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Understanding the Australian Indigenous Entrepreneurs through Narratives

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the categorical content of the narratives of a sample of 35 Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs. The narrative case studies revealed patterns and coherence across Indigenous entrepreneurs talking about success factors and making sense of their business experience. The paper also outlines principles of culturally appropriate research methods for doing research in Indigenous communities and protocols which enable researchers to confidently engage with Indigenous Australians. Protocols such as the use of appropriate communication methods, the development of mutual trust and the need for reciprocity provide researchers with basic guidelines to follow regarding consultation and negotiation with Indigenous Australians. Six sets of values which underpin core principles to research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia are reciprocity, respect, responsibility, spirit and integrity, and survival and protection.

One significant observation identified by the researchers was the strong sense of community amongst the Indigenous entrepreneurs. Many entrepreneurs were part of significant formal and informal networks and were often volunteers or members of community groups and organisations. Mutual sharing was also noteworthy, particularly with the local Indigenous community. Many Indigenous entrepreneurs provided financial assistance, employment opportunities and sought to aid the Indigenous community in whatever way they could via their business. A further issue when considering the factors influencing Indigenous business success is that success is often evaluated differently from the perspective of the Indigenous entrepreneur. For many Indigenous people and communities, profit is not seen as the definitive measure of business success, and other measures such as securing employment of community members have greater importance.

While carrying out a thematic analysis of the data it became clear that the narratives were central to how Indigenous entrepreneurs recall, make sense of their experiencing in start up and running the businesses. The accounts gathered from the narrative case studies also revealed a tension between self-identity and the constraints the identity place on business operations. Furthermore, the perception of the success was largely determined by self-identify and particular context of Indigenous culture and community.

Keywords: Indigenous entrepreneurs; narratives; business success

1. Introduction

Issues relating to power and control have historically caused problems between Indigenous peoples around the world and researchers across the board (West, Stewart, Foster & Usher, 2012). In Australia, historically the mainstream view has shaped society's knowledge and understanding of the Indigenous cultures shaping legislation and policy further marginalising Indigenous people (Lavalley & Poole, 2010; Rigney, 1999). Historical power imbalance between researchers and Indigenous people called for deep transformations regarding methodological approaches to doing research in the Indigenous context (West et al., 2012). Tuhiwai Smith (1999) observed that when Indigenous peoples become researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of research is transformed in several ways (Smith, 1999). This can include questions being framed differently, priorities ranked differently, problems can be defined differently and people participate on different terms. This has led to the development of Indigenous Standpoint Theory (Nakata, 1998) which encourages Indigenous researchers to develop unique standpoint theories, so previous research on Indigenous people can be reviewed and challenged.

In research in the area of Indigenous entrepreneurship, a key proponent of Indigenous standpoint theory Dennis Foley (2003, 2008a, 2008b) has highlighted the importance of Indigenous entrepreneurship to achieving self-determination through economic independence from the position of the Indigenous person as a researcher and subject. It should be noted here that research on Indigenous entrepreneurship in Australia and other countries (Dana and Anderson 2007) tends to be constructed through a 'deficit' model. With literature on Indigenous enterprises in Australia suggests that Indigenous businesses face a wide range of barriers and problems in establishing and developing business enterprises. The barriers faced by potential Indigenous entrepreneurs include a lack of basic business skills and financial literacy (Collins, 2004); a limited pool of skilled labour, poor mentoring and inadequate business advisory support in the establishment phase (Altman, 2001; Collins, 2004) and a lack of access to finance and education (Collins, 2004). This exclusion is reproduced in systems and policies imposed on Indigenous people and is manifested in many forms, both overt and covert, all downward leveling norms or "push factors" (Wood and Davidson, 2011) operate to reduce and limit opportunity, forcing the more ambitious to engage in forms of entrepreneurship as a means of both escape and survival. They also connect to very real political issues about the consequences of how we understand Indigenous economic development and policy formation, particularly as it relates to female Indigenous entrepreneurs (Pearce, 2013).

Hence the literature on Indigenous entrepreneurs focuses mainly on the barriers (including cultural barriers) that are faced, and tends to ignore the strengths and positive cultural and other attributes that Indigenous entrepreneurs bring to the enterprise. These have been identified by some scholars as a colonial impact, resulting in the underdevelopment of Indigenous social and human capital (Foley, 2008a, 2008b). Foley's work suggests that Indigenous businesses face both racial and gender discrimination from mainstream society as well as discrimination from Indigenous communities, emerging from a lack of Indigenous understanding of entrepreneurs. Indigenous standpoint theory thus represents a foundation for formulating, theorising, discourse development and analysis and developing methodological approaches in research which give voice and credence to Indigenous knowledge and knowledge making – Indigenous sense-making. By adopting this approach with this research project on success factors of Indigenous enterprises, we can develop a deeper understanding of Indigenous issues within the business sector which will hopefully lead to better outcomes for Indigenous entrepreneurs in the future.

This paper firstly briefly provides some insights into conceptual and empirical literature on the factors influencing the success of Indigenous entrepreneurship in Australia. The paper then reflects on formal and informal protocols which exist to enable researchers to confidently engage with Indigenous Australians. The paper then further specifies conceptual model of the factors influencing business success of Indigenous enterprises in Australia, the research design and principles of carrying culturally appropriate research methods, and finishes by outlining some narrative accounts gathered in the field work done during 2011 and 2012. In particular the use of narrative as a discourse and its application to Indigenous Standpoint Theory in bringing alive the voices of the Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs – from theory to method to understanding the role of narratives to in Indigenous research practice.

2. Factors influencing business success Indigenous entrepreneurship in Australia: Literature review

According to the literature business success of the Indigenous entrepreneurship in Australia is seen to be directly influenced by the existence of various forms of capital. This includes human capital (Altman, 2001, Collins, 2004, Baguley, 2007), social capital (Flamsteed and Golding, 2005), financial capital (Collins 2004, Foley 2006), physical and technological capital (Altman, 2002, Flamsteed and Golding, 2005) as well as institutional capital which relates to governance structures. As well as directly influencing business success, these forms of capital also have effects on each other. For example, recent work by Foley (2008) suggests that social capital leads to the development of human capital, and vice versa. Social capital may also influence governance arrangements because of social learning about more effective structures from contact with a larger array of information sources. Ability to access financial capital would also be expected to be a function of human capital, as human capital is likely to influence entrepreneurs ability to complete administrative processes required to secure loans.

In addition to these forms of capital, it is expected that business success will be directly and indirectly influenced by cultural capital. Cultural capital incorporates entrepreneurs' worldview, and includes such facets as attitudes towards mainstream Australia, respect for diversity (including the success of others and attitudes towards commercial activity), desire for change and concern for future generations. Previous research by Flamsteed and Golding (2005), Foley (2006) and Baguley (2007) has demonstrated the influence of cultural capital on business development. In the conceptual model, cultural capital is also expected to influence institutional capital because governance structures will be determined in part by what is acceptable to Indigenous communities. Cultural capital also influences social and human capital as it affects the acceptability of developing business skills and relating to mainstream Australia (Foley, 2006).

3. Narrating Indigenous entrepreneurship in Australia

Aboriginal people have a long and unbroken history of storytelling, which is reflected today in many forms including song, dance and art (Brady 1998, Pearce and Cox 2009). In short, storytelling has brought together families and communities in understanding their collective narrative histories (Atkinson 2002). In the Dreamtime, as in modernity, storytelling remains a central feature of Indigenous cultural transmission—we now use it to tell stories of our enterprises and new endeavours (Pearce, 2013).

This research paper aims at increasing our understanding of the challenges facing Australian Indigenous enterprises in a range of geographical, economic and social settings through a largely qualitative research process which includes narratives. The research focused on identifying a broad range of factors which influence the success of Indigenous enterprises, such as culture, governance arrangements, human capital, access to financial capital, and availability of physical and technological capital and personal characteristics. In carrying out this project we were also interested in exploring the extent to which, and the way in which, the activities of Indigenous enterprises are linked to Indigenous culture by providing goods and services that are unique to Indigenous culture – such as Indigenous art, tourism, food and artefacts – or by providing general goods and services to Indigenous communities themselves. We were also interested in exploring how Indigenous social capital (including family, tribal and broader social networks as well as leadership and mentoring capacity) provide a basis to sustain (and to sometime constrain) the formation of, and survival of, Indigenous enterprises. A further issue when considering the factors influencing Indigenous business success is that success is often evaluated differently from the perspective of the Indigenous entrepreneur. For many Indigenous people and communities, profit is not seen as the definitive measure of business success, and other measures such as securing employment of community members have greater importance. For many Indigenous entrepreneurs there is also the challenge of balancing cultural integrity with the concept of commercialisation.

This is where narratives play an important role as they provide the space between theory and method, as narratives in organisational cultural studies offer the possibility for providing some invigoratingly fresh insights into many aspects of popular culture, including those conventionally regarded as the 'other', such as the stories of Aboriginal people (Pearce and Cox 2009). These stories are important in many ways, as they not only help us to work through future endeavours they also help us to understand our history and culture (Robertson, Demosthenous and Demosthenous 2005 in Pearce, 2013).

Narrative as a form of qualitative research methodology is central to this research project, particularly in the form of interviews, narratives and auto ethnographies as a way of documenting the experiences of the respondents in a manner sensitive to the complexities of the relationships between researcher and informant and aware of the complexities of trust, interactions and obligations that characterise research into Indigenous entrepreneurs involved in private and social enterprises.

Understanding and comprehending the differences between cultures is crucial element for doing research in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context (NHMRC, 2003). Another crucial element in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research is the explicit recognition and commitment to respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural values and principles (NHMRC, 2003). Respect is a major element in the forming of trust between researchers and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

community and trustworthy relationships with local community members should be created and maintained wherever possible. At every stage, research with and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must involve a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity (AIATSIS, 2011).

There is a number of formal and informal protocols which exist to enable researchers to confidently engage with Indigenous Australians. Protocols such as the use of appropriate communication methods, the development of mutual trust and the need for reciprocity provide researchers with basic guidelines to follow regarding consultation and negotiation with Indigenous Australians. These protocols are outlined in the AIATSIS Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies (2011) and the NHMRC's Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research (2003).

The following six sets of values underpin core principles to research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia (Table 1).

Table 1: Core principles to doing research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

<p><u>Reciprocity</u> Recognition and “ensuring that research outcomes include equitable benefits of value to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or individuals” (NHMRC, 2003).</p>	<p><u>Equality</u> When researching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, equality can be demonstrated by considering whether research agreements have the strength to sustain equality and whether participating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have understood and expressed satisfaction with proposed research, its potential benefits and the distribution of those benefits (NHMRC, 2003).</p>
<p><u>Respect</u> At the beginning of any research project, researchers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should agree on all aspects of the research project to ensure a respectful relationship is established, maintained and continued.</p>	<p><u>Spirit and Integrity</u> Spirit and integrity is an encompassing value that brings together all others to form a consistent cohesion. It consists of two components, the first being the continuity between past, present and future generations. “The second is about behaviour, which maintains the coherence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values and cultures” (NHMRC, 2003).</p>
<p><u>Responsibility</u> These responsibilities include those to country, kinship bonds, caring for others and the maintenance of harmony and balance within and between the physical and spiritual realms (NHMRC, 2003). Research is considered ethical when the differing responsibilities are established and agreed upon (including those of the researchers), participants are protected, trust is maintained and accountability is clear (NHMRC, 2003).</p>	<p><u>Survival and Protection</u> “Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has had a chequered past, and many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities do not trust researchers for fear of manipulation and unfair treatment. Researchers will need to demonstrate their trustworthiness through “ethical negotiation, conduct and dissemination of research” (NHMRC, 2003).</p>

We undertook 35 in-depth interviews of Indigenous entrepreneurs in urban, regional and remote areas of Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. Theoretical sampling was done based on gender, industry and age of the entrepreneurs as well as the duration of being involved in the business. We sources interviewees from the *Black Pages*, *Koori Mail*, Aboriginal Business Directory and other national Indigenous business portal and particularly through personal contacts. Interviews were conducted by two members of the research team and generally lasted between 2.5 and 3 hours.

We used interviews as a main data – gathering approach. Narratives produced in interview are seen by social researchers (De Fina, 2009 for instance) as worthwhile and valid source of data and our primary

attention was placed on what is said in terms how each participant's business evolved and what was perceived as critical factors contributing to the success. Following Riessman (2008) our approach to narrative analysis was the thematic analysis (as being the most common approach) which focused exclusively on content. We were focusing on the categorical content of the narratives and were looking for patterns and coherence across Indigenous entrepreneurs talking about success factors and making sense of their business experience. And it was expected the themes were influenced by both prior theories, the purpose of the research project and the data themselves.

Regarding data analysis we strictly followed four distinct levels of analysis as advocated by Cope (2005, pp. 178-179). The Level 1 analysis included 'a personal sense-making process and getting to know each of Indigenous entrepreneurs included in the qualitative sampling. During the Level 2 analysis a case study narrative was organised for each participant, as a story of how these Indigenous entrepreneurs started their businesses, particularly focusing on the success factors. These case study narratives were both chronological and thematic. During the Level 3 analysis we identified commonalities and specifics across the case narratives, and we were looking for quotations, patterns, themes and specific illustrating some aspects of success factors, access to resources, etc. It then led in Level 4 analysis towards further clustering of the empirical evidence supporting some of issues around measures and conceptualisation of success and constraints to success for Indigenous business owners.

4. Overview of some preliminary findings

Firstly, it became clear that Indigenous business owners measure success in a number of ways. Traditional measures of business success including financial profit, growth of the business through sales and revenue, customer satisfaction, longevity and generation of increasing employment emerged as important indicators of success for Indigenous business owners. While discussing entrepreneurialism and experience in business, one Indigenous business owner commented:

You have to have a product and you have to make a profit from it. If you don't have those two elements, you're not actually a business.

(Female Indigenous entrepreneur, 30-39 yrs old, Service industry)

This illustrates the owner's belief in traditional measures of success for business and the need to make a financial profit in order to be considered successful in what you do.

In regards to growth of the business, another Indigenous business owner commented:

I work for three different contractors now, so I've got three different incomes coming into my business. When I first started...I only had the one

(Male Indigenous entrepreneur, 47 yrs old, Building and Construction industry)

Another important measure of business success for Indigenous business owners is how it relates to themselves and how it makes them 'feel'. Lifestyle measures, knowing that a job has been well done and recognition and reputation - to be valued by the community are all key considerations when measuring the success of a business to an Indigenous business owner.

In terms of lifestyle, one Indigenous business owner commented:

My business is successful if I'm able to go out in the middle of the day and take my dogs to the beach

(Female Indigenous entrepreneur, 30-39 yrs old,
Service industry)

Another example of how business success relates personally to an Indigenous business owner includes knowing that a job has been well done. This is reflected in the statement below:

I measure my success by how I feel at the end of it. If I walk out and feel "Oh my God, I've done something. I've made a difference here", then I think I've done a good job

(Female Indigenous entrepreneur, 40-49 yrs old,
Service industry)

Recognition and reputation were also found to be key measures of business success for Indigenous business owners..

Examples of this include:

The key to success is if you're getting known and your name is recognised

(Female Indigenous entrepreneur, 40-49 yrs old,
Retail industry)

We're successful in the fact that we've got International recognition. We are successful in the fact that we have won some awards

(Male Indigenous entrepreneur, 60 plus yrs old,
Tourism industry)

These examples relate to recognition on a number of levels ranging from the local Indigenous community right through to the international level. In addition, reputation and cultural obligations are important within Indigenous communities and can have a positive or negative effect on the success of the business (Foley, 2003).

Success measures related to community were also found to be significant for Indigenous business owners. Community in this sense refers to the local community where the business owner lives and includes both the mainstream Australian and Indigenous community. Success measures relevant to community include providing employment to Indigenous people, effects on people and social changes, providing evidence to community members that Indigenous people can successfully run a business and to retain cultural identity.

Providing employment to Indigenous people was a significant indicator of business success for many business owners. A number of Indigenous business owners have Indigenous employment policies in place to ensure Indigenous employment remains a focus of the business. One business owner commented:

I have a policy to employ, 75% of my employees are Indigenous. But at the moment, I'm smashing that, I'm at about 90%.

(Male Indigenous entrepreneur, 47 yrs old, Building
and Construction industry)

Another way Indigenous business owners conceptualise success at a community level involves providing evidence or proving to the wider community (including both the mainstream and Indigenous communities) that Indigenous people can successfully run a business. This measure is quite unique, as it signifies the Indigenous business owners desire to prove themselves as worthy business people. In addition to this, a number of Indigenous business owners mentioned that their desire for success was also related to being a positive role model for the younger Indigenous people within their

community. They wanted to show the younger generation that Indigenous people can run a successful business and instil confidence in them to perhaps one day do the same.

Well, a lot of the younger ones, they come in and see what, how we've been going and that in business. They can see it's a pretty well established business...they can see that we're Aboriginal and we can do it

(Male Indigenous entrepreneur, 63 yrs old, service industry)

Another unique measurement of business success at a community level relates to retaining cultural identity for Indigenous business owners. This involves being able to practice and express meaningful aspects of Australian Indigenous culture, which has become significantly eroded since colonisation (Foley, 2006). One Indigenous business owner expressed:

We're successful in the fact that our kids are seeing old traditions continued in a contemporary way and we are actually gaining some financial benefits from that. So that's a big success

(Male Indigenous entrepreneur, 60 plus yrs old, Tourism industry)

Regarding the constraints to business success Indigenous entrepreneurs singles out the need for training in multiple areas for Indigenous business owners, staff related challenges and cultural challenges such as separating the business from family and the acceptance of Aboriginal culture in the mainstream Australian community. Participants also mentioned marketing (including promotion and sales), financial management and employee training as the most necessary. One Indigenous business owner commented:

I suppose my problem was accounting, first of all. Learning all of that type of thing...just knowledge of what is involved in running a business

(Male Indigenous entrepreneur, 30-39 yrs old, Information Technology industry)

This lack of knowledge in the financial management and administration of the business was noted amongst several Indigenous business owners and some also commented on their inability to access assistance in this area:

I'm not 100% happy with the business support I'm getting, or the lack of business support...I don't know where to go, or who to ask

(Male Indigenous entrepreneur, 30-39 yrs old, retail industry)

Another key constraint to business success to emerge from our qualitative findings included staff related challenges. This challenge incorporated the Indigenous business owner's inability to find and retain skilled staff, issues surrounding transient staff as well as high staff turnover for some business owners. These issues however effect business owners worldwide and therefore are not unique to Australian Indigenous business owners.

One aspect of the constraints to business success that may be deemed unique to Australian Indigenous business owners is the cultural challenges they face in operating their businesses. These challenges include their struggle to separate business from family. This involves family members wanting or demanding benefits from the business which are largely financially related. Indigenous business owners commented that their cultural obligations compel them to 'give back' to their community, in particular their family regardless of their businesses financial standing. This can often cause conflict between the Indigenous business owner and their community or family and contribute additional strain on the business.

Acceptance of Australian Indigenous culture within the mainstream community is also a challenge for some Indigenous business owners. Some (not all) have experienced prejudice behaviour towards

themselves or their business due to their ethnicity. This can be seen in the below comment by one Indigenous business owner:

I can't get it into shops, normal shops, because as soon as they see Indigenous, they're just not interested. That's been the biggest let down

(Male Indigenous entrepreneur, 30-39 yrs old, retail industry)

Other barriers to success for Indigenous business owners included difficulties with running the business from home, business location issues, fierce competition and problems with partners in a partnership business. One Indigenous business owner commented:

She [the business partner] sort of took over, without putting the money in that she promised. She only had like fifteen percent of the business but was taking over

(Male Indigenous entrepreneur, 30-39 yrs old, retail industry)

Again, this challenge is not unique to Australian Indigenous business owners, but is important to note to ensure sufficient training and education programs can be developed to improve the situation for Indigenous business owners.

However, the research team also found that some of the responses regarding the entrepreneurship and strength of Indigenous identity became expressed in what may be described as a story telling or 'yarn' like the following one of a young female entrepreneur who is designing and printing the textile making a range of prints based around her Indigenous identity. In her story she was telling in a very amazing way and remarkable voice how she creates a range of prints based around her identity and her family and where she comes from and who she is, but yet enfolded as a contemporary expression of Aboriginal identity.

"..for me, the essence is on the story, you know, and being able to share those stories and loving to tell the stories and remembering family. And also, the lovely thing about it is that I'm able to continue learning and talking to people here, and hearing new stories. People come to me, I've got a few things to tell you, you know? Um, that's a really beautiful component of it too, and you know, like I said, I'm outside of country, but I've got that constant connection to it in these prints and in these fabrics and in these stories. Which is really lovely, and learning the new things. One of my prints, / Buraworrimbool, which is my latest one, my sister told me a story about the Milky Way and she said, for us Gamillaroy people, the stars actually represent campfires. And sitting around those campfires are our Elders and our loved ones and our families and ancestors that have passed on, and they're cooking up river mussels on the fire, big feasts. So the smoke and the haze of the cooking mussels is the haze of the Milky Way. So the reason why they're cooking that feast is so that when we join them, we can celebrate and share in it with them. And that's something that I've learnt in the last couple of years, that goes back to the beginning of time for us, you know, that we've always known. And know it's something that I can share with my daughter, I can tell the other Gamillaroy people in my family, and in that way, being able to immerse myself in culture, old and new, you know? New and old traditions too, is something that keeps my Spirit alive. Yeah".

"And so with my textiles, it's about creating a visual connection to those people and those places and those stories, keeping them alive. So, making stories or retelling these stories through image, and the stories that I tell are old. You know, they're creation stories, but they're also family stories, you know, about going out and picking napan's or / with Nan and Aunties, or fishing on the river. It's a real variety of things, so it's in my way of thinking, a really good expression of Aboriginal culture, contemporary or whatever, you know, just different ways of telling stories. Old and new both as important as each other".

4. Reflections on doing research in Indigenous context

The literature on Indigenous enterprises in Australia suggests that Indigenous businesses face a wide range of barriers and problems in establishing and developing business enterprises. Scholars, like Foley (2006) have suggested that Indigenous businesses face both racial and gender discrimination from mainstream society (as well as discrimination from Indigenous communities, emerging from a lack of Indigenous understanding of entrepreneurs). These have been identified by some scholars as a colonial impact, resulting in the underdevelopment of Indigenous social and human capital (Foley, 2010). Low levels of human and social capital have led to other social and economic problems, including an undermining of the incentive for individuals to engage in entrepreneurial activity, welfare dependence and substance abuse (Baguley, 2007). Other problems attendant with low levels of social capital include low self-esteem, lack of confidence, as well as limited Indigenous role models and/or Indigenous business networks, ensuring that the Indigenous nascent entrepreneur is forced to operate their enterprise within the business structure of the dominant culture, that is settler society (Flamsteed and Golding, 2005; Foley, 2010).

In carrying out this project we were interested in exploring the extent to which, and the way in which, the activities of Indigenous enterprises are linked to Indigenous culture by providing goods and services that are unique to Indigenous culture – such as Indigenous art, tourism, food and artefacts – or by providing general goods and services to Indigenous communities themselves. We were also interested in exploring how Indigenous social capital (including family, tribal and broader social networks as well as leadership and mentoring capacity) provide a basis to sustain (and to sometime constrain) the formation of, and survival of, Indigenous enterprises. A further issue when considering the factors influencing Indigenous business success is that success is often evaluated differently from the perspective of the Indigenous entrepreneur. For many Indigenous people and communities, profit is not seen as the definitive measure of business success, and other measures such as securing employment of community members have greater importance.

One significant observation identified by the researchers was the strong sense of community amongst the Indigenous entrepreneurs. Many entrepreneurs were part of significant formal and informal networks and were often volunteers or members of community groups and organisations. Mutual sharing was also noteworthy, particularly with the local Indigenous community. Many Indigenous entrepreneurs provided financial assistance, employment opportunities and sought to aid the Indigenous community in whatever way they could via their business.

While carrying out a thematic analysis of the data it became clear that the narratives were central to how Indigenous entrepreneurs recall, make sense of their experiencing in start up and running the businesses. The accounts gathered from the narrative case studies also revealed a tension between self-identity and the constraints the identity place on business operations. Furthermore, the perception of the success was largely determined by self-identify and particular context of Indigenous culture and community. Sharing personal experience can enrich learning by enabling knowledge and practices to be reviewed and evaluated. During this research with Indigenous entrepreneurs, personal observations were noted by researchers to enable more in-depth interpretations of the data gathered and also to create a greater learning experience for fellow researchers in the field of Indigenous entrepreneurship. The researchers' own personal reflections on their observations, interpretations and impressions experienced before, during and after fieldwork can be summarised within the themes of sensitivity, intrusion, the need for community engagement; mutual exchange and recognition. Researchers on this project were often expected or encouraged to share personal experiences during the interview process. This often resulted in the Indigenous entrepreneur feeling more at ease and comfortable in the research setting. Feelings of intrusion was also a sensitive issue and one experienced particularly by the non-Indigenous researchers of the group. A few Indigenous participants interviewed expressed extreme discomfort at the use of an audio recorder and many did not feel comfortable with the direct line of questioning involved with structured interviews. Building a rapport and developing a sense of mutual trust between participant and researcher often enabled the process to progress in a more efficient and relaxed manner.

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