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# INDIGENOUS ENTREPRENEURSHIP RESEARCH: THEMES AND VARIATIONS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

17 The concept of entrepreneurship is a long-standing pillar of economic the-  
19 ory. From the beginning, the entrepreneurial notion represented forces of  
21 economic change that introduce new energy into systems of exchange and  
23 allowed these systems to produce the surpluses that contribute to one im-  
portant aspect of human well-being. Beyond the well-being associated with  
economic surplus, other benefits are seen to flow from entrepreneurship.  
Blawatt (1998), for example, sees the following gains in entrepreneurial  
venture:

- 25
- Entrepreneurs drive the economy, creating new concepts, innovations,  
27 new ventures, employment, and national wealth.
  - Entrepreneurs bring a balance to a nation's economic system, offsetting  
29 concentrations of power, increasing competitiveness.
  - Entrepreneurship serves the community and society first by providing an  
31 improved standard of living, social responsiveness, and sustainable in-  
dustry. It adds to the social and psychological well-being of the commu-  
33 nity by providing an outlet for creative action.
  - Entrepreneurship ... offers third world countries the opportunity to be-

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1     come first world countries (Blawatt, 1998, p. 21)

3     Early on it was recognized that this broad concept of entrepreneurship  
5     could be used to understand and improve the condition of particular dis-  
7     advantaged populations; the so-called “under-developed” communities and  
9     regions (e.g. Danson, 1995). Only recently, however, has the notion been  
11    applied by scholars of entrepreneurship to a particular sector within this  
13    category, to the indigenous populations of the world.

15    It is the purpose of this paper to give an overview of this relatively new,  
17    but vital, field of enquiry. Indigenous entrepreneurship is a growth area of  
19    scholarship not just because it appears to be a distinguishable subject, with  
21    its own characteristics and invitations to research, but also because it ad-  
23    dresses an urgent problem – how to improve the lot of a chronically dis-  
25    advantaged segment of the world’s population.

27    This paper identifies the principal themes that have emerged in studies of  
29    indigenous entrepreneurship, beginning with how the field is identified. It  
31    then outlines some main themes in the discussions concerning indigenous  
33    entrepreneurship, especially the fundamental issue of the relation between  
35    entrepreneurship and cultural values. The paper attempts to sketch where  
37    scholars have found themselves coming together, and where they have  
39    differed in direction and outcomes. Comment is offered on where the most  
   urgent lines of enquiry appear to lie, and where the most promising direc-  
   tions of research seem to be located. The paper closes with an indication of  
   the journals most given to publishing material concerning indigenous en-  
   trepreneurship.

## 2. CHARACTERIZING THE FIELD

31    One set of issues in any emerging subject area concerns the delineation of the  
33    area itself. Scholars attempting to describe the field of indigenous entrepre-  
35    neurship face a pair of obvious questions: (1) who are the indigenous people  
37    of the world? and (2) what is indigenous entrepreneurship? On both points,  
39    there is a contention among those working in this emerging field. Both  
   questions are complicated by a distinction that is theoretically clear but in  
   practice quite untidy – the distinction between the way a field is delimited by  
   definition, and the characterizations that emerge from empirical observa-  
   tion.

2.1. The Concept of “Indigenous”

1  
3 Several authors offer explicit definitions or near-definitions of the term “indigenous,” ranging from the relatively simple to the complex. All seek to  
5 delineate sub-populations that are found worldwide, which differ in many respects but have one thing in common and that is their “indigenoussness.”  
7 The simplest approach to identifying the indigenous is an “accepted self-identification” criterion. On this view, an indigenous person is one who  
9 identifies himself or herself as “indigenous,” and whose self-identification is accepted by the indigenous community in which the person claims mem-  
11 bership (e.g. Hindle & Lansdowne, 2005).

13 Foley (2003) expands the “accepted self-identification” definition with an explicit mention of an original connection with the land. Within this con-  
15 text, Lindsay (2005) writes, “an indigenous person is regarded as an individual who is an original owner of a country’s resources or a descendent of  
17 such a person and which, in either case, the individual regards himself or herself as Indigenous and the Indigenous community in which they live  
accepts them as Indigenous” (Lindsay, 2005, p. 1).

19 Dana’s (2006) concise definition employs an “ancient connection” criterion. He writes, “Indigenous nations are people whose ancestors were living  
21 in an area prior to colonisation, or within a nation-state, prior to the formation of a nation-state” (Dana, 2006, p. 1).

23 Other approaches tend to provide more specific criteria. For example, the United Nations, in a 1995 resolution states,

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27  
29 Indigenous or aboriginal peoples are so-called because they were living on their lands before settlers came from elsewhere; they are the descendants ... of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived, the new arrivals later becoming dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement or other means (General Assembly the United Nations, 1995).

QA : 1

31 Peredo, Anderson, Galbraith, Benson, and Dana (2004) provide the most detailed review of relevant characteristics. They review a number of defini-  
33 tions used for indigenous peoples, including those by the International Labour Organization (1991), the United Nations, the World Bank (2001),  
35 the Asian Development Bank (2000), and other writers and researchers. The authors suggest that there are six key, or common elements relevant to the  
37 concept of indigenous entrepreneurship: (1) descent from inhabitants of a land prior to later inhabitants, (2) some form of domination by the later  
39 inhabitants, (3) maintenance of distinguishing socio-cultural norms and institutions by the indigenous group, (4) an attachment to ancestral lands and

1 resources, (5) often, but not always, subsistence economic arrangements,  
2 and (6) an association with distinctive languages. Not all elements are  
3 present in all cases, but in many cases of modern indigenous cultures, all six  
4 characteristics are present. In general, these characteristics, or some signifi-  
5 cant combination of them, serve to set apart indigenous people from those  
6 populations that came later.

7 Dana and Anderson (2006a) also note that indigenous people display  
8 remarkable heterogeneity across nations and even within particular com-  
9 munities. Governing myths, family, and community organization, values  
10 concerning work, play, sexual roles and relations, are among the many  
11 matters where different indigenous groups exhibit striking differences. As  
12 Peredo et al. (2004) note, between 250 and 300 million people are estimated  
13 by the UN (General Assembly The United Nations, 1997) to fit the defi-  
14 nition of indigenous. By any definition, indigenous are found on all pop-  
15 ulated continents and range from traditional hunter-gatherers and  
16 subsistence farmers to expert professionals in industrialized societies.

17 In addition, there is wide agreement that indigenous populations are  
18 generally poor and otherwise disadvantaged in terms of various economic  
19 measures. The World Bank (2001), for example, opens its “Draft Opera-  
20 tional Policy Concerning Indigenous People” with the acknowledgment  
21 that, “indigenous peoples are commonly among the poorest and most vul-  
22 nerable segments of society,” (World Bank, 2001, p. 1) an assessment eho-  
23 oed by all scholars of indigenous entrepreneurship (e.g. Peredo, 2001;  
24 Anderson, 2004a, b; Berkes & Adhikari, 2005).

25 Scholars point out that indigenous people are, typically, not only poor but  
26 also severely disadvantaged in terms of broader socio-political measures.  
27 Indeed it is this broadly defined, disadvantaged position that is commonly  
28 given as a reason for focusing on indigenous entrepreneurship. To many  
29 scholars, indigenous leaders and politicians, entrepreneurial activity is seen  
30 as a potential instrument of relief within these chronically impoverishment  
31 indigenous communities. As Galbraith, Rodriguez, and Stiles (2006) note,  
32 “indigenous entrepreneurial activities are often cited as the “second wave”  
33 of economic development, with the first wave of economic development  
34 being direct governmental support and wealth transfer policies” (p. 3).

35

## 37 *2.2. Collective Social and Economic Organization*

39 Beyond being disadvantaged, other commonalities emerge among indige-  
40 nous people in spite of their diversity. In particular, two general tendencies

1 have attracted comments and debates within the indigenous entrepreneur-  
ship literature. One of these is the recurring theme of communal or collective  
3 patterns of social organization, including property arrangements and dis-  
tribution of resources. Dana (1995, 1996), for example, draws attention to  
5 the “the Eskimo preference for a communal form of organization” (p. 65) in  
one indigenous community he studied in the sub-Arctic, and to “the tradi-  
7 tional values of these people, working collectively and sharing collectively,  
while disliking the concept of competition” (p. 78) in another, quite distinct  
9 indigenous community.

Bewayo (1999) refers to “the communalistic culture known to be pre-  
valent in black Africa,” (p. 2) while Peredo and Chrisman (2006) employ the  
11 concept of “community orientation” to describe the social organization of  
several indigenous communities in the Andes. “The more ‘community-orien-  
13 ted’ a society is, the more its members experience their membership as  
resembling the life of parts of an organism; the more they will feel their  
15 status and well-being is a function of the reciprocated contributions they  
make to their community” (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006, p. 11). They maintain  
17 that “community orientation” in this sense is a prominent feature of the  
indigenous communities they study.  
19

Perhaps the most elaborate and generalized argument for this view is  
21 presented by Redpath and Nielsen (1997), using Hofstede’s (1980) “cultural  
dimension” of individualism/collectivism. Redpath and Nielsen (1997) take  
23 this dimension to indicate the extent to which members of a society value  
individual over collective needs. In their view, “this dimension is the key to  
25 many core cultural differences between Native and non-Native cultures (and  
between indigenous and non-indigenous cultures throughout the world)”  
27 (Redpath & Nielsen, 1997, p. 329). They sharply contrast the individualistic  
emphasis of non-indigenous societies, especially those in North America,  
29 and the distinctly collectivist orientation they see in indigenous communi-  
ties. Indeed they argue that the difference on this dimension underlies other  
31 cultural differences, such as “power distance” (acceptance of unequal dis-  
tributions of power and wealth), and is the basis of organizational structure  
33 and behaviour of indigenous groups (Redpath & Nielsen, 1997, p. 336).

While there is widespread agreement on this tendency in indigenous  
35 communities, there is a fundamental controversy on its origins and depth.  
The scholars cited above, and others (e.g. Tully, 1995; Bishop, 1999) take  
37 the view that indigenous cultures are, or tend to be, “communal” or “col-  
lective” with respect to property and social arrangements, and see this ten-  
39 dency as deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples.  
However, a number of other scholars disagree with this assessment.

1 Galbraith et al. (2006), for example, mount a spirited attack on that basic  
2 assumption. Citing a range of historical and anthropological scholarship,  
3 they argue that pre-Colonial populations, in North America at least, pos-  
4 sessed a strong sense of private property, and lacked only the standardized  
5 economic institutions of later Europeans necessary to make them full par-  
6 ticipants in the economic activity that is standard today. Essentially, they  
7 argue that without the institutions, common language, and contractual  
8 characteristics required to sustain an organization of non-related individuals  
9 (such as employees and investors), the indigenous populations needed to  
10 access social capital through the networks of related “clan” members in  
11 order to lower the economic costs of economic transactions and productive  
12 activities. And whenever possible, particularly when the economics of pro-  
13 duction changed, as when indigenous populations adopted the horse and  
14 firearm, pre-reservation trade and property ownership was generally done  
15 on an individual or family basis.

Galbraith et al. (2006) do not deny that many current indigenous com-  
17 munities exhibit “collective” inclinations with respect to property and eco-  
18 nomic arrangements. But they hold that it is not a cultural characteristic,  
19 but rather a comparatively recent phenomenon, born of either the forced  
20 reservation system and its collective land-tenure arrangements in many de-  
21 veloped countries or the weak institutional structures commonly seen in  
22 “less developed countries” (e.g. Galbraith & Stiles, 2003). Similar arguments  
23 have been made by other scholars of indigenous economics (e.g. Anderson,  
1997; Miller, 2001; Anderson, Benson, & Flanagan, 2006).

25 As Galbraith et al. (2006) themselves argue, one’s view on this matter of  
26 the cultural rootedness of collective and communal arrangements has power-  
27 ful implications for one’s view about how to foster and encourage indig-  
28 enous entrepreneurship. It should be expected that this will prove to be an  
29 important strand in research concerning indigenous entrepreneurship.

The second cultural tendency that has drawn comment from some schol-  
31 ars is the inclination toward forms of social organization built around kin-  
32 ship rather than economic or other functional factors. In their summary of a  
33 reference work on indigenous entrepreneurship, Dana and Anderson  
(2006a) observe that, “Social organisation among indigenous people is of-  
34 ten based on kinship ties, and not created in response to market needs” (p.  
35 6). Berkes and Adhikari (2005), investigating a number of indigenous en-  
36 trepreneurial ventures involving integrated conservation and development in  
37 Central and South America, also note that many of these ventures are social  
38 enterprises, and involve networks of family members directly and indirectly.  
39 The kin-based social organization of many indigenous communities is an-

1 other factor, which may be expected to have implications for understanding  
and promoting entrepreneurial ventures among these communities.

3

5

### 2.3. The Concept of “Entrepreneurship”

7 What is meant by the term “entrepreneurship” within the concept of in-  
digenous entrepreneurship? It is fair to say that there is no consensus among  
9 management scholars as to what, precisely, constitutes entrepreneurship  
(Venkataraman, 1997, p. 120). It is therefore not surprising that treatments  
11 of indigenous entrepreneurship tend also to show considerable variety in the  
definitions, explicit or implicit, of the entrepreneurial element in the concept.  
13 The “minimalist” definition of entrepreneurship, according to which it is  
simply the operation of a commercial enterprise (as in Siropolis (1977, pp.  
15 23–24) cited by Dana (1996), and echoed in several other publications).  
Hindle and Lansdowne (2005), for instance, define “indigenous entrepre-  
17 neurship” as “the creation, management and development of new ventures  
by indigenous people ...” (2005, p. 133). Dana (2006), who in one place  
19 subscribes (with minor reservations) to Casson’s (1982) definition of an  
entrepreneur as someone who specializes in taking judgemental decisions  
21 about the coordination of scarce resources, tends to also take a similar  
“minimalist” approach in other publications regarding indigenous popula-  
23 tions. Anderson (2004b), citing Drucker (1985), supplements the minimalist  
notion within the context of indigenous entrepreneurship with the idea of  
25 recognizing opportunity and the employment of technology to exploit op-  
portunity by creating an enterprise. A still broader concept of entrepre-  
27 neurship (in the indigenous setting and elsewhere) is offered by Peredo  
(2004), who adds not only the recognition and exploitation of opportunity  
29 but also innovation, risk-acceptance, and resourcefulness.

For purposes of discussing entrepreneurship in its indigenous forms, as in  
31 discussing the concept of the indigenous itself, many scholars tend to move  
beyond the definitional to an empirical grounding. Dana (1996), for in-  
33 stance, elaborates entrepreneurial possibilities with the identification of at  
least seven sub-kinds of entrepreneur (“Cantillonian,” “Weberian,”  
35 “Schumpeterian,” “Barthian,” “McClelland,” “the Displacee,” and the  
“Kirznerian”), all arguably species of the genus “entrepreneur” identified  
37 empirically.

It seems obvious that disparities in what is considered entrepreneurship  
39 will have an impact on scholarship concerning indigenous entrepreneurship.  
The need for an accepted concept of entrepreneurship is well recognized in

1 entrepreneurship scholarship generally, and applies with at least equal urgency to the subject of indigenous entrepreneurship. It is to be expected that  
3 the refinement of this fundamental notion in its indigenous environment will be an important line of research in this emergent area.  
5

#### 7 *2.4. Indigenous Entrepreneurship: Two Paths*

9 Given the differences in opinion regarding both the fundamental nature of “entrepreneurship” and the critical elements that constitute the notion of  
11 “indigenous,” it is not surprising that there are different opinions regarding the term, “indigenous entrepreneurship.” The indigenous entrepreneurship  
13 literature tends to fall into two camps on matters concerning the location and/or the objectives of this form of enterprise. One approach – in some  
15 ways the most obvious – is to think of indigenous entrepreneurship as what goes on wherever people who are indigenous happen to be engaged in entrepreneurial activities. In discussing the challenges to indigenous entrepreneurship with respect to gaming-related reservation economies, Galbraith and Stiles (2003) for instance, consider the number of business start-ups by indigenous people, whether individually or collectively, on or off reserves.  
17 Dana and Anderson (2006a) appear to take a similar view. On this account, indigenous entrepreneurship is basically entrepreneurial activity conducted  
19 by indigenous people.  
21  
23

The contrary view is that indigenous entrepreneurship differs conceptually in its situational context and/or its ultimate objects or goals. It must be admitted that here as elsewhere the boundary between conceptual boundaries and empirical generalization is not rigorously observed. But there is a clear tendency on the part of many scholars to consider entrepreneurship (however that is understood) that is indigenous to be restricted to certain contexts. One restriction is to location, another is to its ultimate objective, and a third is to its form or organization.  
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For example, Peredo et al. (2004) indicate clearly that in their consideration of indigenous entrepreneurship they are counting only indigenous ventures in certain territories or locations. Here indigenous entrepreneurship is necessarily undertaken as something identifiable within an indigenous territory. Thus indigenous entrepreneurs, “may or may not be located in native homelands – many have been displaced or relocated. But they are situated in communities of indigenous people with the shared social, economic, and cultural patterns that qualify them as indigenous populations” (Peredo et al., 2004, p. 12).  
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1 Indigenous entrepreneurship can also be viewed in terms of its goals,  
objectives, or mission, such as self-determination. For example, Lindsay  
3 (2005) argues that indigenous entrepreneurship is undertaken “for the benef-  
5 it of indigenous people.” He continues by connecting this with the “ho-  
7 listic” aims of indigenous entrepreneurship at furthering self-determination  
on the part of indigenous communities, the preservation of heritage, and  
9 other distinct social aims. Underlying many of these concepts is the often  
implicit notion that this form of venture is, almost by definition, organized  
11 in a certain way, that is, collectively. This is intimately connected with the  
idea that goals are communal rather than individual. The connection is  
13 explicit in Lindsay and others, who identify indigenous entrepreneurship as  
incorporating “entrepreneurial strategies originating in and controlled by  
the community, and the sanction of Indigenous culture” (Lindsay, 2005, p.  
1).

15 The divergence may have considerable significance for the way in which  
indigenous entrepreneurship is characterized empirically, and should there-  
17 fore attract some concentrated discussion. Research themes mentioned later  
in this paper (e.g. compatibility with indigenous culture, and the tendency to  
19 land-based ventures and partnership arrangements) are likely to be influ-  
enced significantly in their findings by assumptions made restricting the  
21 concept of indigenous entrepreneurship in any of the ways just mentioned.

23

### 3. DOMINANT RESEARCH THEMES

25

Even though the field of indigenous entrepreneurship is still in comparative  
27 infancy, a number of research themes have emerged in the literature.

29

#### 3.1. *Indigenous Entrepreneurship and Culture*

31

By far, the dominant theme in indigenous entrepreneurship research to date  
33 is the relationship between indigenous entrepreneurship and indigenous  
culture. The nest of sub-themes located under this heading are captured in a  
35 symposium addressing indigenous entrepreneurship presented during the  
2004 Academy of Management Annual Meeting. The symposium introduc-  
37 tion read,

39

Is there such a thing as “Indigenous Entrepreneurship?” If so, what distinguishes it from  
other forms of entrepreneurship? Or is entrepreneurship universal, and must all accom-  
modate themselves to its essential requirements? If this is so, what these essential re-

1       quirements and what implications do they have for indigenous entrepreneurship and  
enterprise? To come full circle, if an irreducible set of essential entrepreneurship re-  
3       quirements exist, in satisfying these in ways consistent with their particular culture,  
history and objectives, are various Indigenous Peoples around the world developing  
5       differing models of entrepreneurship and enterprise development, or is a common ap-  
proach emerging? (Anderson, 2004a, p. 5)

7       As we have seen, while there is a great diversity of opinion as to what  
constitutes indigenous entrepreneurship it is arguable that the majority of  
9       scholars working in this area believe that “indigenous entrepreneurship,”  
clearly exists in some form (Peredo et al., 2004). The question of what it is  
11      that distinguishes indigenous from other forms of entrepreneurship is one of  
the richest areas of discussion and research. There are those, however, who  
13      appear to suggest that the requirements of entrepreneurship are universal in  
a way that makes it difficult if not impossible to reconcile with at least some  
15      indigenous cultural traditions. Others scholars (e.g. Dana, 1996; Peredo,  
2001), however, hold that the activity of entrepreneurship should be un-  
17      derstood more broadly, admitting many forms and adapting itself to differ-  
ent cultural and social settings. The continuum of opinions between the  
19      “universalist” and “relativistic” views of entrepreneurship forms one of the  
most engaging areas of debate in indigenous entrepreneurship.

21      In this symposium, Stiles (2004) approached this issue via the question of  
whether indigenous peoples “can opt in to the process of global develop-  
23      ment on their own terms,” and if so, whether that implies “a uniquely  
indigenous form of entrepreneurship in order to address the imperatives of  
25      Schumpeterian style economy building?” (p. 1). He argued that there are  
historical reasons to be sceptical about the possibility of an indigenous  
27      entrepreneurship, which succeeds both entrepreneurially and culturally. For  
example, he rhetorically asked, “how well have indigenous peoples in the  
29      past adapted to Schumpeterian style intrusions?” According to Stiles (2004),  
“in the case of virtually all people indigenous to the Americas, the answer is  
31      ‘not well.’ In fact the totality of their failure must be the focus of all that we  
say” (Stiles, 2004, p. 1). Stiles argued that the indigenous of North America  
33      quickly recognized the advantages of such European novelties as firearms,  
but failed to appreciate, “that European economic and social methods were  
35      also superior” (Stiles, 2004, p. 1). Stiles’ contention that the failure to adopt  
the social systems needed to produce and/or acquire the goods they came to  
37      value, clearly suggests that the cultural endowments of the indigenous were,  
and presumably still are, difficult to reconcile with the “Schumpeterian in-  
39      trusions” that might have rescued them. The implication is that the re-  
quirements of entrepreneurship are universal, and successful entrepreneurial

1 responses require that indigenous people leave behind, or at least adapt,  
those features of culture, which are incompatible. A truly indigenous form  
3 of entrepreneurship seems bound to fail.

The approach taken by Galbraith (2004), and later by Galbraith et al.  
5 (2006) somewhat resembles these approaches, but differs in some important  
respects. Galbraith et al. (2006) state that, “not surprisingly, individual en-  
7 trepreneurial among tribal members has been an abysmal failure” (p. 27).  
The authors refer to elders’ reports that “the more entrepreneurial indig-  
9 enous individuals and families had moved off the reservations to start busi-  
nesses in the cities” (Galbraith et al., 2006, p. 24). This might be taken as  
11 prima facie evidence for the conclusion, once again, that entrepreneurship  
has its objective demands, and indigenous cultural values tend to conflict  
13 with them. But as noted earlier, Galbraith et al. (2006) also argue that the  
“reservation culture” is, to a large extent, a recent and artificial overlay. Pre-  
15 colonial indigenous populations were, they contend, highly entrepreneurial.  
Their disadvantage was the lack of standardized legal, contractual, and  
17 linguistic institutions to support a more fully developed economic system.  
And that lack was frozen in place by the collective land-tenure system that  
19 came with reservations. On this view, then, the cultural adaptation needed  
to foster indigenous entrepreneurship is largely the shedding of the alien  
21 property system enforced by reservations, together with the acceptance of  
regularized social and legal patterns demanded by developed economic ex-  
23 changes. The suggestion remains that entrepreneurship objectively requires  
certain detailed responses, but the idea that indigenous culture is basically  
25 antithetical to those requirements is less evident.

Mitchell (2004), however, employed the apparatus of “transaction cog-  
27 nition” theory to argue for universal requirements in entrepreneurship. Ar-  
guing that the theory permits the identification of universal elements in  
29 entrepreneurship (see, e.g., Mitchell, Smith, Seawright, Peredo, & McKen-  
zie, 2002), Mitchell contended that “on-reserve” transactions (where, pre-  
31 sumably, cultural forces are fully in play) require more than three times the  
cognitions called for by “off-reserve” exchanges.

33 All three of the positions just described in the 2004 symposium tend to see  
entrepreneurship as embodying a set of demands that are largely universal in  
35 their scope, and they emphasize the tension between those demands and the  
cultural environments of the Indigenous. The conclusion drawn, or implied,  
37 is that if indigenous entrepreneurship is possible, it is likely to require sig-  
nificant cultural adaptation. The outlook furthest removed from this po-  
39 sition is one that accepts the tension between entrepreneurship *as standardly*  
*conceived*, and indigenous culture, but goes on to argue that this merely calls

1 on us to enlarge the standard conception of what entrepreneurship is. Entrepreneurship, on this view, is highly elastic in what it requires.

3 Dana (1995) and Dana and Anderson (2006a) are perhaps the most emphatic in their insistence that indigenous entrepreneurship takes place, but  
5 that it has markedly different characteristics from the non-indigenous varieties. They maintain that, “cultural values of indigenous peoples are often  
7 incompatible with the basic assumptions of mainstream theories” (Dana & Anderson, 2006a, p. 4), a position also argued by the Lockean scholar  
9 philosopher John Bishop (1999) and others (e.g. Tully, 1995). This approach tends also to undermine the “universality” of mainstream characterizations  
11 of entrepreneurship. For example, entrepreneurial activity need not even involve transactions, as in the case of “internal subsistence activity” (Dana  
13 & Anderson, 2006a, p. 8), but wealth is created and so entrepreneurship takes place. Similarly, Lindsay (2005) employs the language of “cultural  
15 value dimensions” to emphasize the contrast between indigenous entrepreneurship and non-indigenous.

17 Likewise Peredo (2004), who believes something recognizably entrepreneurial is common in indigenous societies, cites Polanyi (1944) in challenging  
19 the universality of economic assumptions underlying standard theories of entrepreneurship. Berkes and Adhikari (2005) concur with Peredo and  
21 Chrisman (2006) in arguing that indigenous entrepreneurship may in fact be an instrument for maintaining cultural values, and that entrepreneurship  
23 may be conducted in a different way in keeping with those values, including “a community emphasis, consensus decision-making, and a focus on sharing  
25 and cooperation, instead of competition” (Berkes & Adhikari, 2005, p. 12). And while Morris (2004), in his study of two sub-cultures in “relatively  
27 modernized” societies (South African and Hawaiian), is perhaps closest to the “universalist requirements” position, concluding that there is no need  
29 for different models of entrepreneurship to accommodate cultural differences, he also finds significant differences in the values leading to entrepreneurial  
31 undertakings and their goals among indigenous peoples.

What emerges from this sketch is the idea that responses to the general  
33 question of the relation between indigenous entrepreneurship and culture are formed in large part by how one conceives of entrepreneurship. This is  
35 not just a matter of definition, but rather how one conceives of venturing in relation to economic systems, and economic systems in relation to social  
37 arrangements, culture, and values. The ongoing search for an account of what entrepreneurship is, and what its social, cultural, and psychological  
39 requirements might be, therefore takes on an added urgency in the context of the study of indigenous entrepreneurship. The indigenous context par-

1 ticularly requires that the search be conducted in a way which addresses  
2 those large questions of the cultural boundedness of our conceptions of the  
3 values pursued entrepreneurially, the way that economic and other trans-  
4 actions are socially contained, and the conditions that give rise to recog-  
5 nizing and exploiting opportunities to create “value.”

7

### 3.2. Distinguishing Features of Indigenous Entrepreneurship

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11 Among those who agree that entrepreneurship is, to some degree at least, a  
12 flexible concept, and that indigenous forms of entrepreneurship exploit this  
13 flexibility to create distinctive kinds of venturing, there is a stimulating  
14 variety of proposals as to what distinguishes the phenomenon.

15 Scholars of indigenous entrepreneurship who are inclined to see it as an  
16 adaptation of entrepreneurship to indigenous environment almost univer-  
17 sally comment on the inclusion, even the superordination, of social aims in  
18 the goal-structures of indigenous entrepreneurship. Morris (2004), as noted  
19 above, tends to argue that entrepreneurship takes similar forms across cul-  
20 tures. Nevertheless, he observes that in the two cases he studied closely,  
21 “neither of the two samples placed much emphasis on wealth generation”  
22 (p. 2). Anderson (2004b), on the basis of his study of indigenous people  
23 pursuing development in the Canadian context, comments, “Their goal is  
24 not economic development alone, but economic development as part of the  
25 larger agenda of rebuilding their communities and nations and reasserting  
26 their control over their traditional territories” (p. 2).

#### 3.2.1. Community-Based Development Goals

27 Peredo (2004), whose work on “Community-Based Enterprises” includes  
28 indigenous populations in the Andes, goes even further. “The goals of these  
29 Community-Based Enterprises are broad: they include at least social, cul-  
30 tural, political as well as economic aims. In fact economic goals are generally  
31 a means to social ends” (Peredo, 2004, p. 3). Berkes and Adhikari (2005),  
32 who surveyed 42 cases of indigenous enterprise in “Equator Initiative” da-  
33 tabase, note that “the nature of community benefits strongly suggests that  
34 indigenous entrepreneurships tend to focus on social, community-based de-  
35 velopment” (p. 18). Lindsay (2005) does not hesitate to generalize the point,  
36 “Indigenous entrepreneurship is more holistic than non-Indigenous entre-  
37 preneurship; it focuses on both economic and non-economic goals” (p. 1).

39 The extent to which it is true that indigenous entrepreneurship is char-  
acteristically different from non-indigenous entrepreneurship in its goal

1 structures deserves a close study. The results will depend on, among other  
2 things, what one counts as indigenous entrepreneurship. The earlier division  
3 of opinion as to whether indigenous entrepreneurship is necessarily or typi-  
4 cally conducted collectively and in indigenous communities, or may be  
5 undertaken by indigenous individuals wherever they happen to be, will have  
6 a major impact on these findings. But the outcomes are of major importance  
7 to those who wish to understand and foster indigenous entrepreneurship in  
8 its various settings.

9

### 3.2.2. *Collective Organization*

11 A second characteristic singled out by many scholars is the “collective” or  
12 “communal” nature of much indigenous entrepreneurship. Anderson’s  
13 studies (1995, 1996, 1999) of indigenous development in Canada remarked  
14 that the foundation of that approach was predominately collective, based in  
15 individual First Nations. Lindsay (2005) cites the work of Redpath and  
16 Nielsen (1997), referred to earlier, in support of the view that indigenous  
17 entrepreneurship can be expected, generally, to be collective in its approach.  
18 Berkes and Adhikari (2005), in their review of more than 40 indigenous  
19 projects in Central and South America, refer repeatedly to communally  
20 owned lands, tool banks, and stocks of natural resources. The markedly  
21 collective nature of the indigenous enterprises encountered by Peredo in the  
22 Andes led her to see one of the distinguishing features of that enterprise as  
23 the “basic unit of entrepreneurship.” She argues that, “the entrepreneurial  
24 agent is not some individual but the indigenous community as a group”  
25 (Peredo, 2004, p. 3; see also Peredo & Chrisman, 2006).

### 3.2.3. *Environmental Sustainability*

27 A closely related feature often associated with indigenous entrepreneurship  
28 is a connection with the land, especially with ancestral lands; a feature which  
29 we have seen plays an important part in specifying who the Indigenous are.  
30 Berkes and Adhikari (2005) address the question, “Does indigenous entre-  
31 preneurship have a distinctive features?” by remarking that “One of the  
32 ways in which many indigenous groups are distinguishable from other rural  
33 groups is their attachment to their ancestral lands and natural resources” (p.  
34 1). Berkes and Adhikari (2005) echo Anderson (1999) and others in noting  
35 that a conspicuous aim of many indigenous peoples is the recovery of their  
36 traditional lands.

37 It is perhaps part of this sense of connection with the land that the in-  
38 digenous are frequently said to demonstrate a strong environmental concern  
39 in their operations. Peredo (2001) emphasizes the inherent sustainability of

1 indigenous use of the land among Quechuas and Aymaras. In summarizing  
2 a considerable body of research on indigenous entrepreneurship, Dana and  
3 Anderson (2006a) comment that, “Indigenous enterprise is often environ-  
4 mentally sustainable.” (p. 3) Berkes and Adhikari (2005) refer throughout  
5 their review of indigenous projects reported in the Equator Initiative da-  
6 tabase to the environmental sensitivity of the enterprises and their wide-  
7 spread success in recovering and as well as preserving the natural habitat.  
8 This environmental awareness is taken by many to be a hallmark of an  
9 indigenous enterprise. This concern for the environment is frequently linked  
10 with two other features ascribed to many or most indigenous undertakings:  
11 the use of “traditional knowledge” and the idea that the indigenous inherit a  
12 sense of a “spiritual” connection with the land.

13 Berkes and Adhikari (2005) note that indigenous enterprises often rely on  
14 traditional knowledge, defined by Berkes (1999) as “knowledge, practice  
15 and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through gen-  
16 erations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living things  
17 (including humans) with one another and with their environment” (p. 27).  
18 They emphasize the additional resources available in that knowledge, and  
19 the requirement of indigenous political control over their assets in order to  
20 capitalize on those resources. Dana (2006) echoes the importance of tra-  
21 ditional knowledge and its connection with ecological awareness.

22 The sense of a spiritual connection with the land is often seen as con-  
23 nected with traditional knowledge. In his discussion of traditional knowl-  
24 edge, Dana (2006) quotes McGregor (2004) in including within indigenous  
25 knowledge “principles and values such as respect, and recognition of re-  
26 lationships among all of Creation” (McGregor, 2004, p. 389). Jacob and  
27 Suderman (1994) make a clear connection between this sense of spiritual  
28 connection and environmental sensitivity.

29 Perhaps the salient characteristic of the native worldview, and the one which has the  
30 greatest relevance to sustainability, is that of a sacred perspective on the nature of the  
31 universe. The spiritual point of view possesses the potential to inhibit a cavalier ap-  
32 proach to the use of the earth’s resources. (Jacob & Suderman, 1994, p. 5)

33

### 3.2.4. *The Debate Regarding Cultural or Economic Forces*

35 Whether or not this concern for the environment is a typical feature of  
36 indigenous – and this deserves further study – its roots in indigenous culture  
37 and tradition has been hotly contested. Several authors (e.g. Anderson,  
38 1997; Miller, 2001; Galbraith et al., 2006) take an opposing point of view,  
39 and argue that the perceived “environmental sustainability” or “ecological  
awareness” among indigenous populations is simply good management of



1 what are seen to be valuable, scarce, and non-imitable resources. When  
2 natural assets were viewed as plentiful or abundant, they argue, indigenous  
3 populations had little concern for environmental maintenance. These schol-  
4 ars contend that until scarcity made itself felt, indigenous people were as  
5 exploitative as other populations in their attitude to natural resources. Gal-  
6 braith et al. (2006) are not just bent on correcting what they take to be a  
7 romantic myth. They argue that the “tradition of indigenous overkill contin-  
8 ues into modern times on reservation land where tribal members are not  
9 restricted by state environmental laws regarding the number or size of ani-  
10 mals that can be hunted” (Galbraith et al., 2006, p. 14).

11 Galbraith et al. (2006), in fact, argue that the commonly cited cultural  
12 “philosophy of environmental protectionism” and the proposal that its  
13 spiritual connection exceeds other religions (see Galbraith, 2004) is simply a  
14 modern, romantic myth. They note that, “this is not to suggest that indig-  
15 enous people were more or less environmentally destructive than other cul-  
16 tures, but only that indigenous people tended to be influenced by the same  
17 incentives of economic scarcity or abundance” (Galbraith et al., 2006, p.  
18 11). This contention plays a part in their argument that (re-)instituting in-  
19 dividual property rights is an essential step in promoting viable indigenous  
20 entrepreneurship, a theme also presented in economist Terry Anderson’s  
21 research (Anderson, 1997; Anderson et al., 2006).

### 23 3.2.5. *Indigenous Entrepreneurship and Partnerships*

24 Another common theme in indigenous entrepreneurship is the role of part-  
25 nerships in developing vigorous and effective indigenous enterprises. In de-  
26 veloping their “research paradigm” for indigenous entrepreneurship, Hindle  
27 and Lansdowne (2005) conducted interviews with a number of indigenous  
28 people in Australia and the United States. Among the dominant themes that  
29 emerged (along with the degree of indigenous “content” necessary to qualify  
30 something as indigenous entrepreneurship, and the the issue of individuality  
31 versus collectivity) was the issue of how to manage partnerships between  
32 indigenous and non-indigenous members of an enterprise.

33 This requires recognition that indigenous entrepreneurship often takes  
34 place in a setting where non-indigenous individuals and corporations often  
35 collaborate with indigenous people in an entrepreneurial undertaking. And-  
36 erson (1996) highlighted the prominent role of partnerships, largely between  
37 collectively owned indigenous groups and non-indigenous corporations, in  
38 the development of indigenous entrepreneurship in Canada. Anderson  
39 (1996) also drew attention to advantages for both indigenous groups and  
non-indigenous businesses in these partnerships, while Hindle and Lans-



1   downe's (2005) study suggested some of the questions that must be faced in  
exploring this form of enterprise. Berkes and Adhikari (2005) also explore  
3   the importance of partnerships among the indigenous enterprises they stud-  
ied. Many indigenous enterprises, they discovered, had partnerships at sev-  
5   eral levels of organization. Some of these partnerships were with non-  
government organizations (NGOs), others with government and/or funding  
7   agencies. The importance of these partnerships, from fund-raising to train-  
ing and technical support, was explicit. However, there was less detail re-  
9   garding the partnerships between indigenous and non-indigenous businesses  
– possibly due to the nature of the indigenous populations Berkes and  
11   Adhikari (2005) studied. Differences in these partnership relationships, such  
as patterns of ownership and governance, the role of cultural differences,  
13   and the differences between corporations and not-for-profit organizations  
will need further investigation.

15

17

19

#### 4. RESOURCES

21   Indigenous entrepreneurship is clearly an emergent field. As the discussion  
in this paper reveals, it is also a field that invites interdisciplinary research,  
23   as the resources of sociology and anthropology, as well as economics, pol-  
itics, history, philosophy, and religious studies interact with management  
25   scholarship in investigating the phenomenon of indigenous entrepreneur-  
ship. It can be expected, therefore, that relevant material may be published  
27   in a wide variety of journals, including several that are not usually consulted  
by entrepreneurship scholars. It is nevertheless worth identifying several that  
29   have, at least to date and a certain extent, been the principal source of  
discussions concerning indigenous entrepreneurship. These include the  
31   *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, *Canadian Journal of Native  
Studies*, *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship*, *American Indian Quar-*  
33   *terly*, *Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship*, *Canadian Journal of  
Administrative Sciences*, and *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and  
35   Small Business*. In addition, there are a number of recent edited volumes  
that are dedicated to indigenous economic development and entrepreneur-  
37   ship. Most recently these include Anderson, Benson and Flanagan's (2006),  
*Self-Determination: The Other Path for Native Americans* and Dana and  
39   Anderson's (2006b) *Handbook of Research on Indigenous Entrepreneurship*.

## 5. SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper has been to offer an overview of the current study of indigenous entrepreneurship. From the existent literature on the topic, the following appear to be some of the major themes and questions that have emerged.

First, while there is broad agreement on the application of the term “indigenous,” there are differences of emphasis and outright controversies about empirical description of indigenous people, especially concerning the role of ownership and private property in their culture and traditions.

Second, the concept of entrepreneurship is as controversial in this field as elsewhere in management studies. What lends urgency to the question of its definition and its empirical features is the range of opinion as to how compatible the demands of entrepreneurship are with the cultural heritage of the indigenous populations of the world. There are fundamental disagreements as to how flexible the requirements of entrepreneurship are, and whether true indigenous entrepreneurship can transform entrepreneurship into an authentic and distinctive form.

Third, the concept of indigenous entrepreneurship as a total concept is open to debate and discussion. Not only does it inherit the question of whether the notion of entrepreneurship can be culturally transformed, there is also a difference of approach concerning the location and ultimate goals of indigenous entrepreneurship. While some scholars appear willing to accept any kind of entrepreneurship involving indigenous people as “indigenous entrepreneurship,” other scholars are inclined to restrict the concept to undertakings within indigenous territories and/or directed toward the communal goals of the indigenous population under study.

Fourth, there are a number of critical discussion points related to indigenous populations, and in turn, their relationship to entrepreneurial activities and enterprises. These include, but are not limited to, the pursuit of multiple goals, including social objectives; the notion of collective organization, ownership and outcomes; and a population’s association with the land, characteristically leading to a high degree of environmental sensitivity, drawing on traditional knowledge and fostered by a sense of spiritual connection with the land and its resources.

Finally, the theme of partnerships involving indigenous enterprises with other indigenous enterprises and non-indigenous bodies, including NGOs, government agencies, funding organizations, and non-indigenous individ-

1 uals and corporations, is recognized as a vital topic demanding further  
 3 attention.

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