

Introduction

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This special issue of JAED is dedicated to an enhanced understanding of two-eyed seeing. More specifically, it focuses on the ways in which Indigenous individuals can “see” not only from their Indigenous, spiritual, decolonized, communalist mindset, but also from a Western, scientific, colonial, capitalist, neo-liberal ideology. The two-eyed perspective suggests that this dual ability will allow individuals to learn about, then consciously and actively participate in both the Indigenous as well as the Western worlds—standing with one proverbial foot in each.

In line with the theme of this issue, the following is a review of two books by Robin Kimmerer, written 11 years apart in 2013 and 2024. This collaborative review, articulated by three scholars—academic leaders who are actively examining the evolving field of Indigenous economics, business, and economic development locally, nationally, and internationally—covers two key areas of interest, the first of which is clarifying how Kimmerer combines an understanding of Indigenous knowledge with Western science to support a natural collaborative way in the world. Second, they consider how lessons provided in Kimmerer’s first book support the thesis presented in her second book that the underutilized natural eco-system metaphor can be useful when contemplating contemporary alternatives to a flawed Western capitalist approach. This consideration culminates in ideas on how individuals might collectively “see” Indigenous economic development in a different and enhanced light from two perspectives.

Whenever I read or hear about management decision-making, organizational problem-solving, or the contemplation of unique and transformational community development projects utilizing parable or allegory, I get excited! Why? Because in the early 1990s, while looking for materials to use in my initial delivery of a university course called *Introduction to Organizational Behaviour*, I stumbled upon a useful text called *Images of Organization* by Gareth Morgan (1997). For me, given my interest in Indigenous organizations, it was a game-changer.

According to Morgan, all theories—in his case, those of organization and management—are based on implicit images or metaphors that lead us to see, understand, and act in distinctive yet partial ways. In other words, the use of metaphor implies a way of thinking and a way of seeing. Further, metaphor, such as the ones Kimmerer utilizes, can assist individuals and

community development officers and leaders, in finding appropriate ways of seeing, understanding, and shaping the situations with which they have to deal. Perfect.

Therefore, when addressing the ideas presented by Kimmerer, and those suggested by those espousing the theory of two-eyed seeing, each metaphor, or eye, sees in focused yet limited ways. An eye on Western ways, take for example capitalism, privileges the concepts of the invisible hand of the market economy, individualism, linearity, competition, and the quest for modernity. On the flip side, it renders invisible, for the most part, the significance of political interference, the collective value of communal enterprise, and collective holistic development. Or take, for example, neo-liberal researchers and the discovery of new knowledge by exploring through experimentation via environmental control, expert testimony, and the quest for objectivity via tested and written “truths”, yet missing out on the benefits of qualitative research methodology, diversity of views on the meaning of truth, and the social construction of reality let alone alternative cultural views of the meaning of life. Buddhists, for example, liken community development to the blossoming of the lotus flower, which requires spiritual guidance and a foundation of “mud”.

Morgan suggests that there are at least eight images or metaphors at play when attempting to understand the ways in which organizations (and communities) operate, including the organization as: machine, brains, organisms (Kimmerer), cultures, psychic prisons, systems of politics, transformation, and tools of domination. In summation, these organizational images represent the cognitive reactions and associations of customers, investors, and potential applicants, serving as a template to categorize, store, and recall information.

The ability to see an organization with these eight eyes provides managers with a catalogue of strengths and weaknesses, which provides the tools required of master managers that broaden their thinking and action. Morgan argues that the insights of one metaphor can often help us overcome the limitations of another which, in turn, encourages us to recognize and, indeed, search for the limitations of existing insights. Given this, we can use existing metaphors as springboards for new insight. For Morgan, metaphors lead to new metaphors, creating a “mosaic of competing and complementary insights... one of the most powerful qualities of the approach.”

Morgan’s approach allowed me to springboard to the development of an enhanced understanding of “The Organization as Indigenous”. And it all started 40 years ago when I was set out to research the emerging “modern” Indigenous organization, asking two questions: are you an Indigenous organization? and, if yes, how? What makes your organization Indigenous?

Without going into too much detail, after nearly 40 years of research involving hundreds of leaders and managers of Indigenous organizations in Canada, I suggest that there are at least five aspects of this additional metaphor. These include: 1) the employment of a significant number of Indigenous managers and employees, 2) an intimate connection to the Indigenous community from which the organization was birthed, 3) the integration of Indigenous cultural ways into the operationalization of organizational problem-solving and decision-making, 4) a reimagined understanding of

organizational power, control, and stewardship, and (more recently), 5) the architectural design.

In this way, we can discuss the way in which these organizations help change and build up their own community vision and market, incorporate consensus decision making, and integrate the wisdom of the Elder into the way in which the organization or community operates as well as the importance of ecological knowledge and oral stories. Then, employees of emerging organizations, creatively explore ways to operationalize culture in decision-making, and might take back home new lessons learned; thereby reimagining ways in which these new findings might enhance life at home.

When I read the books by Kimmerer, I saw her approach as an exercise of metaphorical analysis, specifically the Western scientific mechanistic view of organizations (and the community), complete with bureaucracy, specific skills-based training, competition, and the potential for unlimited growth, contrasted with the Indigenous holistic way of seeing the natural workings of the world, informed by values such as reciprocity, gift-giving and sharing, and collaboration. While these two ideological views of the world are fairly independent and mutually exclusive in nature, the eco-systems humanistic metaphor actually emerges as a viable alternative to the Western mechanistic view because of the weaknesses inherent to that view.

In her books, Kimmerer suggests that her organic and gift-giving model, based on assumptions of abundance and reciprocity, can co-exist in those “gaps” or spaces left vacant in the global capitalist economy in which we find ourselves currently. That is, she argues, that the world would be better off if we viewed our current situation with both Indigenous and Western scientific eyes, strengthening our view of our communities and organizations, by weighing the pros and cons of each, allowing room for an Indigenous knowledge-based approach to solving worldly problems where capitalism had failed.

For me, Kimmerer’s approach is also reminiscent of Amartya Sen’s (1999) belief that, rather than economic growth in terms of income, utility, resources or even happiness, poverty and wellbeing should be considered in terms of the expansion of human capabilities. In the eyes of this Nobel-winning Indian economist and philosopher, development should be seen as an effort to advance the real freedoms that individuals enjoy, rather than indices of development, such as those found in the GDP formula. In other words, justice and freedom.

While metaphor as discussed by Morgan allows the analyst to appreciate the “object” in multiple ways, two-eyed seeing provides an opportunity to not only understand but also to “be” in authentic ways. In other words, the Indigenous eye provides avenues for individuals to “see” and “act” based on historically rooted social, cultural, and spiritual perspectives gained over time via traumatic colonial, oppressive, and racist experiences. This includes the way in which individuals see the world currently, in an attempt to understand the meaning of reconciliation in action, sometimes referred to in an overly generalized and fairly simplistic way as “ReconciliAction”. But that is fair, knowing that metaphor, like ideology (and its purposefully misleading offspring political ideology), is in actuality a way to make the complex simple and more palatable in similar ways stories such as parables do.

The individual who develops an ability to see with two eyes is enabled, potentially, to understand and benefit from an interweaving of both the Indigenous and Western world views. Therefore, the Indigenous eye sees the world and experience based not only through the lens of traumatization and pain, but also provides an enhanced perception of emerging global themes including that of a reimagined resilience, strengthened ways of survival, community redevelopment, spiritual reconnection, an emergence of cultural consciousness, and the valuation of entrepreneurial strength.

The other eye, then, counters these realities “seeing” the alternative reality as bundles of commodities (some valued, others not so much) remembering that through a Western lens, it is often difficult to see how Western capitalist ways are, at the same time, creating wealth inequality, environmental destruction, and all the ‘evil’ that comes with greed. What this eye does not “see” clearly, however, is a world supported by science and technology, which ultimately supports capitalist democratic objectives, in a socially constructed and controlled economic system based on supply and demand, where monopolies and oligopolies control the amount supplied, and manipulate the way we value and therefore demand, goods and services, for the betterment of all, based on a wishful belief that when the economic waters of capitalism rise, all boats rise equally. In other words, one eye sees humans as the center of the universe, while the other views humans as merely one of many different beings, each inhering a spiritually endowed purpose in the world, where each and every participant—ancestrally grounded and supported—is valued equally by the universe.

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