



# Indigenous Business Stories

## **An Invitation to Engaging with the Cases of the Indigenous Business Stories Project**

Greetings reader and welcome to the Indigenous Business Stories Project. Our work with Indigenous entrepreneurs, business students, and the broader community of entrepreneurship educators has revealed a desire and a true need for business cases that offer meaningful representations of business from an Indigenous perspective. Our experience has found that Indigenous people approach business in unique, culturally grounded ways. We seek to share some of the wisdom, joy, and simple business strategies that emerge from them knowing their place in the world, and how they influence their communities, partners and many stakeholders through their business activity. We aspire to share the stories of Indigenous business leaders and Indigenous entrepreneurs in ways that may spark rich conversations about ways of doing business that account for Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing.

For many Indigenous communities around the world, knowledge and wisdom have always been communicated through storytelling and oral history (Kelly, 2021). Today, storytelling is used in traditional knowledge sharing, for example in intergenerational relationships within families, but increasingly, it is used in classrooms and business settings to demonstrate the power of collectively shared experiences. Storytelling, also referred to as storywork (Archibald (Q'um Q'um Xiiem), 2008) is a skillful and respected pedagogical practice that honours the agency of all elements involving the storyteller, the listener, and the story itself. In storywork, each element comes alive through interactions with the others. The storyteller weaves received wisdom and lessons into the story using metaphor, humour, cyclical time, and sometimes canonical familiar characters. The listener/reader is invited to reflect on the story through the lens of their own lived experience and personal context, which adds nuance and builds on the story itself. The story passes through both the storyteller and

listener's lenses, revealing answers and posing questions unique to those involved in the exchange.

In a traditional business case, the student is invited into the shoes of a particular decision maker to make decisions that will have implications for the organization. In our stories, we invite students more wholistically into the worlds of an entrepreneur and how they understand their business. We intend to share the ontologies (worldviews) and values of the entrepreneur rather than the specifics of a single decision that makes their perspective and decisions interesting because of the wider accountability structure to generations before and after. We invite learners and facilitators to wholistically consider the position of the organizations so that they can come to understand the lifecycle of that business and how they have come to the position they're in now. Traditional business cases are often positioned as 'trial runs' for students to test decision-making processes. In our stories, we do not ask students to elevate themselves to make decisions for others; rather, we invite students to learn from expert entrepreneurs and business leaders about how those leaders got to where they are now. In this project, learners are asked to pay attention to ways that Indigenous entrepreneurs navigate their business, utilizing the tools and knowledge of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds. By shifting reader positionality from that of an 'expert' to sharing in the wisdom of the entrepreneur's experience, the invitation is to witness as a thoughtful process of stepping back in order to fully see.

Before you begin, we, the authors, ask that you suspend your prior notions and expectations of how to engage in the learning process using business cases, and embrace our invitation into the work of these stories. Be ready to contribute to the collective pool of knowledge that widens all our capabilities in meaningful interpretation, deep reflection, and builds toward the practice of asking powerful questions. Each learner has their own perspective, and thus their own contribution to make in discussing the case (Nabigon et al., 1999). We invite you to make connections, ask questions, and especially to listen to the contributions of the others in the circle with you. We hope you enjoy this entrepreneur's story, as told as closely as possible, in their own words...