori with sole Māori ethnic affiliations reported greater opposition to capitalism ($t(3157) = 5.34$, $p < .001$; $d = 0.20$) and support for government regulation ($t(2917.06) = 6.36$, $p < .001$; $d = 0.22$) than Māori with multiple ethnic affiliations. This suggests that stronger identification with singular Māori identity may align with more collectivist economic perspectives.

There was no evidence to suggest that Māori living in rural dwellings or urban dwellings differed in their attitudes towards capitalism ($t(2893) = -0.25$, $p = .805$; $d = -0.01$) or government regulation ($t(2939) = -1.72$, $p = .086$; $d = -0.06$),

indicating that identity and socio-economic factors transcend spatial contexts in shaping Māori economic perspectives.



Note: Higher scores reflect higher opposition to capitalism and support for government regulation.

Figure 1: Mean Levels of Opposition to Capitalism and Support for Government Regulation by Age Group

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations Between Variables Included in our Analyses

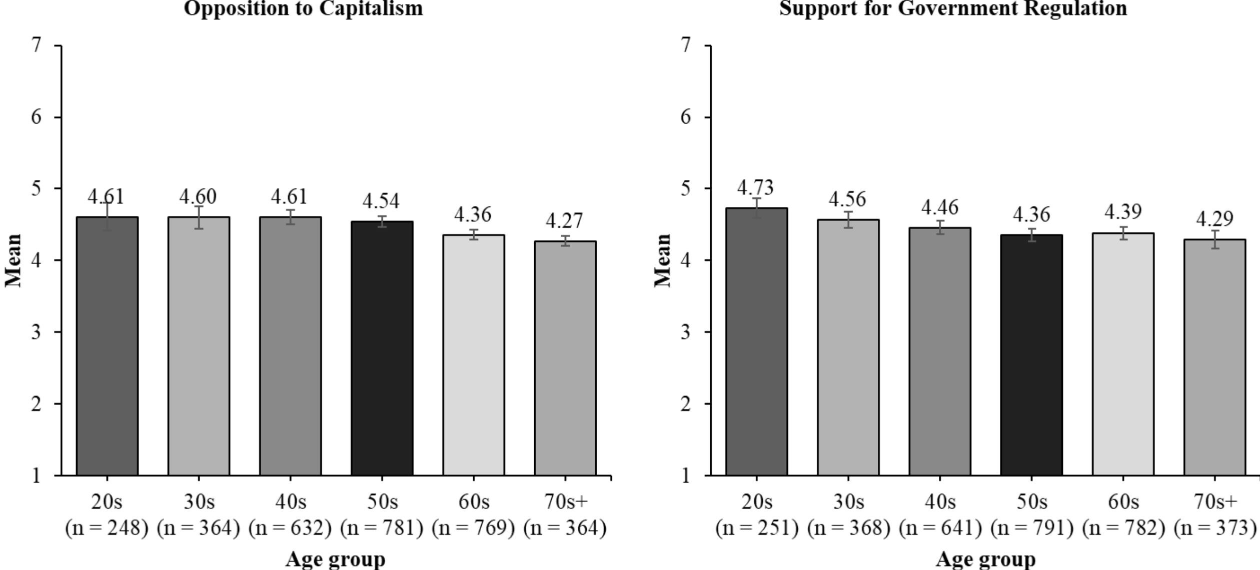
Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Gender	--												
Age	0.14***	--											
Sole Māori affiliation	0.02	0.16***	--										
Household income[a]	0.09***	−0.20***	−0.10***	--									
Urban	0.01	−0.15***	−0.05*	0.17***	--								
Sole trader[b]	0.06**	0.14***	−0.06**	−0.01	−0.01	--							
Employer[b]	0.10***	0.09***	−0.04	0.13***	−0.04	−0.09***	--						
Education	−0.12***	−0.24***	−0.11***	0.29***	0.12***	−0.01	−0.06***	--					
Conservatism	0.06**	0.15***	0.10***	−0.04	−0.08***	−0.01	0.03	−0.20***	--				
Iwi importance	−0.07***	0.10***	0.34***	−0.07**	−0.02	−0.02	−0.07***	0.04	−0.02	--			
CEAIE	−0.12***	−0.03	0.28***	−0.04	−0.03	−0.06**	−0.07***	0.13***	−0.05***	0.52***	--		
Opposition to capitalism	−0.08***	−0.07***	0.10***	−0.15***	0.00	−0.08***	−0.12***	0.07***	−0.18***	0.18***	0.18***	--	
Support for government regulation	−0.06***	−0.08***	0.11***	−0.11***	0.03	−0.09***	−0.17***	0.10***	−0.26***	0.23***	0.19***	0.37***	--
N	3,080	3,240	3,241	1,475	2,974	2,281	2,281	2,724	2,952	3,117	3,231	3,159	3,207
Mean	0.36	52.61	0.38	1.02	0.52	0.13	0.05	4.69	3.66	4.98	4.64	4.49	4.43
SD	0.48	14.13	0.49	0.92	0.50	0.33	0.23	2.86	1.28	1.91	1.46	1.64	1.22
Range	0–1	21–85	0–1	0–11.44	0–1	0–1	0–1	0–10	1–7	1–7	1–7	1–7	1–7
ω	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	0.77	--	0.77

Notes:

[a] Divided by $100,0000. [b] Dummy coded (0 = no, 1 = yes).

$^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

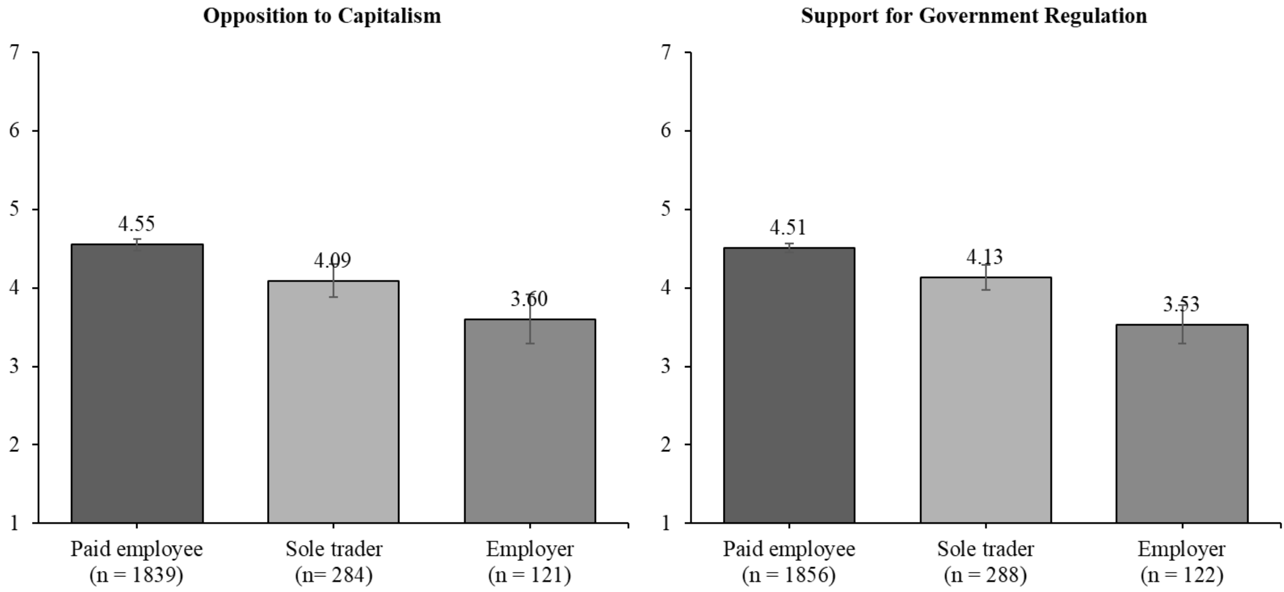
Figure 2 displays attitudes towards capitalism and government regulation by age. These results revealed a small difference in opposition to capitalism ($F(5) = 3.75$, $p = .002$; $\eta = 0.08$) and support for government regulation ($F(5) = 5.73$, $p < .001$; $\eta = 0.09$) across age groups, with younger age groups reporting greater opposition to capitalism and support for government regulation than their older counterparts. This generational difference may reflect the changing economic conditions, educational experiences, and political climates that have shaped younger Māori perspectives on economic systems.



Note: Higher scores reflect higher opposition to capitalism and support for government regulation.

Figure 2: Mean Levels of Opposition to Capitalism and Support for Government Regulation by Age Group

Figure 3 displays attitudes towards capitalism and government regulation across employment types. Attitudes towards capitalism ($F(2) = 27.96$, $p < .001$; $\eta = 0.16$) and government regulation ($F(2) = 45.45$, $p < .001$; $\eta = 0.20$) differed significantly across employment types, with paid employees reporting greater opposition to capitalism and support for government regulation than sole traders and employers. This pattern likely reflects employees' experiences within hierarchical economic structures where they have limited control over resources and decision-making processes.



Note: Higher scores reflect higher opposition to capitalism and support for government regulation.

Figure 3: Mean Levels of Opposition to Capitalism and Support for Government Regulation by Employment Type

Multiple Regression Analyses

Opposition to Capitalism

Table 2 displays the results of our multiple regression analyses. Our results for opposition to capitalism revealed that people with lower annual household incomes ($b = -0.27$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$) reported greater opposition to capitalism than those with higher household incomes. This finding aligns with research on economic vulnerability and redistributive preferences, suggesting that material circumstances shape perceptions of economic systems.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Opposition to Capitalism and Support for Government Regulation

Variable	Opposition to Capitalism					Support for Government Regulation				
	b	SE	*ß*	*t*	*p-value*	*b*	SE	*ß*	*t*	*p-value*
Intercept	4.89	0.31	—	15.92	< .001	4.79	0.22	—	21.58	< .001
Gender[a]	−0.07	0.10	−0.02	−0.71	.481	0.01	0.07	0.00	0.13	.894
Age	−0.01	0.00	−0.06	−1.78	.076	0.00	0.00	−0.05	−1.59	.113
Sole Māori affiliation[b]	0.14	0.10	0.04	1.39	.165	0.13	0.08	0.05	1.74	.082
Household income[c]	−0.27	0.05	−0.15***	−5.01	< .001	−0.15	0.04	−0.11***	−3.79	< .001
Urban[d]	0.02	0.09	0.01	0.24	.810	0.04	0.07	0.02	0.64	.519
Sole trader[e]	−0.38	0.14	−0.08**	−2.67	.008	−0.31	0.10	−0.09**	−3.05	.002
Employer[e]	−0.60	0.21	−0.08**	−2.84	.005	−0.71	0.15	−0.13***	−4.65	< .001
Education	0.03	0.02	0.05	1.57	.116	0.02	0.01	0.06	1.82	.070
Conservatism	−0.21	0.04	−0.16***	−5.55	< .001	−0.23	0.03	−0.24***	−8.42	< .001
Iwi importance	0.10	0.03	0.11***	3.34	< .001	0.11	0.02	0.17***	4.97	< .001
CEAIE	0.08	0.04	0.07*	2.19	.029	0.05	0.03	0.05	1.64	.102
R^2	0.12***					0.17***				

Notes: [a] Dummy coded (0 = women; 1 = men). [b] Dummy coded (0 = no; 1 = yes). [c] Household income divided by $100,000. [d] Dummy coded (0 = rural; 1 = urban). [e] Dummy coded (0 = no, 1 = yes).
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Political conservatism was negatively associated with opposition to capitalism ($b = -0.21$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$); that is, political conservatives held more positive attitudes towards capitalism than liberals, consistent with right-wing economic ideologies that emphasise market freedom and minimal state intervention.

After adjusting for these associations, our results revealed that paid employees reported greater opposition to capitalism than sole traders ($b = -0.38$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = .008$) and employers ($b = -0.60$, $SE = 0.21$, $p = .005$). Sole traders and employers, as economic actors with greater autonomy and direct engagement with market systems, may foster perspectives that value entrepreneurial independence and fewer regulatory constraints.

Moreover, higher iwi importance ($b = 0.10$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$) and CEAIE ($b = 0.08$, $SE = 0.04$, $p = .029$) positively predicted opposition to capitalism. This suggests that deeper connections to tribal identities align with economic perspectives that challenge individualistic market approaches and favour systems that protect collective interests. Cultural confidence strengthens critical perspectives on capitalist systems, indicating that Māori who deemed their iwi as important to their self-concept, or who had the resources to appropriately engage with Māori culture, reported greater opposition to capitalism than Māori who did not.

Support for Government Regulation

Turning to government regulation, Table 2 shows that household income ($b = -0.15$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$) and political conservatism ($b = -0.23$, SE = 0.03, $p < .001$) predicted lower support for government regulation. Lower-income Māori expressed greater support for government regulation, while conservative political views correlated with less support for government regulation.

After adjusting for these associations, Māori who were paid employees reported greater support for government regulation than sole traders ($b = -0.31$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .002$) and employers ($b = -0.71$, $SE = 0.15$, $p < .001$). The employment position emerged as a robust predictor of attitudes toward regulation, with paid employees demonstrating significantly stronger support for government regulation compared to both sole traders and employers.

Moreover, Māori who deemed their iwi important to their self-concept reported greater support for government regulation than those who did not ($b = 0.11$, SE = 0.02, $p < .001$). However, CEAIE was not significantly associated with support for government regulation ($b = 0.05$, SE = 0.03, $p = .102$), suggesting differential effects of cultural confidence on economic perspectives. While cultural identity significantly influenced support for government regulation, this relationship was specifically tied to iwi identification rather than cultural efficacy.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate the complex interplay of cultural, occupational, and demographic factors that produce heterogeneous economic attitudes among Māori, challenging monolithic representations of Māori perspectives. Our analyses revealed multifaceted patterns in the way Māori attitudes toward capitalism and government regulation vary across different population segments, with three primary domains of influence emerging from the data: cultural identity factors, employment position, and demographic characteristics.

Discussion

Cultural Identity and Economic Attitudes

Contemporary discourse frequently presents Māori experiences through a cultural lens, suggesting relatively uniform perspectives and values within the group. However, our findings demonstrate that while cultural identity shapes Māori economic perspectives, these attitudes vary considerably based on employment position, gender, age, and ethnic affiliation.

Participants who rated their iwi as more important to their identity expressed stronger opposition to capitalism and greater support for government regulation. This aligns with the economy of mana framework (Dell et al., 2022; Hēnare, 2009), which suggests that stronger cultural connections may orient individuals toward collective prosperity rather than individual accumulation. Similarly, higher cultural efficacy—confidence in cultural knowledge and practices—correlated with perspectives on capitalism that were more critical, supporting research by Grimes et al. (2015) indicating that Māori tend to prioritise environmental concerns over economic growth.

Employment Position as Economic Mediator

Employment position emerged as a particularly robust predictor of economic attitudes. The significant differences between the categories of paid employees, sole traders, and employers highlighted the way economic positioning mediated perspectives on capitalism. Māori employees demonstrated considerably stronger opposition to capitalism and support for government regulation compared to self-employed individuals and employers. This pattern reflects the finding in Houkamau, Lilly, Newth et al. (2024) that self-employment offers Māori greater autonomy and alignment with cultural values such as tino rangatiratanga, potentially explaining why self-employed Māori hold more favourable views of market systems than their employed counterparts.

Demographic Influences on Economic Perspectives

The significant influence of demographic characteristics further illustrates the heterogeneity of Māori economic perspectives. The gender gap in attitudes—with women expressing more critical views of capitalism—may reflect broader societal patterns identified by Seguino (2020), while also suggesting specific Māori contexts where, as Mikaere (2017) argues, colonial disruption of traditional gender balances continues to shape economic experiences. Age-based differences indicate generational shifts in economic outlook, with younger participants demonstrating more critical perspectives than older generations. The relationship between sole Māori ethnic affiliation and stronger opposition to capitalism suggests that strength of identification with Māori identity may influence economic attitudes, although this relationship merits further investigation.

Our results empirically support Himona's (2013) critique that essentialised representations of a singular Māori world view fail to capture the diversity of lived experiences among contemporary Māori. In this current study, the substantial variation in economic attitudes reflects the concept that the BERL data illustrates: there are diverse economic realities for Māori, where different positioning within economic structures shapes perspectives on those very structures.

While recognising this diversity, our findings suggest that cultural identity factors influence economic attitudes for many Māori, though not universally or uniformly. This indicates that traditional Māori values may remain relevant to contemporary economic thinking for some individuals, while others may prioritise different values based on their unique circumstances and experiences.

Limitations

This study provides insights into the diversity of Māori attitudes towards capitalism and government regulation of business, but with some limitations. First, while our sample size was substantial (N = 3,241), the response rate for the original MIFAS sample was relatively low at 7.02% (Houkamau et al., 2019), followed by a retention rate of 46.2% for Wave 2. This raises concerns about self-selection bias, where those with stronger opinions about economic systems or stronger cultural identification might have been more likely to participate in the MIFAS survey.

Our measure of opposition to capitalism relied on a single item ("Capitalism has generally had a negative impact on the way that we live"), which may not have captured the multidimensional nature of attitudes toward economic systems. Capitalism encompasses various aspects—free markets, private ownership, profit motives, and competition—and participants might hold nuanced views about different elements rather than opposing or supporting the system as a whole. Similarly, while our measure of support for government regulation used three items, it primarily focused on business regulation and income redistribution. This approach may not fully capture the breadth of regulatory preferences, particularly regarding environmental protection, cultural safeguards, or treaty-based regulations that may be especially relevant to Māori.

These methodological limitations reflect a trade-off that we made in our research design. Māori have been found to participate in surveys at much lower rates than other New Zealanders (Fink et al., 2011; Manatū Hauora│Ministry of Health, 2017) and are more likely to remove themselves from survey-based studies over time (Satherley et al., 2015). Because of these factors, we carefully considered every item in the 2020 MIFAS and aimed to reduce response fatigue in our participants, in the hope that they would complete our entire survey. The length and breadth of our questionnaire meant we allocated single items to measure certain variables, including attitudes to capitalism. While this approach leaves our study open to criticism, it has been argued (Hoeppner et al., 2011) that a short scale might represent an improvement on a lengthy scale, particularly where there are ethical reasons to reduce scale items, such as minimising participant burden in time-consuming surveys. Others have acknowledged that single-item measures provide a balance between practical needs and psychometric concerns when longer scales are not feasible (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; Jovanović & Lazić, 2018).

Another limitation is that in the MMM-ICE framework (Matika et al., 2020; Sibley & Houkamau, 2013), the CEAIE measure primarily assesses confidence and capability in Māori cultural contexts, rather than dimensions of cultural identification that could influence economic attitudes, such as political consciousness or engagement with contemporary Māori economic institutions. Additionally, in this study, our measure of iwi importance asked about its subjective importance but did not assess actual engagement. Stronger associations might emerge if we were to measure active participation in iwi economic development rather than just psychological identification.

Further, our categorisation of employment status (paid employee, sole trader, employer) may overlook important variations within these groups. For instance, employees in different sectors or with varying levels of job security might hold diverse economic perspectives.

Lastly, our findings are specific to the Aotearoa New Zealand context and may not generalise to Indigenous populations in other countries with different colonial histories, treaty arrangements, and contemporary economic circumstances. Despite these limitations, this study makes a significant contribution by empirically demonstrating the diversity of Māori economic perspectives and identifying key factors that shape these attitudes.

Conclusion

This research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Māori economic perspectives by empirically demonstrating the heterogeneity that exists within Māori attitudes toward capitalism and government regulation. Our findings challenge oversimplified cultural narratives in three critical ways.

First, we provide evidence against the essentialisation of Māori identity in economic discourse. The variations in economic attitudes based on cultural identity factors (iwi importance and cultural efficacy), employment position (employee, sole trader, employer), and demographic characteristics (gender, age, ethnic affiliation) reveal that Māori navigate capitalism through diverse and complex frameworks that cannot be reduced to a singular cultural perspective.

Second, our findings highlight the way the current discourse obscures class divisions within Māori communities. The significant differences between paid employees, sole traders, and employers demonstrate that economic positioning fundamentally shapes perspectives on capitalism and regulation.

Third, our results illuminate the fluid ways individuals navigate between cultural identification and economic realities. The complex interplay between iwi importance, employment position, and economic attitudes challenges Moran's (2015) observation that capitalism repackages identity-related differences as a personal choice. For many Māori, economic attitudes remain meaningfully connected to cultural identification, suggesting that identity continues to function as a framework for critiquing and engaging with economic systems.

While recognising diversity within Māori communities, we acknowledge the strategic value of collective identity in political contexts. This is not contradictory; rather, it reflects the way Māori identity operates at multiple levels simultaneously: the broader ethnic category remains relevant for Treaty relationships with the Crown, while diverse expressions within it reflect the richness of Māori realities. This approach, termed strategic essentialism, enables both protection of collective rights and recognition of diverse economic expressions. By recognising diversity within Māori economic perspectives, we can move beyond binary frameworks that position Māori as either entirely aligned with or opposed to capitalist systems. Instead, this research supports emerging scholarship that views Indigenous economic engagement as creative adaptation, where Māori transform economic systems to reflect their values and collective aspirations while navigating the realities of contemporary capitalism in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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About the authors

Professor Carla Houkamau is a Professor in the Department of Management and International Business. She is of Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tahu and Pākehā/New Zealand European descent.

Dr Kieren Lilly is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Institute for Social Science Research at the University of Queensland. His research examines experiences of inequality and discrimination, with a particular emphasis on the relationships between social identity, health, political ideology, and collective action. For example, his doctoral thesis examined the causes, consequences, and development of perceived relative deprivation over time, focusing on how different ethnic groups respond to perceived inequality. Kieren is also passionate about LGBTQIA+ research, leading and supporting projects examining (a) the relationships between identity, health, and well-being among LGBTQIA+ populations and (b) attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ people and social policy.

Dr Kiri Dell is a Senior lecturer in the Business School at the University of Auckland. She is a Ngāti Porou woman living in her tribal territory of Ruatōria. Her main passion is working with whānau and activating their aspirations for whenua Māori. She holds various director, trustee and board roles across a number of organisations, and is a chair of the Indigenous Caucus of the Academy of Management. She has a lively and large whānau, which enables her to play the many roles of mum, aunty, daughter, sister, cousin and niece. Kiri is working towards her ultimate goal of progressing Indigenous entrepreneurship and prosperity.

Dr Amber Nicholson is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Auckland's Faculty of Business and Economics - He Manga Tauhokohoko with a long association with the Dame Mira Szászy Research Centre. She completed her PhD in 2021, exploring ways to enhance Māori wellbeing through recognising ancestral landscapes in business operations. Her research interests include Māori concepts of wellbeing, economies of mana, and kaitiakitanga.

Dr Nimbus Staniland is a Senior Lecturer in Management at the University of Auckland's Faculty of Business and Economics - He Manga Tauhokohoko with over 10 years' experience in tertiary education. Her research focuses on how Māori and other Indigenous research methodologies can be applied to workplace experiences and the organisation of work, developing theoretical frameworks particular to Aotearoa New Zealand.

Professor Jason Mika is Tūhoe, Ngāti Awa, Whakatōhea, Ngāti Kahungunu. Jason is a Professor of Māori Management, Associate Dean Māori, and Co-Director of the Dame Mira Szászy Centre at the University of Auckland Business School. Jason's research, teaching, writing, and practice centres on Indigenous business philosophy in multiple sites, sectors, and scales, including Indigenous trade, tourism, agribusiness, and the marine economy. In 2015, Jason completed a PhD in Māori entrepreneurship at Massey University. In 2019, Jason was a Fulbright-Ngā Pae o Te Māramatanga senior scholar at Stanford University's Woods Institute for the Environment and the University of Arizona's Native Nations Institute. Jason is a member of the Academy of Management, Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management, and Te Apārangi Royal Society of New Zealand. Prior to academia, Jason was a management consultant and policy analyst in Māori economic development. Jason's research has influenced several areas of public policy, including trade, environment, and statistics.

Professor Chris Sibley is in the School of Psychology at the University of Auckland. He has published more than 400 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, and is the editor of the Cambridge Handbook of the Psychology of Prejudice, and the Cambridge Handbook of Political Psychology. Chris grew up in Lower Hutt, and completed his PhD at Victoria University of Wellington in 2005. Chris is the Principal Investigator for the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS). He teaches in research methods and social psychology. Outside of work, Chris admits to being an avid reader of science fiction novels and keen trail runner.

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Indigenous Women's Inclusion in the Workplace: Setting the Blak Agenda

Sharlene Leroy-Dyer (Garigal/Darug, Awabakal, Wiradjuri)[1]

[1]The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Abstract: For generations, Indigenous women have resisted and confronted colonial systems that marginalise us in every sphere of life, including the workplace. Employment inequity is not a neutral gap; it is the outcome of ongoing colonisation, embedded in structures, systems, and organisational cultures. Using Indigenous Feminist Theory, Intersectionality, and Critical Race Theory through an Indigenous standpoint, this research centres Blak women's voices to expose systemic racism, reveal the weight of cultural load, and highlight pathways to self-determined, culturally safe workplaces. Storytelling and yarning—as sovereign knowledge practices—are the heart of this study. Through these stories, we see not only harm, but leadership, resistance, and strength.

Keywords: racism, whiteness, race, power and privilege, inclusivity, intersectionality

Terminology Statement

In this paper, I use the term Indigenous Peoples, this represents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia, Indigenous Peoples worldwide (where applicable) and when used in already written literature and government policy. In addition, the terms Aboriginal and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are used where needed, as is First Nations. The term Peoples is used to signify that Indigenous Peoples are not one people or Nation, but a collective of Peoples and Nations.

Lower case in western is used intentionally to decentre colonial linguistic dominant discourse (Lenette, 2022).

Situating Myself

As an Aboriginal person, it is important for me to situate myself within this research, as this has a significant bearing on how the research is approached. Standpoint is unique to an individual Indigenous researcher; it has to be actively developed as a particular form of investigation (Nakata, 2002). My standpoint is determined by several things such as my relationality, my life experiences, my age, my gender, my sexual orientation, my community, my Country, my skin colour, my political affiliations, and how I see myself in relation to society. For example, I am a Garigal/Awabakal/Darug woman, living on Gubbi Gubbi Country. I am an Urban Aboriginal woman who has fair skin and am not automatically recognised as Aboriginal and, at times, I have to legitimise my Aboriginality. I grew up in the western suburbs of Sydney on Darug Country. I come from the most socio-economically disadvantaged group in Australia. I am 61 years old, was married and am now widowed, and I have a 36-year-old son. My cultural identity as constructed from all of the above is fragmented, however, I live in a contemporary world where culture cannot stay the same; it is dynamic and has many configurations (Fredericks, 2004). All of this and more shapes my standpoint and my research.

I identify as an Aboriginal (Blak) woman, and I see things from an Aboriginal woman's perspective, which will not be the same as any other person. Therefore, the way I see and perform research is unique to my Aboriginal standpoint.

Introduction

"The track behind us is littered with the relics of policies, programs and projects that failed ... mainly because they did not include Indigenous people in making the decisions" (Senator Patrick Dodson, cited in Commonwealth of Australia, 2022, p.4).

Colonisation has shaped every aspect of Indigenous Peoples engagement with the labour market. For Indigenous women, the weight of both racism and sexism compounds this reality. The disadvantage we face is not accidental or individual; it is structured into the very systems that govern workplaces.

Critical Race, Indigenous Feminist, and decolonising scholars discuss ways that global, political, cultural, economic, and political systems and structures of the past 500 years precipitate racialised contemporary realities (Dar et al., 2021), and, despite the vast intellectual history, the academy remains largely devoid of these debates. For more than 30 years, feminist scholars of colour have argued that much feminist scholarship was actually about white, middle-class women, ignoring the reality that the category gender is fundamentally complicated by class, race/ethnicity, and other differences (Acker, 2006).

The post-colonisation history of Australia is premised on white settler entitlement and perceptions of cultural superiority that justifies and normalises systemic exclusion of, oppression of, and racism towards Indigenous Peoples in Australia. In Australia, Indigenous Peoples are the most politically, socially, and economically disadvantaged group in many areas, especially in education and employment. However, the policies enacted to redress this have done little to address the disadvantage that Indigenous Peoples face (Davis, 2015; Dawson et al., 2020; Dillon, 2021; Henry & Leroy-Dyer, 2025; Leroy-Dyer, 2022). This is partially due to successive federal and state governments ignoring the dominant political philosophy of self-determination held by Indigenous Peoples. Racist policies and practices still exist within colonial structures, systems, and workplaces, alongside the wilful denial of Australia's racist past (Leroy-Dyer, 2022; Katz, 2017).

In 2009, the Australian Government announced a new initiative, Closing the Gap, to reform and improve the disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in a variety of areas. One such area was employment, committing to halving the employment gap within a decade, that is, by 2018. This target was never met. The interconnecting nature of race, class, and gender have created interdependent and overlapping systems of discrimination and disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Within the colonial structures, systems, and workplaces exists racist, sexist, and social hierarchical policies (where members vary in their level of power, influence, skill, or dominance) and practices that hinder inclusion (Leroy-Dyer, 2016; Leroy-Dyer, 2022; Leroy-Dyer & Menzel, 2023).

This paper is grounded in Blak sovereignty and Indigenous standpoint. It centres Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing as the foundation for understanding and addressing workplace exclusion. Rather than positioning Indigenous women as subjects of deficit, this work affirms our agency, leadership, and vision for transformation.

Literature Review

This research draws from three intersecting frameworks:

- Indigenous Feminist Theory highlights sovereignty, self-determination, and the gendered impacts of colonisation.
- Intersectionality illuminates how race, gender, class and coloniality intersect to shape workplace experiences.
- Critical Race Theory exposes racism as systemic and embedded in organisational structures.

These are not abstract tools applied to Indigenous women's experiences; they are ways of naming and theorising what Blak women already know. Together, they provide a critical lens for challenging the structures that maintain exclusion.

Indigenous Feminist Theory

Indigenous Feminist Theory centres Indigenous sovereignty, decolonisation, human rights, and social justice goals that empower Indigenous women (Liddle, 2014; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). It analyses power dynamics both within Indigenous communities and in the colonial structures that shape our lives. Unlike mainstream feminism, it prioritises self-determination and community advancement rather than individual empowerment, highlighting the distinct barriers faced at the intersection of race and gender (Fredericks, 2010; Liddle, 2014; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Snyder, 2014).

Indigenous Feminist Theory foregrounds issues such as the devastating consequences of colonisation, the Stolen Generations [1], forced sterilisation, stolen wages, racism, dispossession, and the struggle for land rights. These

[1] In Australia, thousands of Aboriginal children were forcibly removed by governments, churches, and welfare bodies to be raised in institutions, fostered out, or adopted by non-Indigenous families, or used as slave labour. They are known as the Stolen Generations (AIATSIS, n.d.)

collective experiences have produced different priorities and political goals for Indigenous women compared to those reflected in mainstream feminist movements (Arvin et al., 2013; Campbell, 2022; Green, 2007; Smith, 2011).

This paradigm critically examines how gender injustice against Indigenous women emerges from colonial policies and patriarchal practices that embed gendered power imbalances (Susack, 2015). Indigenous feminists have long critiqued mainstream feminism for privileging individualism over communal values (Arvin et al., 2013; Liddle, 2014; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Snyder, 2014; Susack, 2015). As Waterman, cited in Campbell (2022), observes, mainstream feminism is "whitestream", focused on gender equality alone, whereas Indigenous feminism centres principles of inclusivity, responsibility, and relationships.

Moreton-Robinson (2000) powerfully argues that white feminists constitute the normative standard of womanhood, benefiting from colonisation. Moreton-Robinson's development of Indigenous women's standpoint theory (2013) addresses the limitations of dominant feminist frameworks, highlighting how Indigenous women's experiences are shaped by complex intersections of race, gender, history, and sovereignty (Standiland et al., 2024). Indigenous Feminist Theory, therefore, affirms a deep connection to Country, Ancestors and all living beings—an element absent in traditional feminist thought (Campbell, 2022; Moreton-Robinson, 2013).

Feminist political thought acknowledges that women's experiences differ and that hierarchies arise from gendered othering (Banerjee, 2016), yet many Indigenous women remain invisible in these frameworks. Similarly, hooks (2014) similarly critiques the way racism, sexism, and class exploitation marginalise Black women, with mainstream feminism often centring whiteness over solidarity. Fredericks (2010) notes that, despite broader women's rights movements, Aboriginal women's societal and economic positioning remains stagnant. This reality reinforces the need to challenge entrenched white patriarchal power structures that continue to exclude Indigenous women (Liddle, 2014).

Intersectionality Theory

As an Aboriginal (Blak) woman, I experience discrimination along multiple axes, particularly race and gender. Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), explains how overlapping systems of power produce unique forms of marginalisation, often rendering Black women—and, by extension, Blak women—invisible (Stewart, 2019). Intersectionality recognises that people's lives are shaped not by a single axis of inequality but by multiple intersecting identities, such as Indigeneity, race, gender, class, sexuality, and age (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

This framework enables a deeper understanding of how structural oppression operates across these intersections. Olsen (2018) notes that Intersectionality provides a critical lens for exploring the relational nature of power and identity. In Indigenous contexts, it acknowledges how colonialism intensifies gendered oppression, making Indigenous Feminist analyses inherently intersectional (Snyder, 2014).

Intersectionality can be both a theoretical approach and an analytic tool for examining how identities interact with structures of power. As Banerjee (2016) suggests, Intersectional Indegenic Feminism offers a framework for understanding Indigenous women's lived realities while advancing principles of equity, rights, agency, and empowerment.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory provides a framework for analysing race, power, and privilege in systems and institutions (Rabaka, 2022). Originating in the United States legal academy during the civil rights era, Critical Race Theory examines how racism is embedded in legal, political, and social structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Watson, 2022). It exposes the limitations of traditional liberal approaches that overlook how racism is reproduced daily and structurally (Brown & Jackson, 2022).

Derrick Bell's foundational scholarship established Critical Race Theory as both an academic and activist movement. Beyond law, it has informed disciplines such as education, psychology, and philosophy, where it is used to interrogate whether western thought itself is racially structured (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

A key tenet of Critical Race Theory is that racism is a permanent feature of everyday life, manifesting in both overt actions and subtle gestures. Anti-discrimination laws alone cannot address the harm it causes to Indigenous Peoples (Watson, 2022). Critical Race Theory positions race as a power system that grants privilege to some while disadvantaging others (Wildman & Davis, 2013). It is not only descriptive but transformative, seeking to expose racial hierarchies and dismantle them.

Why These Theories

Twila L. Perry (2010) observes that "the failure of Feminist Theory to engage the intersection of race and gender results in lost opportunities for women from diverse backgrounds to engage more fully in collaborative thinking and action" (p.

252). These frameworks, when brought together, are mutually enriching. They allow us to confront the complexities of identity, the meaning of equality, and to build shared investments in common struggles.

Intersectionality has been applied across multiple disciplines and has significantly advanced Indigenous Feminist and Critical Race Theory scholarship. Its relevance for Blak women in the workplace is profound (Leroy-Dyer & Menzel, 2023). Together, Critical Race Theory, Indigenous Feminist Theory, and decolonising scholarship reveal how global, political, cultural, and economic systems over the past five centuries have created and sustained racialised contemporary realities (Dar et al., 2021). Despite this vast intellectual history, these debates remain marginal within mainstream academic spaces.

Addressing systemic inequality requires rejecting narrow, class-based frameworks in favour of contextualised, socio-structural analyses that foreground race, gender, class, and their intersections. This integrated theoretical approach is critical for understanding and transforming the world of work for Indigenous women.

Indigenous Disadvantage in Australia

Indigenous Peoples are not a homogenous group. Prior to invasion, there were over 600 Nations throughout Australia, each with their own territory, language, and customs (Leroy-Dyer, 2010; 2022). Colonisation has left an indelible mark on Indigenous Peoples, who have experienced economic, psychological, and cultural dislocation with a history of discriminatory practices that have led to a legacy of economic disadvantage (Leroy-Dyer, 2021).

Labour Market and Employment Disadvantage

The labour of Indigenous Peoples in Australia has been exploited since the early years of colonisation. This exploitation has taken various forms such as non-payment and underpayment of wages, indentured labour, withholding and mismanagement of wages, stolen wages, and compulsory redirection of welfare payments and other entitlements (Anthony, 2013; Gunstone, 2017; Leroy-Dyer, 2018; Leroy-Dyer, 2021). As a consequence of this exploitation and discrimination, Indigenous Peoples' labour market outcomes are well below those of non-Indigenous Australians (Biddle et al., 2013; Leroy-Dyer, 2022).

With relatively low rates of employment, Indigenous Peoples have the highest unemployment rate in Australia. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2021), only 54.1% of Indigenous Peoples were employed, and non-Indigenous people were 1.4 times more likely to be employed. Dennysmith and Loosemore (2020) note that the employment rate for Indigenous Peoples "has improved by less than a percentage point in a decade". In 2021, the unemployment rate for Indigenous Peoples aged 15 years and over was 12.3%, compared to the unemployment rate for non-Indigenous Australians at 4.3% (ABS, 2021).

Closing the Gap on Indigenous employment disadvantage has been an enormous failure (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022). For instance, Target 7: By 2031, increase the proportion of Indigenous youth (15–24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67% is improving, but not on track. Additionally, Target 8: By 2031, increase the proportion of Indigenous Peoples aged 25–64 who are employed to 62% is not on track (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

Moreover, when Indigenous Peoples are employed, they experience structural racism, discrimination, unconscious bias, sexism, shadeism, culturism, pigeonholing, stereotyping, lack of career opportunities, and exclusion among other things which create an invisible barrier or "white ceiling" (Leon, 2022; Plater et al., 2020) This white ceiling impacts on wellbeing, job satisfaction, career development, and career progression, and often leads to Blak women exiting the workplace. The few that break through the white ceiling demonstrate a form of cultural agility or "cross-cultural code-switching" (Jordan & Leroy-Dyer, 2023; Molinsky, 1999, 2007).

Racism has been identified as one of the determinants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing at a national level (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022; Bennett, 2014), since racism has an effect on a person's mental health and wellbeing. Racism towards Indigenous Peoples has resulted in incidents of depression and anxiety; it can decrease life satisfaction, increase stress and negative emotional reactions, and has been linked to suicide (Bennett, 2014; Paradies, 2016; Paradies et al., 2015).

Shadeism, a result of colonisation, is a racial stratification system that privileges lighter-skinned Indigenous Peoples over those with darker skin (Hunter, 2007; Plater et al., 2020). Shadeism can cause fair-skinned people to experience

racism twofold, by being overlooked in favour of white people, then being disregarded by Indigenous Peoples as they are not considered sufficiently cultured. In their study, Plater et al. (2020, p.494) found "skin shade and cultural and community connections are powerful and interrelated determinants of workplace success and failure", and that discrimination based on skin shade was common, especially in the workplace.

Culturism is regarded by race scholars as the functional equivalent of racism, whereby people are discriminated against on the basis of cultural norms (Bonilla-Silva, 2013), constituting "the negative evaluation of cultures deemed different from the dominant culture and can be employed to fill the gap left behind by discredited notions of racial inferiority" (Plater et al. 2020, p. 495). Culturalism isolates those within a workplace who exist inside the dominant group from those who are not in the dominant group—outsiders, similar to insider–outsider theory (Schinkel, 2013). Plater et al. (2020, p. 495) found that while workplaces seem "culturally appropriate", white colleagues and managers used culturalism to argue that Indigenous employees displayed "self-destructive behaviours" by prioritising cultural obligations over workplace deadlines.

Cross-cultural code-switching is the act of modifying one's behaviour to be seen as conforming appropriately to the cultural norms of the other dominating culture Jordan & Leroy-Dyer, 2023; Molinsky, 2007. Cross-cultural code-switching is most effective when used strategically to achieve a particular outcome. Cross-cultural code-switching requires a person to function appropriately in a variety of foreign cultural situations, outside of the cultural settings which they were born and raised, often exhibiting behaviour which is in conflict with their own cultural norms, values, and beliefs (Molinsky, 2007). While the "decision to engage in code-switching behaviour is a conscious one, it is a decision that comes with a potential psychological cost, particularly as it requires operating in conflict with deeply held values" (Jordan & Leroy-Dyer, 2023, p. 192; Molinsky 1999, 2007).

In their study, Plater et al. (2020) found that Aboriginal people "sold their soul" so they would "fit" within a workplace. One participant stated, "You've heard the term 'coconuts', that's what that refers to. The white managers will welcome you in if you look black but act white" (Plater et al., 2020, p. 495). The study, which was undertaken between 2014 and 2016, conducted narrative interviews to understand what it meant to be a mature-age Indigenous university graduate. Twenty-six graduates aged between 30 and 60 were interviewed; all were working while studying and "all were in roles where identifying as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person was required or strongly preferred due to the nature of their work" (Plater et al. 2020, p. 490).

The participants in this study completed their first university degree as mature-age students, as, due to colonisation, there were no opportunities for them to complete higher education while young. Within a historical context, the study participants' post-degree workplace experiences, according to Plater et al. (2020), "are inextricably linked to Australia's colonial past" (p. 490). The participants reported a complete disrespect and disregard for their qualifications, experience, culture, and community in their workplaces. Participants noted that racism was part of their everyday work life, where people acted to undermine and control them.

Racism manifests itself in numerous ways in the workplace. Racism can be direct or indirect, overt or covert, between individuals, on an interpersonal level, or embedded in organisations' policies, procedures, and practices. Racism can include things such as being treated unfairly because of a person's "Aboriginality", racial slurs and comments, appearance racism, being ignored, violence, lack of career or training opportunities, or having racist materials in the workplace (just to name a few) (Cooms et al., 2025; Jones et al., 2023; Leroy-Dyer, 2016; Leroy-Dyer & Menzel, 2023; Plater et al., 2020).

Institutional and structured racism has long-term effects on Indigenous Peoples (Leroy-Dyer, 2016), with studies finding that more than half of Indigenous Peoples experience racism in the workplace, which impacts on wellbeing and job satisfaction (Brown et al., 2020). Ferdinand et al. (2013) found that, of 755 Indigenous Peoples surveyed in Victoria, almost every one of them had experienced racism in the previous 12 months. Biddle et al. (2013) assert that racism could lead to Indigenous Peoples decreasing their labour supply to avoid racial discrimination.

The *Gari Yala (Speak the Truth)* report (Brown et al., 2020), surveyed 1,033 Indigenous Peoples from around Australia about their experiences of racism in the workplace. The results of the survey were alarming. Some of the findings include:

- 28% of respondents felt culturally unsafe at work
- 38% reported being treated unfairly because of their Aboriginality
- 44% reported hearing racial slurs
- 59% experienced racism.

Further, Indigenous Peoples were:

- 2.5 times less likely to be satisfied in their jobs
- 3 times less likely to recommend their place of work to other Indigenous Peoples
- 2 times as likely to look for alternative work within the next year
- less likely to feel supported in the workplace when reporting racism, with 1 in 3 feeling supported.

Several studies conducted on the Australian Public Service (APS) (Bargallie, 2020' Faulkner & Lahn, 2019; Larkin, 2014; Leon, 2022) found that racism permeated the APS and was a contributing factor to the ongoing attrition of Indigenous staff. Larkin (2014) examined how race contributed to the continuing decline of Indigenous Peoples in the APS, and argued that the "APS denies the existence of racism", however, institutes "a series of colour-blind, benevolent, white programs of special measures designed to address a perceived Indigenous deficit" (p. 11).

Bargallie (2020), using an insider perspective, applied Critical Race Theory to unmask the racial contract that underpins the "absent presence" of racism in the APS. This study showed that, despite claims of fairness, inclusion, opportunity, respect, and racial equality for all, Indigenous employees languished on the lower rungs of the APS employment ladder, and uncovered how racism was normalised in the APS as it is in other "white institutions".

There have also been several studies on Australian universities (Asmar & Page, 2009; Bunda et al., 2012; Burgess & Leroy-Dyer, 2009; Cooms et al., 2025; Jones et al., 2023; Leroy-Dyer, 2026; Leroy-Dyer & Menzel, 2023; Platter et al., 2020; Wood & Watson, 2018) written from an Aboriginal standpoint by academics who have experienced (or witnessed) racist or other forms of discrimination within the workplace that their "white counterparts" do not experience. This includes lack of, or being denied, opportunities; overt and covert racism from colleagues and students; excessive cultural workloads; being pigeonholed; and having to "prove your worth"; among other things.

Cooms et al. (2025) note that the academy facilitates a hostile worldview for Indigenous Peoples, while Jones et al. (2023) contend that academic institutions are unsafe places where Blak knowledges and ways of being, knowing, and doing are attacked and undermined, and Blak people are often seen as lesser than their white counterparts, with their role in the academy being to "fix" the "Aboriginal problem", all while enduring continued racism, despite diversity, equity, and inclusion policies in their workplaces.

Studies show that growing numbers of Indigenous Peoples are entering historically white, structurally racist workplaces and experiencing racism—"something more insidious and subtle" than blatant racism (Larkin, 2014, p. 48). According to Larkin (2014, p. 48), "Whiteness materialises as a dominating and pervasive form of racialised power that objectifies and subjectifies Indigenous employees in ways to circumvent and preclude their meaningful participation in the workforce."

Differing mechanisms of power and racism have been used to control and dominate Indigenous Peoples within the labour market since colonisation, such as denying equal wages, denying the payment of wages, and implementing wage conditions that were akin to slavery (Leroy-Dyer, 2021).

Undeniably, racism disadvantages Indigenous Peoples in the workplace and, although Indigenous Peoples face disproportionate challenges in the workforce due to the ongoing impacts of colonisation and dispossession, "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience additional burdens because of their gender" (Brown et al., 2020, p. 3). The experiences of Indigenous women in the workforce aligns with what Intersectionality Theory suggested we would find in their workplaces and work experiences.

Indigenous Women

Since colonisation, Indigenous women have been seen through the lenses of negative stereotypes in which settler Australians have understood us (Hickey, 2016; Wood & Watson, 2018), manifesting in exclusionary practices. This "cultural analysis" has promoted racist stereotypes of Indigenous women as lazy, non-productive, and unwilling to work (Langton, 2011; Leroy-Dyer, 2021; McGrath & Sanders, 1995; Miller, 1985). These representations are potently embedded in Australian culture, and impact upon the lives of Indigenous women in a myriad of ways.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021), employment rates for Indigenous Peoples in 2018–19 differed markedly by sex. Women have an employment rate of 45%, well below that of their male counterparts at 54%. Primarily, women are employed in low-paying positions in community and social assistance occupations. In addition, the *Gari Yala* report (Brown et al., 2020) noted that women in lower levels in employment also had the lowest levels of support in the workplace.

One potential factor influencing the lower participation of Indigenous women in the workforce is caring responsibilities. Indigenous Peoples have a significantly higher rate of disability, 24% (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023), but lower levels of engagement with services and supports, which results in Aboriginal women taking on significantly more caring responsibilities than men (Brown et al., 2020; Cooms, 2021; Cooms et al., 2022). In addition, Indigenous women tend to take on the role of care giver (Parmenter et al., 2024) more than the non-Indigenous population, and this has a detrimental effect on Indigenous women's entry and participation in paid employment. Further, they are a particularly vulnerable group in the workplace, and are more likely to be culturally unsafe in unsupported employment and have higher cultural loads (Brown et al., 2020).

Australia-wide, more women are being appointed to managerial roles, however, high resignation rates are undermining gender equality gains, while occupational segregation remains a key driver of inequality (Duncan et al., 2025). Indigenous women in Australia are underrepresented in managerial and executive positions in the workforce, and, while the gender balance of 40% female representation on boards has largely been achieved, the inclusion of culturally diverse and Indigenous women has largely been ignored (Women on Boards Australia Pty Ltd, 2022).

Indigenous women report experiencing violence at more than three times the rate of non-Indigenous women, and the physical, verbal, sexual, and emotional abuse suffered is often more severe (Kinnersly, 2022). More generally, Indigenous women experience inequity in economic participation fuelled by racism and discrimination (Cooms et al., 2022; Jordan & Leroy-Dyer, 2023; Leroy-Dyer, 2022), and face greater levels of discrimination, harassment, and unfair treatment in the workplace than any other group in Australian society (Cooms et al., 2025; Leroy-Dyer, 2016, 2021, 2022; Leroy-Dyer & Menzel, 2023) 2023; Leroy-Dyer, 2022). Racism correlates with lower engagement and academic outcomes, especially for Aboriginal women (Rennie, 2018), policies, actions, and attitudes create inequality based on race, creating the power to discriminate against, oppress, or limit the rights of Indigenous Peoples. For Indigenous women, the intersectionality of race and gender compound this discrimination Cooms et al., 2025; Leroy-Dyer & Menzel, 2023).

Application to the Workplace

From the research available we can ascertain that bias and systemic discrimination of Indigenous women creates inequalities at every stage of the employment cycle, beginning with recruitment and selection, right through to promotion (Brown et al., 2020). In addition, women who identify as Indigenous, "face multiple and compounding disadvantages when participating and progressing in the labour force" (Brown et al., 2020, p. 2).

Rallying against this oppressive control and domination since colonisation, Indigenous women, over the decades, have fought against racial discrimination despite being marginalised by both race and gender in the workplace, giving voice to the issues and challenges particularly regarding inequalities in education and employment (Jordan & Leroy-Dyer, 2023; Leroy-Dyer, 2022).

Socio-economic disparities and the construct of class, gender, ethnic, racial, and other characteristics are reproduced in the workplace, coinciding with increased interest in equity, diversity, inclusion, and gender studies (Acker, 2006;

Ozbilgin et al., 2011; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015)Studies of the production of gender, class, and racial inequalities in workplaces have mostly focused on one of these categories, rarely attempting "to study them as complex, mutually reinforcing or contradicting processes" (Acker-Verney, 2016, p. 442).

The impacts of intersectional disadvantage and discrimination in employment are well recognised by Indigenous researchers and academics, who have highlighted racist assumptions, language and behaviour, isolation and exclusion, and organisations that demonstrate no understanding of Indigenous Peoples or culture (Bennett, 2014; Cooms et al., pending; Cooms et al., 2025; Cooms et al., 2022; Gair et al., 2015; Leroy-Dyer, 2022; Leroy-Dyer & Menzel, 2023; Paradies, 2018; Paradies et al, 2015; Watego, 2021).

Wasserman & Frenkel (2015, p. 1487), note that there have been "a number of empirical studies documenting the organizational experiences of women of distinct social backgrounds". However, by utilising Intersectionality Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Indigenous Feminist Theory, and incorporating them as praxis, a workplace can move beyond being superficial and one-dimensional to ensure that specific groups are not excluded or marginalised, and this praxis can be used as a valuable tool for critiquing complex dominant systems of control and oppression (Leroy-Dyer & Menzel, 2023; Museus & Griffin, 2011; Museus & Saelua, 2019).

Cooms et al. (pending) note that, despite the systems being set up to destroy us, Blak women have managed to move the system to make space for us, even despite individualistic neoliberal practices. This means we have to work to challenge and dismantle both racism and sexism by decolonising the harmful practices that permeate in the workplace.

The *Gari Yala* report (Brown et al., 2020, p. 24) recommended ways in which an organisation can achieve an inclusive workplace, which include: commit to unearthing and acting on workplace truths, focus on workplace readiness (cultural safety) not worker readiness, recognise identity strain and educate non-Indigenous staff about how to interact with their Indigenous colleagues in ways to reduce this, recognise and remunerate cultural load as part of an employee's workload, focus on sustainable careers and career development.

Leroy-Dyer & Menzel (2023), pose questions employers should consider when creating an appealing workplace for Indigenous Peoples, especially women, which include: Why does the organisation want an Indigenous workforce?; What value does this workforce bring to the organisation?; How can the organisation provide a safe space?; Is the organisation's business model based on exploitation and marginalisation? Does the organisation practice reconciliation the correct way (not tokenistic, but really commit, and truth-telling is an important part of this)?; Has the organisation started to decolonise and de-westernise practices?; Can the organisation ensure that harmful practices of the past have discontinued?; and How can our organisation/this position bring benefit to/build capacity for Indigenous employees/communities?

Methodology

Indigenous methodologies have emerged as a vigorous and active field of knowledge production that involve Indigenous Peoples from around the world applying their own perspectives and understandings to social research and methodologies (Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2010). Indigenous methodologies are an approach based on Indigenous philosophical positioning and epistemology, the interplay between the method and the paradigm, and the extent to which the method is consistent within an Indigenous worldview. They also raise questions about the importance of protocols within Indigenous communities and the necessity to recognise how the methods are transposed. Indigenous methodologies aim to pay due respect to those communities and their teachings in a suitable way, which can then be translated into research (Kovach, 2010). It is a movement towards a more inclusive and culturally acceptable way of doing research for Indigenous Peoples that is culturally appropriate and ethically correct in moving towards the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge about Indigenous Peoples. This approach is based on Indigenous ethics and knowledge that determines how to access knowledge, the tools to gain that knowledge, and the theoretical approaches for conducting research (Porsanger, 2006). An Indigenous methodological approach is not just confined to "disciplines orientated by native studies"; it is also relevant for "fields seemingly unrelated to native life and native ways" (Kahakalau, 2004, p. 20).

Indigenous Research Perspectives

The history of research for Indigenous Peoples in Australia is tied to colonisation—told through the eyes of the colonisers. Indigenous Peoples did not have a voice and were "dehumanised" as objects of research (Smith, 1999). Cultural practices and norms were distorted and described in ways that reflected the non-Indigenous researchers' prejudices, beliefs, and values (Smith, 1999). According to Martin (2003, p. 2), "mistreatment of ourselves and our land, marginalisation from structures and governance and development of misguided policy and programs resulting in feelings of distrust, caution, fear of exploitation and misrepresentation" summed up the effects of past research.

Indigenous research theories have been derived from "what it means to be Indigenous" and have not been constructed in isolation from the human and civil rights movements, national struggles, and other theoretical approaches (Smith, 1999). Indigenous scholars have developed theories that focus on decolonising and reframing research practices that enable Indigenous voices to be heard and to ensure truth and vision in Indigenous research.

Design and Method

This research then forms an extension of the research undertaken for my PhD thesis, which involved six detailed case studies on selected organisations and industries to gather a holistic view of the organisations' approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. Case studies were chosen because it enabled a holistic, in-depth investigation, while aligning with Indigenous methodologies. The study aligned with the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) code of ethical research and ethical clearance was obtained through university processes.

Yarning and storytelling were employed as culturally informed research methods that allow for greater openness, comfort, and communication, and centring Aboriginal relationality at the fore (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Kwaymullina, 2005; Ullrich, 2019).

Yarning and yarning circles were utilised to allow for in-depth conversations about the lived experiences of the participants. Yarning aligns with Indigenous worldviews as a means of transmitting knowledge (Kovach, 2010) and is a culturally appropriate way to interview Indigenous research participants. Yarning allows the researcher and the participant flexibility, as participants have a high degree of control over the stories they share (Blodgett et al., 2011) through an informal and relaxed discussion relevant to the research. "While the yarn is relaxed and interactive it is also purposeful with a defined beginning and end" (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 40). By utilising yarning, the researcher is accountable to the Indigenous Peoples participating in the research, as yarning develops a trust between the researcher and participants and assists in building a relationship.

Research is storytelling. We listen to people's stories through yarning; we reflect on those stories and share them in our research findings. Storytelling is a huge part of Indigenous culture.

Recruitment and Selection of Participants

As stated above, the thesis encompassed case studies of six organisations. The criteria for choosing an organisation were that they needed to be a large corporation, have locations in urban and rural/remote communities, and have high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment rates. Once the organisations were confirmed, permission was sought to interview/yarn with any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person employed in the organisation.

Potential participants needed to be identified through organisational employment records, and there was a reliance on the organisations to put forward participants. In discussion with senior managers, key criteria for recruitment were that there needed to be a good gender mix (although this paper only relays the stories of women) from varying rural/remote/urban locations where the organisation operated. Each organisation forwarded emails to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, accompanied by the information and consent forms, asking for volunteers for the study. In total, 192 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people chose to participate in the research project. All were involved in yarns or yarning circles.

Yarning and Data Analysis

Yarns were digitally recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were given an identifying code, enabling easy identification of key themes and quotes. Data was analysed using a descriptive coding technique (Punch, 2005), which identified commonalities and attached meaning, allowing the data to be summarised and categorised. The yarns were manually coded using Microsoft Excel, due to the sheer number of transcriptions. Priori and inductive coding (Willis, 2010) was used to analyse the data as it allowed for a more holistic data analysis.

The yarns gave excellent insights into not only the participants but how the participants were "treated" in the organisations. The stories of strength and resilience in the next section, were gathered from participants as part of the doctoral research. These stories were from Blak women employed by the organisations involved in the study.

In the next section, I use an Indigenous methodological approach from Fredericks et al. (2019) and Kovach (2010) to share stories of Indigenous women's experiences, from their perspectives engaging in the western workplace.

Setting the Blak Agenda – Stories of Strength and Resilience in the Workplace

The yarns shared by Blak women offer much more than personal narratives. They are acts of resistance and living archives of truth-telling that expose how systemic racism, sexism, and colonial workplace structures intersect. Using Indigenous methodologies, storytelling is not merely data; it is a sovereign act of knowledge production. Each story reveals both the harm created by colonial systems and the power of Blak women's leadership and resilience.

Story 1 – Resistance through Action

> *Finding my place within a western workplace has been a struggle for me. As a younger person I worked for an organisation that racially and sexually discriminated against me. After a particular incident that left me mentally broken, with the assistance of my union, I gathered the strength to sue my employer. I lodged a complaint with the Human Rights Commission and with the Industrial Relations Commission in NSW. My employer, after a long, drawn-out process, settled out of court. The whole experience left me physically and mentally distraught. However, it planted in me the seed to want to change the system, to help others who were suffering in the same way. In my current workplace I am a union workplace delegate and every day I fight for rights to a culturally safe workplace.*

This story reflects how Blak women are often positioned at the intersection of racism and sexism—a key tenet of Intersectionality Theory. As per Snyder (2014), it was clear that colonialism led to a western workplace that intensifies gendered oppression. It reveals the emotional and psychological burden carried when challenging workplace discrimination through colonial legal systems. Rather than being supported through culturally safe mechanisms, the storyteller had to turn to western legal processes that were exhausting and adversarial—with the exhaustion perhaps reflecting the fact that this Blak woman belongs to a "particularly vulnerable group" given the likelihood that work sits within a broader context of care (Parmenter et al., 2024). Instead of receiving culturally safe support, the storyteller had to rely on exhausting and adversarial Western legal processes, amounting to cross-cultural code switching (Jordan & Leroy-Dyer, 2023; Molinsky, 2007).

Yet, this yarn also illustrates sovereignty in action: transforming pain into leadership and collective advocacy. This is a hallmark of Indigenous Feminist praxis, moving beyond the individual to uplift community. By becoming a workplace delegate, the storyteller is actively reclaiming space and authority, challenging the colonial structures that once harmed her.

Story 2 – The Cost of "Justice"

> *There are no winners in this situation. I went to induction training and a couple of the participants in the training made some inappropriate racial comments. I raised that with my manager who initiated a formal investigation. There was a formal investigation, and the allegations were found to be factual. The employee involved was counselled about their behaviour, told to attend cultural awareness training and put on notice that the offensive behaviour would not be tolerated. It was good that the organisation took me and my complaint seriously, however the whole process was really hard. At times I felt like withdrawing the complaint as it was taking its toll on me. I am glad I saw it through but the cost to me—my mental health—was massive but I am still here and I am stronger now and help others who are going through similar stuff.*

This story exposes how even when organisations "do the right thing" procedurally, they fail to address the cultural and personal cost experienced by Indigenous women. The storyteller's fatigue and trauma mirror what Critical Race Theory describes as the *permanence of racism*—where processes appear neutral but are embedded in white systems that reproduce harm (Brown & Jackson, 2022; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The organisation's response, while procedurally correct, did not mitigate the emotional toll or provide culturally safe support mechanisms, revealing the limitations of liberal legal frameworks in addressing systemic racism.

From an Intersectionality Theory perspective (Crenshaw, 1989), this story illustrates how race and gender intersect to produce compounded disadvantage. The storyteller, as a Blak woman, bore the emotional and cultural labour of pursuing justice—a burden not shared by her non-Indigenous colleagues. The process of reporting and enduring an

investigation reflects the *invisible cultural load* that Indigenous women carry, often having to educate, advocate, and endure simultaneously.

Moreover, the experience aligns with Indigenous Feminist Theory, which critiques colonial institutions for failing to recognise Indigenous women's relational and collective responsibilities (Fredericks, 2010; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). The storyteller's resilience and her decision to support others post-incident reflect Indigenous Feminist praxis—transforming personal trauma into collective advocacy. This is not just survival; it is sovereignty in action.

The story also exemplifies cross-cultural code-switching (Jordan & Leroy-Dyer, 2023; Molinsky, 2007), where the storyteller had to navigate western legal and organisational systems that conflict with Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The psychological cost of this code-switching is evident in her mental health struggles, reinforcing the need for trauma-informed, culturally safe responses that go beyond procedural justice.

Ultimately, this yarn underscores a central argument of this paper: that justice within colonial frameworks often comes at a personal cost to Indigenous women, and that true inclusion requires structural transformation, not just policy compliance.

Story 3 – Everyday Racism and Stereotypes

> *I was in the lunchroom and one person said, "You know they are going to run a diversity program, that means they're going to employ a lot of Aboriginal people." I said, "Yes that's right." She said, "Then we're going to have no one turn up for work. I hope they're better than the last three Aboriginal people we employed because they didn't turn up." I said, "Tell me if I'm wrong, but the last young Aboriginal person that worked for us on checkout went to uni at the end of January." She said, "Yes." I said, "Every week you used to come complaining to me about kids that don't turn up for work and people that don't turn up for work on checkouts." She said, "Yes." I said, "So would you like me to stop employing white Australians? Who do I employ?" She said, "Point taken." I said, "Everyone has to be treated on their own merits and people have to be made to feel comfortable." Of course, she didn't know I was Aboriginal, imagine what she would have thought about that.*

This yarn powerfully illustrates how everyday racism operates through casual, seemingly innocuous comments that reinforce deep-seated stereotypes about Aboriginal people. The lunchroom exchange is emblematic of what Critical Race Theory terms *microaggressions*—subtle, routine expressions of racial bias that serve to reinforce dominant power structures and signal exclusion (Brown & Jackson, 2022; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). These microaggressions are not isolated incidents but are embedded in workplace culture, shaping perceptions of competence, belonging, and value.

The storyteller's response—calm, strategic, and educative—reflects the cultural agility and cross-cultural code-switching that Blak women often employ to navigate hostile environments (Jordan & Leroy-Dyer, 2023; Molinsky, 2007). This form of code-switching requires Indigenous women to adapt their communication and behaviour to dominant cultural norms, often at the expense of their own wellbeing. It is a survival strategy, but one that comes with a psychological cost, as it demands constant vigilance and emotional labour.

From an Intersectionality Theory perspective (Crenshaw, 1989), this story highlights how race and gender intersect to produce compounded disadvantage. The storyteller not only experiences racism but must also manage the gendered expectation of emotional restraint and diplomacy. Her labour—correcting misinformation, challenging stereotypes, and maintaining professionalism—is invisible yet essential. It reflects the *double burden* carried by Indigenous women, who are expected to educate others while enduring systemic exclusion.

Indigenous Feminist Theory further illuminates the dynamics at play. The storyteller's intervention is not merely a personal act of resistance but a form of sovereign knowledge production—asserting Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing in a space that routinely denies them (Fredericks, 2010; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Her refusal to accept deficit narratives about Aboriginal workers challenges the colonial logic that positions Indigenous people as inherently unreliable or unproductive. This act of truth-telling aligns with Indigenous Feminist praxis, which centres relational accountability and collective empowerment.

Importantly, the story also reveals the impact of shadeism and cultural invisibility. The colleague's assumption that the storyteller was non-Indigenous underscores how fair-skinned Blak women are often erased from dominant narratives, yet still subjected to racism. This duality—being both invisible and hyper-visible—reflects the complex ways in which colonialism continues to shape workplace dynamics. It reinforces the need for organisations to move beyond tokenistic diversity initiatives and engage in structural transformation that embeds Indigenous governance, cultural safety, and relational ethics.

Ultimately, this yarn affirms this paper's central argument: that racism is not confined to formal policy or overt discrimination; it is woven into the everyday fabric of workplace interactions. Addressing this requires more than cultural competency training; it demands a decolonising approach that dismantles the systems enabling such harm and centres Indigenous women's voices, leadership, and sovereignty.

Story 4 – Tick-Box Inclusion and Cultural Load

> *The cultural awareness that we do here doesn't teach the leaders how to communicate with an Indigenous person. It doesn't teach them or give them an awareness about cultural sensitivities, all the things that they need to operate as a leader with an Indigenous employee. I've had leaders ring me and say, "I've got this problem with this employee, quick deal with it because they're Blak." I can't deal with it; I don't have the authority. It is all well and good for the organisation to have diversity initiatives, but if they don't have good policies and practices in place, then those initiatives are useless and cause more harm to Blak women.*

This story reveals the superficiality of mainstream inclusion practices. Many workplaces treat cultural awareness as a box-ticking exercise rather than a deep, relational commitment to change. The storyteller is positioned as the de facto fixer for all issues involving Indigenous staff, highlighting the cultural load that Blak women disproportionately carry—a concept that is central to both Intersectionality Theory and Indigenous Feminist Theory.

From an Intersectionality perspective (Crenshaw, 1989), this story illustrates how race, gender, and cultural identity intersect to produce compounded disadvantage. The storyteller is not only expected to perform her formal role but also to absorb the additional burden of managing cultural dynamics, educating non-Indigenous staff, and resolving issues that stem from systemic ignorance. This invisible labour is rarely acknowledged or compensated, yet it is essential to the functioning of the workplace.

Indigenous Feminist Theory critiques this dynamic by exposing how colonial institutions shift responsibility for change onto Indigenous women, rather than transforming themselves (Fredericks, 2010; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). The storyteller's experience reflects a broader pattern whereby Blak women are expected to carry the weight of reconciliation, inclusion, and cultural safety—without authority, recognition, or support. This is a form of institutional exploitation that mirrors historical patterns of dispossession and labour extraction.

The story also exemplifies Critical Race Theory's critique of liberal inclusion frameworks, which often focus on procedural fairness while ignoring structural power imbalances (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The organisation's diversity initiatives, while well-intentioned, fail to address the deeper colonial logic that positions Indigenous staff as problems to be managed rather than leaders to be empowered. The lack of culturally informed leadership training and the reliance on Indigenous staff to "fix" cultural issues reflect a system that remains fundamentally unchanged.

Moreover, the storyteller's experience highlights the failure of workplaces to recognise Indigenous governance and relational accountability as valid frameworks for leadership and management. Instead of embedding Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, organisations often default to western managerial models that perpetuate exclusion and harm.

Ultimately, this yarn reinforces this paper's central argument: that inclusion cannot be achieved through tokenistic measures or superficial training. True inclusion requires structural transformation—embedding Indigenous governance, recognising cultural load as legitimate labour, and shifting power away from colonial systems toward Indigenous sovereignty and leadership.

Story 5 – Safety through Indigenous Governance

> *I work in an identified role and my workspace is primarily First Nations Peoples who work with a strong cultural ethic that allows me to meet my cultural obligations and protect me. There is a strong Indigenous governance and Elders presence. I feel safe in this workplace, safer than I have felt in a very long time, and I feel valued and productive at work and look forward to work every day. I am able to learn from the Elders every day and engage in relational reciprocal relationships. However, outside of my immediate workspace, in the wider organisation I am reminded of how systematic racism permeates.*

This story offers a rare and powerful counterpoint to the previous yarns—a vision of what culturally safe workplaces can look like when Indigenous governance and relational accountability are embedded. The storyteller's sense of safety, value, and productivity is directly linked to the presence of Elders, Indigenous colleagues, and culturally grounded practices. This affirms the central argument of Indigenous Feminist Theory, which prioritises collective

sovereignty, relational ethics, and community advancement over individualistic empowerment (Fredericks, 2010; Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

The contrast between the storyteller's immediate workspace and the wider organisation underscores the fragmented nature of inclusion within colonial institutions. While pockets of safety can be created through Indigenous leadership and governance, they remain vulnerable unless structurally protected. This reflects Critical Race Theory's assertion that racism is not only interpersonal but institutional, embedded in the very architecture of organisations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The wider organisation's failure to replicate the culturally safe conditions of the storyteller's team reveals the limits of diversity policies that do not address power structures.

From an Intersectionality Theory perspective (Crenshaw, 1989), the story highlights how race, gender, and cultural identity intersect to shape workplace experiences. The storyteller's sense of belonging is not just about representation, but about being in a space where her cultural obligations are understood and respected. This is particularly significant for Indigenous women, who often carry additional responsibilities related to care, community, and cultural continuity—responsibilities that are frequently invisibilised in mainstream workplaces.

The presence of Elders and Indigenous governance also reflects Indigenous epistemologies, where knowledge is relational, embodied, and intergenerational. The storyteller's ability to learn from Elders and engage in reciprocal relationships is not a peripheral benefit; it is central to her wellbeing and professional development. This aligns with Indigenous methodologies that view storytelling, yarning, and relationality as sovereign knowledge practices (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Kovach, 2010).

Ultimately, this yarn affirms that true inclusion is not about assimilation into colonial systems, but about transforming those systems to reflect Indigenous values, leadership, and ways of being. It demonstrates that when Indigenous governance is embedded, workplaces can become sites of strength, healing, and cultural continuity—not just survival.

Story 6 – Creating Change Off-Country

> *I have never felt like I fit in, at my previous workplace they didn't understand my worth. I was the sole Blak person there. They didn't understand my ways of being, knowing, and doing and outwardly mocked me. This was an extremely unsafe place. I left there vowing never to work in an environment like that again. I went to work in workplace that employed just Blak people. This was a safer environment; however, I wasn't able to contribute to my community in the way I really wanted to. I took a chance and applied for the job I am currently in. This was the first time I lived and worked off-Country and for the first year I felt I had made a huge mistake; however, I have been instrumental in creating positive change and a safer work environment, by surrounding myself with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and creating something unique. Although there is still a lot of work to do, I feel that I am making a difference, contributing to my community, and assisting to grow the next generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women leaders.*

This story exemplifies the transformative leadership of Blak women who, despite systemic exclusion, actively reshape workplace cultures. The storyteller's journey—from unsafe environments to building culturally grounded spaces off-Country—reflects the core principles of Indigenous Feminist Theory, which prioritises collective empowerment, relational accountability, and sovereignty over assimilation (Fredericks et al., 2019; hooks, 2014; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Her actions demonstrate that inclusion is not about fitting into colonial systems; it is about reclaiming space and asserting Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.

The initial experience of exclusion and cultural erasure in her previous workplace aligns with Critical Race Theory's critique of institutional racism. The mocking of her identity and practices illustrates how colonial workplaces often fail to recognise Indigenous epistemologies, instead positioning Blak women as outsiders or problems to be managed (Bargallie, 2020; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The storyteller's decision to leave and seek safer environments is a form of resistance—a refusal to endure cultural violence.

Her experience also highlights the intersectional burdens faced by Indigenous women. As Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 2011; Museus & Saelua, 2019) suggests, the compounded effects of race, gender, and cultural displacement intensify marginalisation. Working off-Country adds another layer of complexity, as it disconnects Indigenous women from their traditional support systems and cultural obligations. Yet, the storyteller's ability to build community and foster leadership among other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women demonstrates resilience and relational strength—key tenets of Indigenous Feminist praxis.

The creation of a culturally safe space, even in a context of displacement, reflects the power of Indigenous governance. By surrounding herself with other Blak women and embedding Indigenous values into the workplace, the storyteller

challenges dominant organisational norms and reconfigures the workplace as a site of cultural survival and transformation. This aligns with the broader argument that real inclusion requires structural change, not just representation or diversity rhetoric.

Her story also affirms the importance of relationality and intergenerational leadership. By mentoring and supporting the next generation of Indigenous women, she enacts a form of sovereign knowledge transmission that resists colonial fragmentation. This is not just professional development; it is cultural continuity.

Ultimately, this yarn reinforces this paper's central thesis: that Blak women do not merely survive colonial workplaces—they transform them. Through Indigenous Feminist, Intersectional, and Critical Race lenses, this story illustrates how leadership, resistance, and community-building are acts of sovereignty that challenge and reimagine the structures of work.

Discussion

By analysing these yarns through Indigenous Feminist, Intersectional, and Critical Race frameworks, we move beyond storytelling as anecdote to storytelling as theory, data, and political resistance. These stories speak truth to power; they are not just about inclusion but about sovereignty, justice, and transformation.

These stories demonstrate how Blak women navigate racism, sexism, cultural load, and the white ceiling. They also show that when Indigenous governance and cultural authority are embedded, workplaces can become sites of strength, not harm. Structural racism cannot be solved by training alone; it requires decolonising workplace systems.

The stories together reveal a pattern: colonialism continues to shape workplace dynamics through both systemic and everyday racism. However, Indigenous women do not merely survive these spaces—we transform them.

Through the lens of Indigenous Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Intersectionality, these narratives:

- expose the structural nature of workplace racism
- reveal the invisible cultural load carried by Blak women
- demonstrate the power of Indigenous governance
- show that inclusion cannot occur within unchanged colonial structures.

Real change must start with redistributing power, embedding Indigenous governance, and valuing Indigenous knowledges at every level of the organisation.

The analysis also confirms what Indigenous Feminist, Critical Race, and Intersectionality theorists have long argued: that power must be confronted at its source. Inclusion cannot occur within colonial structures unchanged; it requires redistribution of power, not just diversity rhetoric.

Conclusion

Indigenous women's experiences in the workplace are not isolated incidents; they are reflections of deeply embedded colonial structures that continue to shape labour market outcomes. This paper has shown that the disadvantage faced by Blak women is not incidental, but systemic, rooted in the intersecting legacies of colonisation, racism, and patriarchy.

The stories shared in this research are not just personal narratives; they are theoretical interventions. Each yarn illustrates how Indigenous Feminist Theory, Intersectionality, and Critical Race Theory operate in real time—exposing the cultural load, emotional labour, and structural exclusion that Blak women endure. These stories also demonstrate resistance, leadership, and the transformative potential of Indigenous governance and relational accountability.

From the union delegate who turned trauma into advocacy, to the woman who built a culturally safe space off-Country, these narratives embody Indigenous sovereignty and collective strength. They affirm what the literature has long argued: that inclusion cannot be achieved within unchanged colonial structures. Cultural awareness training and diversity policies are insufficient when they fail to address the deeper power dynamics that marginalise Indigenous women.

The discussion section highlighted how these stories align with the theoretical frameworks—showing how racism is both overt and covert, how cultural load is invisibilised, and how Blak women are often tasked with fixing systems that

exclude them. These insights reinforce the front-end arguments: that employment inequity is a product of colonisation, and that Indigenous women's inclusion must be grounded in self-determination, not assimilation.

Real inclusion requires more than representation. It demands:

- embedding Indigenous governance and leadership at all levels
- recognising and remunerating cultural load as legitimate labour
- creating culturally safe systems of accountability and redress
- valuing Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing as foundational, not supplementary.

In setting the Blak agenda, Indigenous women are not asking to be included in colonial systems—we are asserting our right to transform them. These stories, theories and practices converge to demand a workplace that reflects who we are, honours our sovereignty, and supports our leadership. Anything less is not inclusion; it is continued colonisation.

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About the author

Sharlene Leroy-Dyer is a Saltwater woman; she is a descendant of Matora (Awabakal) and Bungaree (Garigal / Darug). Sharlene is Director of the UQ Indigenous Business Hub and an Associate Professor in Indigenous Business at The University of Queensland. Sharlene's expertise centres around Closing the Gap on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage in education and employment, focusing on empowerment and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, in education, employment, entrepreneurship, leadership, and governance. Sharlene contributes towards improving Indigenous employment programs at a policy and business level. She is the Editor in Chief of the International Journal of Indigenous Business, an Associate Editor of the Journal of Industrial Relations and of Labour and Industry.

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Identified Positions in Queensland: A Discussion on Purpose, Practice, and Possibilities

Emma Olssen (Wiradjuri)[1]

[1]The University of Queensland, Business School, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Abstract: This discussion paper critically examines the concept and practice of identified positions in Queensland, specifically those targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Drawing on Indigenous standpoint theory and early-stage qualitative research, it interrogates the legislative, cultural, and organisational interpretations of these roles. The paper argues that, while identified positions are intended to address inequities and recognise cultural expertise, their inconsistent application and ambiguous purpose can contribute to confusion and tokenism. Through personal reflection, legislative analysis, and emerging insights from yarning sessions, this paper invites dialogue on how identified roles can be reimagined to foster genuine inclusion and structural change. It contributes to ongoing conversations about Indigenous employment, equity, and the responsibilities of organisations in creating culturally safe workplaces.

Key words: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, employment, Indigenous employment, identified positions, affirmative action measures, legislation, tokenism.

Terminology Statement

Indigenous: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Identified: A term used in recruitment to identify that the position is targeted only to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Professional position: Any employment held by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Overview

Before I begin, as part of my culture, I will introduce myself, tell you a little about who I am and where my family is from. I reflect on my Aboriginal practice to introduce myself and my community, and the importance of these protocols in the research context.

I am a proud Koori woman, from the Wiradjuri Nation, through my mother and grandparents, and Middle-Eastern, on my father's side. We are Burns (maternal grandfather) and Moran (maternal grandmother). I was born in Muloobinba (Newcastle, New South Wales), however I moved to Queensland and was raised in Winnam (Wynnum), on Quandamooka Country (Moreton Bay).

This paper briefly explores the question, What are identified positions in Queensland and why do we have them? This paper draws on my current research as a PhD student who is undertaking a critical review of identified positions through the voices and experiences of Indigenous Peoples working in professional positions, while this research has not been completed, some interesting themes are emerging. It is important to acknowledge and recognise that the use of this term "identified position" will be within the parameters of Queensland only, as this research does not touch on the other states and the term has a different meaning at a federal level.

One of the key themes that has emerged from this research is the understanding of what identified position are, and related questions such as, Why do we have identified positions?, Are they for closing the gap to address inequities?, Are they for cultural expertise and knowledge?, Are they simply a box-ticking exercise designed to meet hiring metrics.

Some would say yes to those questions; others would say that they are designed to meet inequities; and others do not know they even exist.

Conceptual Framing

Identified positions are often situated within the broader frameworks of affirmative action, human resource management and Indigenous employment policy. The Queensland Human Rights Commission (2020) links these roles to section 25 of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld) (Queensland Government, n.d.), which allows for a genuine occupational requirement based on attributes such as race. However, the term "identified" is not explicitly defined in legislation and has evolved through practice. This paper draws on Indigenous standpoint theory (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Rigney, 1999) to frame the discussion acknowledging multiple worldviews and the importance of cultural knowledge.

Locating Identified Positions in the Literature

Identified positions sit at the intersection of human resource management (HRM), industrial relations, and affirmative action policy. Within HRM, they are often framed as diversity initiatives aimed at increasing Indigenous representation, yet their implementation frequently lacks the structural support necessary for meaningful inclusion (Bargallie, 2020; Steel, 2017). From an industrial relations perspective, these roles are enabled by legislative provisions such as section 25 of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld), which permits genuine occupational requirements based on race. However, the absence of a clear legal definition of "identified" has led to varied interpretations across sectors. Affirmative action literature further complicates this picture, highlighting tensions between equity drive intentions and the risk of reinforcing marginalisation when roles are poorly understood or inadequately supported (Henry & Leroy-Dyer, 2024; Lahn, 2018). The paper builds on these bodies of work by foregrounding Indigenous voices and exploring how identified positions are experienced in practice.

Current Understanding within the Queensland Context

Simply put, according to the Queensland Human Rights Commission (2020), an identified position, being in accordance with the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld) section 25, is generally understood to mean a position to be filled only by a person that holds that attribute, such as race.

Employers in Queensland, Australia, commonly use the term "identified position" when advertising a position such as program officer (identified) with a reference within the job advertisement to section 25 of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld); this is also referred to as an "affirmed position" but not usually advertised as that. The term "identified" is generally used to signify that the role is for an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person. Interestingly, the term "identified position" is not explicitly referred to within the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld) but is defined as a genuine occupational requirement for a position to be filled only by a person with that particular skill set, such as race (Queensland Government, n.d.). This terminology has been picked up by the private sector following policies developed by the Queensland Government using this terminology. To date, there is little evidence identifying the origin of the term "identified"; however, the concept of identified positions emerged in response to the findings of the Miller Report, officially known as the *Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs* (Miller, 1985).

Research Approach

This paper draws on a research topic around the experiences of Indigenous Peoples in professional positions and also draws on the same research design: literature, both grey and academic, and Indigenous knowledges as a framework, specifically Indigenous standpoint. Moreton-Robinson (2000) and Rigney (1999) both articulate that there is more than just one interpretation and worldview. Additionally, I draw on my cultural practices such as how I conduct myself as a Wiradjuri woman. Yindyamarra is the practice of Wiradjuri philosophy; it is our way of being, knowing, and doing. It is shared respect, being polite and gentle, and doing things slowly. It is shared knowledge and engaging in windangadurinya (deep listening) (Grant & Rudder, 2005; Lyons, 2022; Morris et al., 2022).

The method used is research topic yarning sessions. Drawing on Bessarab and Ng'andu's seminal work, it is important to acknowledge there are different types or styles of yarns, such as social, collaborative, therapeutic, and research topic yarns (2010, pp. 40–41). Bessarab and Ng'andu articulate that research yarning enables both the participant and researcher to journey together on the topic of interest that is relevant to the research (2010, p. 38).

This research draws on data collected for my PhD thesis, being the experiences of Indigenous Peoples in professional employment. This data is still in the early stages of analysis, and the insights provided here come from the themes that have emerged during this early analysis.

Emerging Insights

In the initial stages of data collection, some themes have emerged from the PhD research, such as the different understandings as to what an identified position is. However, this paper seeks to discuss identified positions in Queensland their purpose, practice, and possibilities. To answer the research question from a legislative level, the term has been coined in reference to *the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld) section 25 definition as a genuine occupational requirement for a position to be filled only by a person with that particular skill set, such as race. As stated by research participant 2: “An identified role means that the job can only be done by someone who is of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent.”

It is also important to note that the federal government in Australia uses the same term “identified” for very different purposes in accordance with their policies. For example, an identified position could refer to the job role and state, “We welcome candidates who bring strong cultural knowledge and the ability to engage respectfully and effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples”. These roles value inclusive communication and collaboration, and are open to all applicants committed to fostering positive relationships and understanding. Conversely, the term “affirmative measure”, used in accordance with the special measures under subsection 8(1) of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) (Australian Government, n.d.), is the term used within the federal government to fill vacancies that can only be occupied by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

While the term “identified position” is used at both state and federal levels with varying interpretations, this diversity offers an opportunity to clarify and strengthen understanding of its purpose and value. Some organisations describe identified positions as a way to foster inclusion and cultural richness, while many Indigenous Peoples view these roles as opportunities to contribute unique knowledges and perspectives that strengthen organisational capability and community connections (Steel, 2017). At this early stage of data collection, the integration of literature with yarning sessions has revealed valuable insights into how participants aspire to feel valued and make meaningful contributions; for example, “Yeah, it is that box ticking that I think can be dangerous. I think it can be a real risk, and it has been a real risk to community” (participant 15). Further insights were revealed when Lahn (2018) interviewed a total of 34 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander current and former Australian Public Services (APS) employees. This research explored factors influencing Indigenous employee retention within the APS. Findings highlight that participants possess valuable expertise on Indigenous matters, yet this knowledge is often underutilised—revealing an opportunity to better leverage these strengths and create roles that genuinely reflect their contributions, rather than simply meeting targets (Lahn, 2018).

Drawing on the discussion of the purpose, practice, and possibilities of identified positions, one could argue that the legislation is clear; it is race related, requiring knowledge and experiences, and the positions are to provide meaningful contributions at a cultural level, while also closing the gap and addressing inequities. However, unfortunately, the legislation is grey and interpretive, meaning that, at times, it is used for meeting targets. So, I ask the question, If you are considering having an identified position, what is the position and why do you want it in your organisation?

Contribution and Limitations

The scope of this thesis is currently limited to Queensland; however, there is significant potential for future research to extend across other Australian states and territories. The purpose of this paper is to critically examine the concept of identified positions and interrogate the diverse interpretations of their existence. This discussion builds upon existing research that provides a platform for Indigenous professionals to articulate their experiences and perspectives within professional roles (Eva et al., 2025). Emerging themes from this research highlight the necessity of engaging with and clarifying the meaning of identified positions. Future inquiry should therefore consider how the literature aligns—or diverges—from the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples in professional contexts, particularly in relation to addressing interpretative inconsistencies and the tension between meeting employment targets and ensuring meaningful cultural knowledge contributions (Eva et al., 2024; OECD, 2019). This balance is delicate; care must be taken to avoid imposing additional burdens that result in unnecessary cultural load [1]. Bargallie (2020) underscores the

[1] Cultural load is the invisible, often unacknowledged, extra workload placed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in Australia to act as cultural educators, representatives, and support for their non-Indigenous colleagues and the wider organisation.

persistent challenge of Indigenous employees being expected to continually educate others about cultural differences. Without formal recognition of this labour, such expectations risk perpetuating cultural load through the ongoing requirement to inform and guide non-Indigenous staff (Sivertsen et al., 2023).

Future Research Possibilities

This discussion paper highlights the need for further empirical research into the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples in identified positions across different jurisdictions. Comparative studies between Queensland and other states and territories could illuminate how legislation and policy differences shape workplace realities.

Policy and Practice Implications

Policymakers and human resources practitioners are encouraged to critically reflect on the intent and implementation of identified positions: Are these roles genuinely fostering inclusion or are they inadvertently reinforcing tokenism? I pose there is an opportunity to co-design policies in collaboration with Indigenous communities to clarify the purpose of identified roles, embed cultural accountability, and ensure that these positions are supported by appropriate structures and recognitions. Dialogue between government, industry, and Indigenous professionals is essential to move beyond compliance and towards transformative practice.

Conclusion

This discussion paper has explored the contested and often misunderstood concept of identified positions within the Queensland, Australia, context, drawing on legislative frameworks, cultural perspectives, and emerging insights from Indigenous professionals. It has highlighted the ambiguity surrounding the term, the divergence between state and federal interpretations, and the lived realities of those navigating these roles.

Identified positions, while intended to address systemic inequities and recognise cultural expertise, risk becoming mechanisms of tokenism when their purpose is unclear or when structural supports are lacking. The voices of Indigenous professionals reveal that these roles can carry a significant cultural load, particularly when organisations fail to embed genuine inclusion or recognise the value of Indigenous knowledges.

As the research continues, it is critical that organisations and policymakers engage in meaningful dialogue with Indigenous communities to co-design roles that are culturally safe, structurally supported, and aligned with community aspirations. This includes clarifying the intent behind identified positions, ensuring alignment with legislative frameworks, and embedding accountability mechanisms that go beyond compliance.

The purpose of this paper has been to draw focus on the terminology of identified positions and gain a deeper understanding of its meaning at both a legislative and personal level. Through education, understanding, and action, there can be no confusion as to what an identified position is and why it is being advertised. We all have a part to play.

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About the author

Emma is a Koori, Aboriginal woman from the Wiradjuri Nation in New South Wales through her mother and grandparents, and Middle-Eastern, Jewish Australian on her Father's side. While Emma was born in Muloobinba (Newcastle, New South Wales), she moved and grew up in Winnam (Wynnum), on Quandamooka Country (Moreton Bay). Emma has a professional background in leadership, executive management, management, organisational change and Indigenous Engagement. Emma's research, informed by Indigenous methodologies, is on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Employment, reviewing State Government strategies, programs, policies and legislation focused on the targeted recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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Stepping into Standpoints: Indigenous Standpoints Guiding Decolonial Reflexivity in Business Education

Samantha Cooms (Noonuccal Quandamooka)[1], Gaala Watson (Gungalu and Birri-Gubba)[1], Sharlene Leroy-Dyer (Garigal/Darug, Awabakal, Wiradjuri)[1]

[1]The University of Queensland Business School, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Abstract: In the face of ongoing colonial legacies embedded within education systems, this paper calls on non-Indigenous academics to seek out Indigenous standpoints as vital guides for the ethical and effective decolonisation and Indigenisation of educational practices. Rather than relying on superficial inclusion, meaningful transformation requires engagement with Indigenous knowledge systems as they are expressed through Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST). These standpoints emerge in diverse and often non-textual forms, including story, art, yarning, data, and poetics, and offer grounded, relational insights capable of disrupting and expanding western educational paradigms. We argue that IST provides a powerful method for shifting how knowledge is valued and who is recognised as a knower. For non-Indigenous allies, this means entering into a reflexive, accountable relationship with Indigenous voices and perspectives. This paper outlines how Indigenous standpoints can guide the transformation of curricula, pedagogy, and institutional culture by challenging power structures and fostering inclusivity and relational accountability. Ultimately, we contend that IST is not merely an academic tool, but a pathway toward educational practices that honour Indigenous knowledge, advance self-determination, and contribute to collective transformation.

Keywords: curriculum and course design, equality and diversity, Indigenous standpoint theory, decolonial reflexivity, educational transformation

Terminology

Lower case in western and eurocentric is used intentionally to decentre colonial linguistic dominant discourse (Lenette 2022).

Introduction

Decolonising education, particularly in business and management, requires sustained engagement with the legacies of colonialism and capitalism, which continue to shape educational systems. This paper emerges at a moment of intensified calls, both globally and locally, for business schools and higher education institutions to reckon with colonial legacies, including through truth-telling processes, Indigenous-led policy reforms, and increasing demands from students and communities for meaningful change. Business education, in particular, is being challenged to respond, as conventional business education has long been dominated by eurocentric paradigms that marginalise Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies (Allen & Girei, 2023; Dar et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2023). Scholars have critiqued these dominant approaches as largely superficial, noting that tokenistic inclusion of Indigenous content often fails to challenge higher education institutional structures or disrupt colonial power relations (Bastien et al., 2022; Hrenyk & Salmon, 2024; Love & Hall, 2022). These critiques highlight what has been termed an "apartheid of knowledge" (Love & Hall, 2022, p. 203), in which Indigenous knowledges are excluded from meaningful participation in curricula and pedagogy. To move beyond this impasse, the application of Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST) is critical. IST offers a framework that centres Indigenous voices and perspectives, not as supplementary to dominant narratives, but as transformative in their own right (Foley, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2000, 2013; Nakata, 1998).

IST enables Indigenous academics to articulate knowledge from within their own lived experiences, providing critical insights that can expand and challenge entrenched epistemic boundaries. As Allen and Girei (2023) argue, decolonial reflexivity requires individuals, particularly those in dominant groups, to confront the discomfort of their own complicity within colonial systems. This process cannot be achieved through inclusion alone. Mere additions to curricula risk perpetuating dominant capitalist paradigms (Abreu-Pederzini & Suarez-Barraza, 2020; Pinto & Blue, 2016). Gaudry and Lorenz's (2018) Indigenisation spectrum offers a helpful model, distinguishing between surface-level Indigenous inclusion, intermediate reconciliation Indigenisation, and the deeper structural transformation required in decolonial Indigenisation. Only the latter meaningfully engages with Indigenous knowledge systems, disrupts hegemonic institutional structures, and places Indigenous perspectives at the centre of academic work. Integral to this transformation is a critical reassessment of pedagogical practices. Case studies, commonly used in business education, have been shown to reproduce deficit discourses about Indigenous peoples unless intentionally developed in partnership with Indigenous communities (Hrenyk & Salmon, 2024; Price, Skopec et al., 2022; Price, Hartt et al., 2022). When crafted reflexively, case studies can become tools for relational pedagogy that reflect Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.

This paper is written for non-Indigenous scholars, educators, and higher education institutional leaders who are seeking to move beyond symbolic inclusion and take responsibility for decolonial change. It emerges in response to increasing calls for higher education institutions to dismantle systemic racism, uphold Indigenous data sovereignty, and meaningfully engage with Indigenous-led scholarship. We focus on business education because it remains one of the most resistant and under-theorised disciplines in decolonial discourse, despite its powerful role in shaping leadership, economies, and decision-making across sectors. IST and decolonial reflexivity together offer a pathway for fostering more inclusive, ethical, and relational academic environments (Allen & Girei, 2023; Cooms & Saunders, 2024; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Hrenyk & Salmon, 2024). Moreover, IST highlights the broader societal value of Indigenous knowledge systems, such as ecological knowledge relevant to sustainable resource management (Arbon & Rigney, 2014; Bullock et al., 2018). These insights reinforce the imperative to prioritise Indigenous perspectives in both curriculum and institutional design. Allyship, when grounded in IST, is not about acting on behalf of others, but about learning through Indigenous standpoints to critically assess one's own position and practice (Barkley & Kivi, 2022; Maddison & Nakata, 2020; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). This form of allyship requires continual reflexivity and accountability. When embraced within educational contexts, it enables non-Indigenous scholars to challenge hegemonic knowledge systems and co-create spaces where Indigenous knowledge can flourish.

This paper presents a conceptual analysis grounded in a critical reflective methodology informed by Indigenous research principles, relational accountability, and IST. As Indigenous scholars, our analysis is grounded in lived experience, literature, and pedagogical practice. We draw on our own standpoints to explore how IST can inform educational transformation, particularly within business schools. This approach resists extractive analysis and instead prioritises ethical engagement, community accountability, and the amplification of Indigenous voices. To support this, later in this paper we offer a typology of Indigenous standpoints (Table 1) as a practical tool for understanding the diverse ways these perspectives may be engaged.

Clarifying Key Concepts

- Decolonial reflexivity refers to the ongoing, critical self-assessment of one's positionality within systems of colonial power and knowledge. For non-Indigenous scholars, it requires acknowledging complicity in colonial institutions and undertaking relational, accountable change.
- Allyship in this context means learning with and through Indigenous standpoints, not speaking on behalf of Indigenous peoples, but co-creating space for their leadership.
- Parallax, as used in this paper, is the movement between standpoints that makes visible different truths and illuminates complexity.

Decolonisation

Decolonising business education is a necessary and urgent task, requiring a critical interrogation of how institutional norms and knowledge systems have been shaped by colonial ideologies and structures (Love & Hall, 2022; Motta & Allen, 2022). Business schools, historically operating within hierarchical models grounded in colonial logic, have long excluded marginalised voices, reproducing systems of inequality and maintaining Eurocentric dominance in knowledge production (Allen & Girei, 2023; Dar et al., 2021; Hrenyk & Salmon, 2024; Ojediran & Anderson, 2020). As a result, business education remains peripheral to broader decolonial discourse, despite being implicated in its reproduction.

Meaningful decolonisation in this context requires a comprehensive examination of how colonialism continues to influence every level of institutional operation. This includes challenging dominant modes of knowledge dissemination and creating space for alternative knowledges grounded in Indigenous worldviews (Jammulamadaka et al., 2021; Motta & Allen, 2022; Woods et al., 2022). Informed by postcolonial and critical theory, decolonial approaches aim to dismantle systems that perpetuate marginalisation and exploitation, calling instead for frameworks that prioritise relationality, self-determination, and inclusion (Foley, 2003; Smith, 1999; Tuck & Yang, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Beyond institutional practices, business education is also embedded in broader structural forces, including capitalism, racism, and settler colonialism, which collectively reproduce global racial hierarchies (Dorries et al., 2019; Gerrard et al., 2022; Randell-Moon, 2023). These forces underpin curricula that prioritise profit maximisation and western-centric ideals while ignoring the social, cultural, and environmental consequences of business decisions (Dar et al., 2021; Gerrard et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2023). As Moreton-Robinson (2015) highlights, settler colonialism has historically entrenched non-Indigenous property rights while systematically dispossessing Indigenous peoples. This legacy persists in the epistemic and material exclusions seen in contemporary business education. Racial capitalism—the entwinement of racial hierarchies with capitalist exploitation—remains foundational to these inequities (Issar, 2021; Jammulamadaka et al., 2021; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). Neoliberal ideologies further intensify these dynamics by promoting market-driven solutions that obscure systemic barriers and maintain the marginalisation of Indigenous and other equity-deserving groups (Habibis et al., 2020; Issar, 2021).

The work of Allen and Girei (2023) on decolonising management, organisation, and knowledge (MOK) foregrounds how colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary power structures. Decolonial efforts in this space aim to transcend these logics by reconfiguring how knowledge is produced, valued, and applied in organisational contexts. This necessitates attention to the Indigenisation spectrum (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), as well as a rigorous critique of institutional racism and privilege within the academy (Banaji et al., 2021; Côté & Evans, 2023; Hrenyk & Salmon, 2024). IST plays a central role in this work. As a framework grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, IST enables the interrogation of dominant knowledge systems and supports the development of decolonial reflexivity. When applied effectively, IST exposes the limitations of Eurocentric paradigms and helps create the conditions for transformational change through the centring of Indigenous knowledge systems.

Context of Business Education: Colonial Legacy of Business Education

This section outlines how colonial knowledge continues to shape business education and explores key barriers and transformative frameworks, including the concept of colonial load, systemic privilege, and the Indigenisation spectrum, that inform decolonising educational practice.

Perpetuation of Colonial Knowledge and Violence

Business education continues to perpetuate colonial violence by upholding Eurocentric knowledge systems, privileging western values, and marginalising Indigenous voices (Banerjee, 2022; Dar et al., 2021; Jammulamadaka et al., 2021). Leadership within academia plays a critical role in either sustaining or dismantling these structures; despite this, white privilege remains embedded in the hierarchy of higher education institutions, reinforcing historical imbalances and obstructing the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges (Blaise et al., 2024; Dar et al., 2021; Riley et al., 2019). The dominance of western epistemologies sidelines relational, sustainability-oriented Indigenous worldviews (Kwek, 2003; Motta & Allen, 2022). The erasure of Indigenous narratives within business education reproduces systemic harm and undermines the field's potential contributions to justice, equity, and sustainability (Dorries et al., 2019; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Watson, 2016; Wolfe, 2006). Without deep interrogation of curricula, pedagogy, and institutional values, colonial patterns will persist. These institutional dynamics are not accidental but structurally embedded within academic systems that privilege western epistemologies and gatekeeping practices. Patterns of exclusion, including the underrepresentation of Indigenous and other scholars of colour in leadership roles and editorial boards, further reinforce these dynamics (Bhambra et al., 2020; Doharty et al., 2021; Mbembe, 2016).

Reassessment of Values and Priorities

Decolonising business education requires a fundamental reassessment of the values and priorities underpinning curricula and pedagogy. Dominant models rooted in extraction, individualism, and material accumulation must be questioned and reoriented (Habibis et al., 2020). Business schools have long reinforced economic systems that disconnect success from communal wellbeing, sustainability, or justice (Bastien et al., 2022; Cooms, 2022; Everett, 2023; Hrenyk & Salmon, 2024). Indigenous values offer alternative frameworks grounded in reciprocity, relationality, and environmental stewardship. These include prioritising holistic wellbeing of people and place, respecting interconnectedness, and valuing shared responsibility (Evans & Williamson, 2017; Kwaymullina & Kwaymullina, 2014).

Watson (2023) highlights how, for many Indigenous peoples, resources such as money are viewed as communal tools to be shared (not hoarded), exemplifying radically different conceptions of value. Embracing these perspectives challenges capitalist norms and supports more inclusive and sustainable business education models (Habibis et al., 2020; Kwaymullina, 2005; Martin / Mirraboopa, 2003).

Systemic Barriers: The Colonial Load

The persistence of systemic barriers within business schools is deeply rooted in the legacy of stolen land and labour (Cooms, 2015; Dorries et al., 2019; Leroy-Dyer, 2021; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). These institutions continue to operate within frameworks that marginalise Indigenous knowledge and fragment relational ways of knowing (Battiste, 2002; Dar et al., 2021). Curricula and pedagogy often fail to reflect Indigenous lived realities and exclude Indigenous conceptualisations of success, leadership, and economy. This exclusion contributes to student disengagement (Gray & Beresford, 2008), feelings of alienation among Indigenous learners (Nakata et al., 2012), and diminished cultural safety within academic environments (Page & Asmar, 2008). Indigenous students may experience a "cultural interface" (Nakata, 2007) where they are forced to navigate conflicting epistemologies without institutional support, resulting in compromised educational outcomes. Further, the failure to incorporate Indigenous content meaningfully can result in tokenism, where Indigenous topics are included superficially, reinforcing deficit perspectives rather than challenging them (Rigney, 2001). These dynamics not only disadvantage Indigenous students, but also limit the educational potential for all learners by maintaining narrow, Eurocentric knowledge systems.

Inseparability of Colonialism, Capitalism, and Education

Black Marxist, Indigenous, and decolonial scholars point to the structural entanglement of colonialism, capitalism, and education (Blaut, 1989; Gerrard et al., 2022; Rodgers & Liera, 2023). Within business education, this manifests in curricula and managerial practices that reproduce hierarchies, promote exploitation, and disconnect knowledge from context and community (Allen & Girei, 2023; Dar et al., 2021; Hrenyk & Salmon, 2024).

Education has long served as a tool of colonial indoctrination, disciplining bodies, identities, and aspirations in line with settler norms (Bargallie, 2020; O'Sullivan, 2021; Watson, 2016). In the business school, this results in the reproduction of extractive logics that further marginalise Indigenous peoples (Ojediran & Anderson, 2020). Addressing this legacy requires more than critique: it demands the active cultivation of Indigenous standpoints to inform new pedagogies and practices. Transformation must be relational, grounded, and accountable, rooted in recognition of these complex intersections and in a commitment to systemic change (Blaut, 1989; Boswell, 1989).

Indigenisation Spectrum

The Indigenisation spectrum, as articulated by Gaudry and Lorenz (2018), offers a practical and relational framework to guide business educators and institutions through the complexities of decolonising and Indigenising academic practice. This framework does not suggest a linear progression or a fixed destination, but instead invites critical reflection and accountability in addressing colonial legacies. Crucially, it acknowledges that full decolonisation may not always be immediately achievable, particularly within systems steeped in Eurocentrism and institutional privilege, but it remains an ongoing ethical imperative.

From an Indigenous standpoint, Indigenisation is not a checklist or a symbolic gesture. It is a practice grounded in Country, community, and collective responsibility. As such, non-Indigenous academics must actively seek out Indigenous standpoints to guide their efforts. These standpoints can take many forms: lived experience, community knowledge, story work, academic scholarship, and the work of Elders; and all must be engaged with humility, reciprocity, and respect.

Drawing on Bunda (2022), two fundamental components of decolonisation within education are:

1. Deconstructing colonial legacies: This involves critically analysing the enduring impacts of colonialism embedded in knowledge systems, pedagogies, and institutional structures. It means asking difficult questions: Who developed this knowledge? For what purpose? Who was excluded? How is this system maintained? For non-Indigenous allies, this step requires cultivating competence in Indigenous IST and committing to ongoing decolonial reflexivity.
2. Promoting Indigenous knowledges, practices, and worldviews: This involves actively engaging with Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, not as supplementary content, but as epistemological foundations that offer alternative, culturally grounded pathways for knowledge and education. This step restores cultural agency to Indigenous communities and requires institutions to restructure systems to accommodate Indigenous ontologies.

The spectrum includes three overlapping approaches that help contextualise where an institution or academic might sit in their journey.

- Indigenous inclusion: This is often the entry point for institutions, where efforts focus on supporting Indigenous students and staff within existing systems. While inclusion is necessary, it risks maintaining colonial structures if not paired with deeper transformation.
- Reconciliation Indigenisation: This approach acknowledges historical injustice and seeks to build relationships with Indigenous communities. It may involve curriculum reform or symbolic actions, but, without structural change, it can become performative.
- Decolonial Indigenisation: This is the most transformative position on the spectrum. It demands institutions centre Indigenous knowledges, challenge dominant paradigms, and engage with Indigenous peoples as equal knowledge holders. It requires a dismantling of hegemonic norms and a rebuilding of educational practices that are relational, ethical, and grounded in Country.

To move towards genuine Indigenisation, non-Indigenous scholars must be willing to step into Indigenous standpoints, not to extract or translate, but to be led. This is not a neutral act. It requires discomfort, decentring of self, and sustained commitment to transformation. As Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) assert, true decolonisation will not emerge from within the dominant logic unless Indigenous frameworks are not only consulted but embedded at every level. Engaging with the Indigenisation spectrum in this way supports the development of inclusive, culturally safe learning environments that uphold Indigenous sovereignty and honour diverse epistemologies. Guided by IST, this process builds the critical reflexivity needed to challenge institutional whiteness and opens space for relational accountability within business education.

Applying Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing

Decolonisation in hegemonic business education is not a performative gesture, but a substantive and ongoing transformation that must be grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. These ontological and epistemological orientations are not monolithic; they are richly diverse and can be activated through multiple pathways, including Indigenous knowledges, Indigenous studies, and Indigenous perspectives (Bunda, 2022; Drummond, 2020). Indigenous knowledges represent sophisticated systems of understanding cultivated through generations of relational learning, oral transmission, and land-based practices (Kwaymullina et al., 2013; Martin / Mirraboopa, 2003). Indigenous studies involves the critical scholarly examination of Indigenous histories, cultures, and systems of thought, providing institutional and pedagogical pathways for engaging Indigenous conceptual frameworks on their own terms (Nakata, 2007; Smith, 1999). Indigenous perspectives reflect the lived and embodied experiences through which individuals interpret and interact with the world, centring principles of reciprocity, collective wellbeing, sustainability, and respect for Country (Foley, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Nakata, 1998).

Indigenous perspectives and practices are most powerfully mobilised through Indigenous standpoints. These standpoints are not only epistemological positions, but lived commitments to being in right relation with knowledge, with land, with ancestors, and with community. As Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis (2002) argue, standpoint is shaped by social location and identity. Yet IST expands this concept to include place-based ontologies and the sovereignty of Indigenous knowledge systems (Foley, 2003; Nakata, 1998). Rather than suggesting a singular application of IST, we recognise that standpoints are multiple and plural, emerging in academic theory, in cultural practices, in activism, in art, and in ceremony. The table below outlines these different forms to help clarify the multiple and valid expressions of Indigenous standpoints that can guide the decolonial transformation of business education.

Table 1: Forms of Indigenous Standpoint Theory and their Epistemic Expressions

Form of Standpoint	Description	Example(s)
Academic standpoint	Scholarly articulation of Indigenous epistemologies, methodologies, and critiques of dominant knowledge systems	Foley (2003); Nakata (2007); Smith (1999)
Place-based standpoint	Standpoint grounded in Country and shaped through cultural knowledge systems and relationships with land and kin	Kwaymullina et al. (2013); Martin / Mirraboopa (2003)
Cultural standpoint	Embodied in ceremonial practices, kinship systems, oral traditions, and intergenerational learning	Arbon (2008); Martin (2003)
Political standpoint	Emerges in struggles for sovereignty, land rights, and policy reforms; rooted in collective activism	Moreton-Robinson (2015); Walter (2018)
Creative standpoint	Expressed through art, performance, storytelling, and poetics that carry knowledge in culturally resonant ways	Cooms & Saunders (2024); Sameshima (2007)
Relational standpoint	Centred in reciprocal responsibilities to Country, ancestors, and community; values care and connection	Coates et al., (2021); Graham (1999)

These standpoints do not merely inform curricula; they shape how knowledge is recognised, who is permitted to hold and transmit it, and under what conditions it may be engaged. Parallax theory, as articulated by Sameshima (2007), helps us understand how multiple, interconnected standpoints expand what is visible and knowable. Cooms and Saunders (2024) extend this to suggest that standpoints in conversation can reconfigure the boundaries of knowledge itself, if approached with integrity and relational accountability.

For institutions to meaningfully engage in decolonisation, they must create space for standpoints to speak back to colonial and capitalist logics. This means refusing extractive modes of engagement and instead centring Indigenous voices, authority, and governance. As Hrenyk and Salmon (2024) demonstrate, case studies in business education must be developed in genuine partnership with Indigenous peoples to reflect Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. If standpoints are misappropriated or instrumentalised, they risk being co-opted by the very systems they seek to dismantle (Berghs & Dyson, 2022; MacKinnon, 2015; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). This is why decolonial reflexivity must be grounded in Indigenous-led research principles, Indigenous data sovereignty (Walter, 2018) and clear recognition of Indigenous intellectual property (Kukutai et al., 2020). Without these, institutional efforts risk reproducing harm rather than enabling transformation (Cooms et al., forthcoming; Nakata, 2007; Smith, 1999).

Drawing on the Indigenisation spectrum (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Hrenyk & Salmon, 2024), this work must be iterative and embedded in practice, not just policy. The Four Rs of IST—Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility—offer a scaffold to hold this complexity (Ardill, 2013; Cox et al., 2021; Foley, 2003; Jones, 2023). Respect demands the validation and inclusion of Indigenous perspectives within academic and public discourse. Relevance amplifies First Peoples' voices in decision-making processes. Reciprocity reflects the commitment to self-determination and an emancipatory political and scholarly agenda. Responsibility ensures the continuation of Indigenous autonomy, practices, and epistemic diversity (Foley, 2003). These principles do not serve the needs of non-Indigenous actors, nor should they. They serve the continuity of Indigenous knowledge systems, and any institutional shift must follow their lead.

Parallax and the Importance of Indigenous Standpoint Theory

To further deepen the relational approach to decolonial education and allyship, the concept of parallax becomes essential. Drawing on Sameshima's (2007) pedagogical theory of parallax, our understanding of the world is enriched when we engage with multiple perspectives and experiences. This aligns with standpoint theory, which asserts that individual standpoints, shaped by social positioning, offer distinct and valuable insights. Parallax, in this context, enables the coexistence and interconnection of diverse standpoints, forming a dynamic space for critique and transformation (Cooms & Saunders, 2024). Decolonial reflexivity operates within this parallax, where diverse standpoints are respected and mobilised to challenge colonial legacies and ongoing systemic inequities (Allen & Girei, 2023; Sameshima, 2007). IST, as articulated by Foley (2003) and Nakata (1998), affirms that creating space for Indigenous perspectives is not optional but essential for any meaningful decolonial effort. Without these perspectives, institutions are unable to realise the full potential of parallax.

Hrenyk and Salmon (2024) demonstrate that case studies in decolonising business education must be co-developed with Indigenous peoples to reflect Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. The colonial project, in its totalising nature, seeks to absorb or erase diversity, which underscores the importance of buffers, such as IST and decolonial reflexivity, that enable genuine parallax shifts (Berghs & Dyson, 2022; MacKinnon, 2015; Moreton-Robinson, 2015).

Efforts to decolonise at the Indigenous or Indigenist level reflect the tensions outlined by Motta and Allen (2022), who highlight the challenges inherent in decolonising the academy. These tensions demand humility, openness, and accountability in undertaking decolonial and de-westernisation work (Cooms, 2022; Gates et al., 2023). Decolonial reflexivity must be embedded within Indigenous-led and governed research frameworks, guided by right stories and right ways (Coates et al., 2021; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). This includes respecting Indigenous data sovereignty (Walter, 2018) and recognising Indigenous intellectual property, without which parallax is undermined by ongoing epistemic exploitation (Kukutai et al., 2020). Creating protected spaces through decolonial processes, where Indigenous knowledge is safeguarded from appropriation, is consistent with the principles advocated by Cooms et al. (forthcoming), Nakata (2007), and Smith (1999). These scholars emphasise deep listening, self-reflexivity, and centring First Nations voices as fundamental for sustainable and authentic transformation. These parallax-informed shifts in perspective compel institutions to reconsider whose knowledge is centred, how it is engaged, and what structures must change to enable Indigenous epistemic authority. Anchored in the Indigenisation spectrum, this approach is necessary for enabling parallax to function as a genuine epistemic tool for decolonial change (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Hrenyk & Salmon, 2024; Sameshima, 2007).

The foundational principles of IST (Four Rs of Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility) deepen the decolonial and Indigenisation potential of business education (Ardill, 2013; Cox et al., 2021; Foley, 2003; Hrenyk & Salmon, 2024; Jones, 2023; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). These Four Rs function as navigational tools, guiding business education along the Indigenisation spectrum toward genuine recognition, meaningful representation, and deep respect for Indigenous knowledges. In this way, IST enables the ongoing establishment and maintenance of Indigenous epistemologies within academic discourse (Allen & Girei, 2023; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Jones, 2023).

IST, Decolonial Reflexivity, and the Colonial Foundations of Business Education

Unlike other disciplines, Australian business schools have consistently failed to attract, retain, and advance Indigenous scholars (Altman et al., 2017; Gainsford & Evans, 2021). This ongoing underrepresentation must be understood in relation to the foundations of business and management, which are inherently tied to colonial, Eurocentric capitalist systems (Leroy-Dyer, 2021, 2022). These systems—what Tom et al. (2019) call the "death project" (p. 7)—require the maintenance of exploitative relationships with both people and the environment, driving systemic harm such as ecological degradation and structural inequality. In this context, IST becomes a critical tool for disrupting the reproduction of colonial knowledge and reorienting business education toward justice. Given the scarcity of Indigenous scholarship within the discipline and the structural bias embedded in its epistemologies, IST provides a necessary lens to expose and unsettle the dominance of western ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Previous work by Indigenous scholars has highlighted the importance of providing clear guidance to challenge the often-implicit reproduction of colonial norms in academic practice (Bennett, 2022; Fredericks et al., 2020). IST supports this work by offering a relational and situated approach to decolonial reflexivity. Grounded in an awareness of power, privilege, and social location, IST draws on Bourdieu's (1984) theorisation of capital to show how one's positionality, informed by cultural, economic, and social capital, shapes their relationship to knowledge. Crucially, decolonial work can be undertaken from any standpoint, but the nature and impact of that work is deeply contextual. First Nations peoples in Australia often hold the least capital in dominant institutions, yet their perspectives illuminate the limits and violences of western epistemologies most acutely (Bourdieu, 1984). In this sense, Indigenous standpoints are not simply perspectives to include, they are essential entry points for understanding how business education might be reimagined and transformed.

This is particularly evident when examining the field of management education. Figure 1 below highlights foundational theorists of management Frederick Taylor, Henry Ford, Max Weber, Mary Parker Follett, Elton Mayo, and others, whose theories overwhelmingly reflect western industrialist and human relations paradigms. These figures represent a canon rooted in Eurocentric assumptions, prompting critical questions about who is absent, why these absences persist, and how they are maintained.

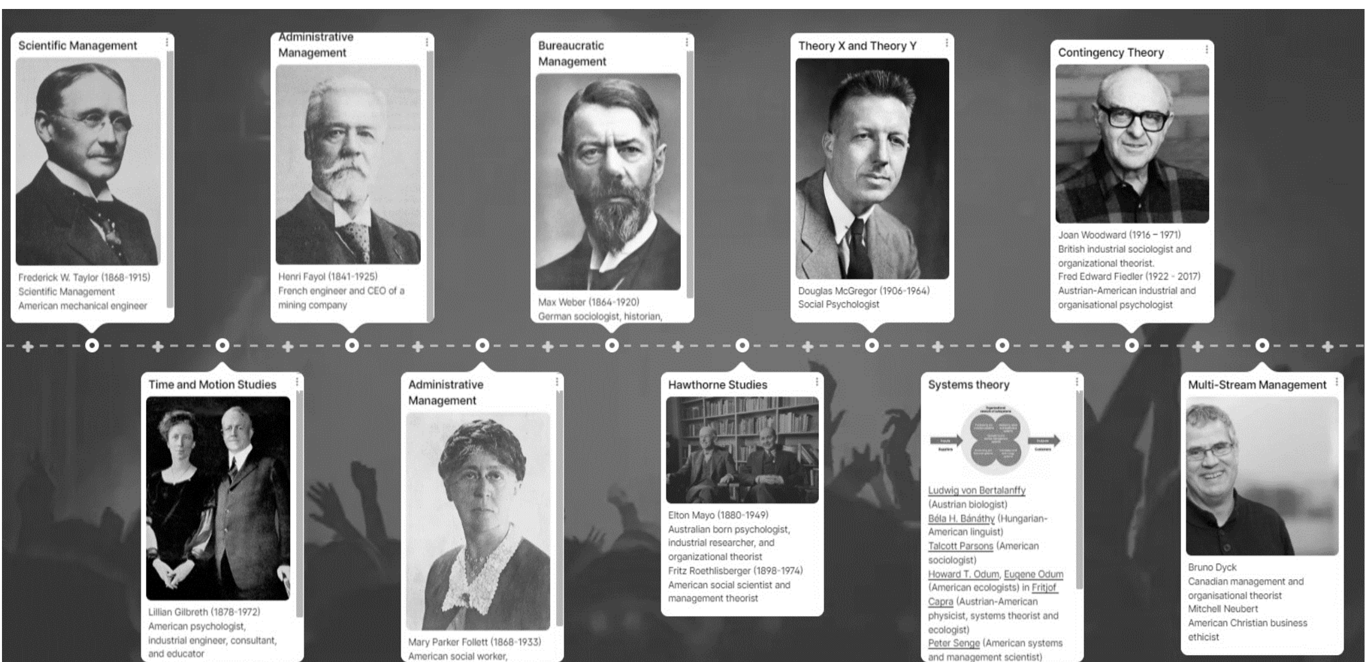

Figure 1: Foundational Management Scholars

These foundational thinkers shaped an entire discipline, yet their theories emerged in isolation from, and often in opposition to, the values and realities of Indigenous communities and other non-western societies. Their continuing dominance within management education reinforces hegemonic knowledge systems and silences alternative ways of thinking about leadership, economics, and collective wellbeing.

By contrast, Figure 2 below highlights foundational Indigenous thinkers, such as Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Lilla Watson, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Martin Nakata, Bronwyn Fredericks, Dennis Foley, Marcia Langton, Mary Graham, and Bronwyn Carlson, whose contributions remain marginalised in business curricula despite their deep relevance to questions of governance, sustainability, entrepreneurship, and social change.

Figure 2: Foundational Indigenous Voices

These scholars offer intellectual frameworks grounded in relationality, collective responsibility, and cultural continuity, principles that directly challenge the extractive logics of mainstream management theory. The continued exclusion of these thinkers from business education is not accidental; it reflects the persistence of what Bennett (2022) describes as systemic epistemic bias.

IST foregrounds these voices not only as valid but as vital. Seeking out Indigenous standpoints is not an optional exercise in inclusion; it is an ethical imperative and a methodological necessity for institutions committed to decolonisation. Doing so requires reflecting critically on the knowledge structures we uphold, the voices we centre, and the responsibilities we carry within systems of education that have historically worked to erase us.

Indigenous Standpoint Theory and Transformative Change

IST is a foundational framework for the decolonisation of business education. It confronts entrenched systems of hierarchy, control, and Eurocentrism by making visible the colonial biases that shape dominant paradigms (Henry & Foley, 2018). As observed in the operation of parallax (Cooms & Saunders, 2024), IST provides a critical means of understanding societal issues through Indigenous perspectives. In doing so, it performs a dual function: disrupting hegemonic knowledge systems and guiding decolonial reflexivity.

As a disruptive force, IST enables the interrogation of Eurocentric paradigms that have historically excluded Indigenous voices from business and management knowledge (Foley, 2006; Kwaymullina, 2018; Nakata, 1998). By centring Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, IST compels a re-evaluation of accepted practices and ideologies, revealing the harm embedded in dominant frameworks and offering alternative modes of understanding. In this way, IST provides the grounding from which decolonial reflexivity emerges, ensuring that reflexive practice remains

accountable to Indigenous knowledges and lived realities. Because of this, IST is not just a theoretical tool but a necessary foundation for building meaningful decolonial reflexivity. Reflexivity in this context must be robust, acknowledging and challenging the institutional power structures that have marginalised Indigenous knowledge while prioritising Indigenous contributions to reframe what counts as legitimate knowledge. This depth of reflexivity lays the foundation for a more ethical and accountable model of allyship, one that moves beyond surface engagement and centres relational responsibility. This positions IST as central to movement along the Indigenisation spectrum (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), particularly toward its decolonial end.

IST transcends theory. It is a dynamic praxis that both dismantles exclusionary norms and offers pathways for institutions to reshape themselves. Within business education, this means more than acknowledging colonial legacies, it demands a sustained commitment to challenging capitalist epistemologies and elevating Indigenous leadership, knowledges, and methodologies. By embedding IST in curricula and research practices, business education becomes a site of transformation. It provides mechanisms for incorporating Indigenous knowledges and prioritising self-determination, which are critical for building decolonial reflexivity. As such, IST is both theory and practice, a catalyst for reshaping the educational landscape in ways that are inclusive, equitable, and grounded in Indigenous worldviews (Jones et al., 2024).

One example of IST in practice can be seen in the use of Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poetic work "The Unhappy Race: The Myall Speaks" within an employment relations course at The University of Queensland to introduce students to a Quandamooka perspective on labour, power, and workplace relations. As a creative expression of cultural and political resistance, Oodgeroo's poem offers more than historical critique, it activates a relational and embodied standpoint that speaks to the lived experiences of colonisation and dispossession. In the classroom, engaging with this poetic text becomes a site of Indigenous-led curriculum transformation, enabling students to consider how colonial structures have shaped economic and managerial systems. Through guided discussion and reflective analysis, non-Indigenous students are invited into a reflexive space where they must grapple with the dissonance between dominant management logics and Indigenous experiences of systemic exclusion. This pedagogical approach exemplifies how IST, when embedded through cultural and creative standpoints, can shift the terms of engagement in business education, foregrounding Indigenous knowledge, disrupting settler-colonial assumptions, and fostering relational accountability.

Benefits

The application of IST in business education contributes to the development of inclusive learning environments that centre Indigenous and marginalised perspectives (Bunda et al., 2012; Kidman, 2020; Le Grange, 2020). These environments facilitate deeper engagement with diverse lived experiences, especially in areas such as entrepreneurship and sustainability (Kwaymullina, 2005, 2018; Woods et al., 2022). IST also supports the cultivation of decolonial reflexivity, particularly by exposing how cultural, economic, and social capital (often held by non-Indigenous academics) shapes knowledge production and institutional authority (Bourdieu, 1984). It highlights the limitations and harms of dominant paradigms and positions Indigenous knowledges as essential to ethical scholarship.

The incorporation of Indigenous perspectives into business education supports more nuanced decision-making and problem-solving (Greenwood, 2008; Jones et al., 2023). These perspectives, rooted in relationality, sustainability, and collective responsibility, offer critical insights into addressing complex challenges such as climate change, social justice, and economic inequality (Guto, 2020; Nyong et al., 2007; Schultz, 2020). Recognising and engaging with Indigenous standpoints is thus a fundamental step for transforming both institutions and broader decolonial practice (Smith, 2012).

Challenges

Despite its transformative potential, applying IST within academic systems presents significant challenges. Dominant knowledge systems continue to privilege western epistemologies, systematically marginalising and excluding Indigenous perspectives (Bunda et al., 2012; De Plevitz, 2007; Fredericks et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2023; Kidman, 2020). This exclusion sustains colonial hegemony and perpetuates forms of epistemic violence against Indigenous peoples (Cram et al., 2016; Ormond et al., 2006).

A "colonial algorithm" operates within academia, reinforcing white dominance while suppressing Indigenous ways of knowing (Fredericks et al., 2021; Walter & Andersen, 2016). This algorithm upholds systemic privilege and maintains the racialised disadvantage of non-white scholars (Bargallie, 2020; Lilley, 2017). Academic search engines and publishing systems also exacerbate exclusion. Biases in search algorithms render alternative or marginalised literature invisible, compounding the dominance of privileged voices (von Hippel & Buck, 2023). Top-tier journals have historically

upheld exclusionary practices, where scholars from marginalised backgrounds face higher barriers to publication and, when published, receive less attention and recognition (Boyd, 2021; Boyer et al., 2023; Lundine et al., 2018; Willis et al., 2021). To counter these challenges, decolonisation must involve structural change. This includes increasing the visibility and representation of Indigenous scholars, shifting authorship and publication protocols to promote epistemic and cultural diversity, and amplifying the legitimacy of Indigenous knowledge systems (Ward-Fear et al., 2020). Doing so will foster more inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive academic environments (Bennett, 2022; Courtenay & Gair, 2009).

Conclusion

This paper has argued that IST is not only a critical theoretical framework but a necessary methodology for transforming business education. Rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, IST provides the epistemic clarity needed to disrupt entrenched Eurocentric paradigms and guide institutions toward decolonial Indigenisation. In doing so, it moves beyond tokenistic inclusion to centre Indigenous perspectives as indispensable to understanding, critiquing, and reshaping the foundational assumptions of business and management. Through the lens of parallax, IST reveals the interconnected yet distinct standpoints that shape knowledge systems. It makes visible the colonial algorithm embedded within academia and demands intentional reflexivity that is grounded in accountability to Indigenous peoples and knowledge. This requires not only the amplification of Indigenous voices but also a critical reassessment of who is considered a knower, what counts as knowledge, and how that knowledge is produced and validated.

As demonstrated throughout this paper, IST enables the exposure of harm, the reframing of power, and the articulation of alternatives. It is both theory and praxis, a pathway to dismantling exclusionary systems and building educational environments that are structurally and relationally just. By embedding Indigenous standpoints into the core of business education, institutions can contribute to a broader project of decolonisation, cultural resurgence, and self-determination. In this way, IST is not simply a contribution to business education, it is a necessary condition for its ethical and epistemic future.

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About the authors

Dr Samantha Cooms (Noonuccal, Quandamooka) is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Queensland Business School. Her research centres Indigenous management, leadership, and relational approaches to care, with a particular focus on disability, employment, and culturally safe service design. She works across academic, community, and policy contexts, advancing Indigenous-led methodologies and strengths-based approaches to organisational practice and social change.

Dr Gaala Watson is a Gangalu and Birri-Gubba (Wiri) scholar and governance researcher based at the University of Queensland Business School. Her work focuses on Aboriginal governance, Indigenous economics, and Indigenous enterprise. Gaala's research brings Indigenous knowledge systems into dialogue with organisational practice, with a focus on systems change and Indigenous-led development. With experience across academia, business, and community sectors, her work supports culturally grounded approaches to governance and enterprise and aims to create practical impact.

Dr Sharlene Leroy-Dyer (Garigal, Darug, Awabakal) is an Associate Professor and Director of the Indigenous Business Hub at the University of Queensland Business School. Sharlene has extensive experience as an academic and equity practitioner, having worked for over 45 years in industry and academia. Sharlene's research focuses on Closing the Gap on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage in education and employment. Sharlene's scholarship bridges theory and practice, with a focus on real-world impact.

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INDIGENOUS BUSINESS HUB, BUSINESS SCHOOL
THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
LEVEL 3, COLIN CLARK BUILDING (39)
BRISBANE QLD 4072 AUSTRALIA