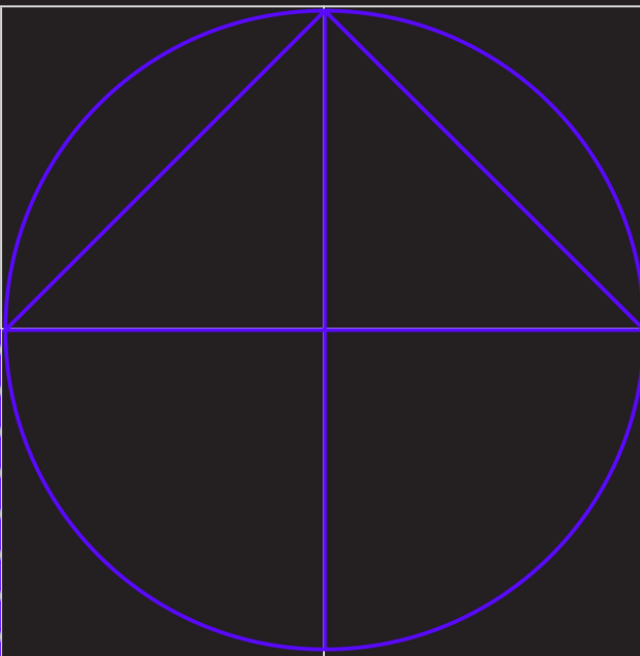
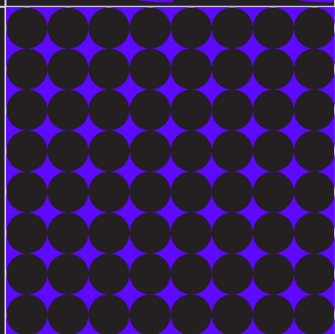
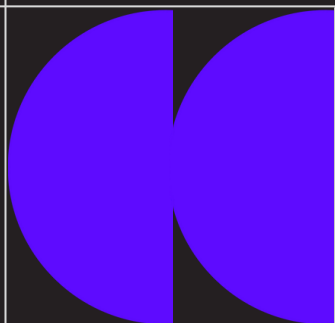


# INNOVATION NORTH



Session 7 Briefing Note:

## WORLD VIEWS ON INNOVATION



# Introduction

There are many approaches to corporate innovation, such as stage-gate models, management design thinking, open innovation, and lean startup methodology. Each of these approaches puts the company or its customers at the centre, creating value for the company but can inadvertently cost society. The Innovation Learning Lab's ambition is to develop an approach to innovation that puts the company and society on equal footing – creating value for both the company and society simultaneously, or what is often called shared value. Doing so fosters creativity, long-term profitability, and resiliency. Together, corporate participants and researchers develop this approach by integrating a systems perspective into corporate innovation processes (see the briefing note from Session 1).

The communities that most embody a systems perspective are Indigenous because they are connected to the land, to each other, and to the past and the future. They see themselves as part of the system, not apart from it. A Western worldview treats business and society as separate, which means that society can be an afterthought in corporate innovation processes. An Indigenous worldview can inform corporate innovation processes by seeing business and society as deeply integrated. Doing so could revolutionize the corporate innovation process.

Not only will corporate innovation be enhanced from Indigenous ways of knowing-being-doing, but companies will build stronger ties with this land's First Nations, whose culture has been suppressed through colonization. Understanding an Indigenous worldview will serve all people living in Canada, including First Nations and settlers.

This upcoming Lab session will only provide a small window into an Indigenous perspective but hopefully, show that an Indigenous worldview can offer deep insight into corporate innovation processes. Melanie Goodchild, our speaker, is one of the few Indigenous people worldwide studying the intersection of an Indigenous worldview and innovation. She calls this Relational Systems Thinking and brings our thinking full circle from Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer's first two sessions.

# The Western Worldview and Conventional Approaches to Innovation

Conventional approaches to innovation are suited for technological problems or relatively stable environments and can be reliably understood. Such innovation works well for engineering problems, such as reducing energy use and industrial design, or a newly designed smartphone. However, more turbulent, complex or socio-technical environments benefit from a systems lens. Such decisions could include investing in the infrastructure needed to tackle climate change or designing buildings to accommodate the future of work.

**A systems perspective bridges a Western worldview with an Indigenous worldview.**

|            | Conventional Thinking                                                                                                              | Relational Systems Thinking                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Indigenous Worldview                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Motivation | <p>Focuses on firm-related problems and solutions</p> <p>Starts with the problem and zooms out to consider the broader context</p> | <p>Focuses on relationships (with one's self and others) to generate solutions of mutual benefit</p> <p>Starts with the problem and zooms in and out (between one's self, organization, and organizational ecosystem); looks backwards and forwards – “in all directions”</p> | <p>Centers in relationships, which shape individuals' responsibilities</p> <p>Zooming out, looking at not just what can be seen but also the metaphysical; “the seen and the unseen, the past, present and future, the spirit, the earth</p> |

|                  | Conventional Thinking                                                                                                                                                          | Relational Systems Thinking                                                                                                                                                                                           | Indigenous Worldview                                                                                                     |
|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Purpose          | Shareholder or stakeholder purpose                                                                                                                                             | Collective purpose today and in the future; sometimes this means that there may be losers in the short term for the benefit of the collective in the long term                                                        | Peaceful co-existence, healing and well-being                                                                            |
| Data             | Prioritizes facts and numbers, with an emphasis on measurement, analysis, and solutions; uncertainty is masked, disagreements often dismissed                                  | Maps relationships among people and things; engages community to see what company officer miss; numerical and non-numerical data, such as stories, images, art, are valued; disagreements are embraced                | Values oral storytelling and images; gives voice to the metaphysical; i.e. learning can happen through visions or dreams |
| Analytical Logic | Deductive, inductive, analytical; innovators assume that the system is stable, cause and effect are known, and outcomes can be predicted; innovators seek to understand trends | Abductive, as innovators go back and forth from experiential insights and data; draws insight from experimentation and action; values experiential and practical insights and activates senses and observation skills | Inductive, experiential learning; observation; coming to know; everything is alive and has a role, can teach something   |
| Decision Making  | Recognizes trade offs and optimizes outcomes (e.g. revenues, costs)                                                                                                            | Integrating multiple perspectives, which sometimes means give and take for a long-term solution                                                                                                                       | Focus is on being, rather than success                                                                                   |
| Self-Image       | Seeing one's self outside the system                                                                                                                                           | Seeing one's self as part of a system                                                                                                                                                                                 | Seeing one's self as inseparable from system; not centred in humans only, but all physical and metaphysical beings       |

# The Indigenous Worldview

An Indigenous worldview - also referred to as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), Indigenous knowing-being-doing, Native Science, or Indigenous knowledge systems - has guided Indigenous ways of life around the world. An important attribute of an Indigenous worldview is its relational orientation. Indigenous peoples understand that the elements of a system are interrelated, whether they be people, things, or ideas, such as water or the Earth (often referred to as "Mother Earth"). It recognizes that relationships have taken a long time to form and shape who we are today and will be in the future. These relationships generate mutual responsibilities.

Because people are a part of the natural environment, not outside of it, Indigenous people form a deep bond with all things that give life. This deep understanding of interdependencies means that Indigenous people believe that harming nature harms humans.

## **Everything is alive, everything has a role, everything has something to teach people.**

To find answers, Indigenous peoples analyze whole (eco)systems and do not attempt to incrementalize, fragment or piece apart ideas. They look backwards, to their ancestors, and forward, to future generations. They focus on physical and metaphysical aspects of life. Their observational skills are central to how they understand the world around them.

*...our language teaches us that everything alive is both physical and spiritual ... that everything is interdependent and interconnective ... and that humans are only a small part of the whole ... and thus, that everything we do to our Earth Mother, we also do to ourselves."*

**-Elder Albert Marshall**

There have been several efforts to foster co-existence, reconciliation, and non-interference between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples. Elders Albert and Murdena Marshall coined the concept “Two-Eyed seeing” to describe the dialogue between Indigenous and Western worldviews. These different worldviews must be regarded as equal while “acknowledging that in some instances, one perspective may further our understanding of a specific concept or situation more than the other.” Two-Eyed seeing can help foster innovation that puts firms, society and the environment on equal footing.

## Relational Systems Thinking

Melanie Goodchild has studied both Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches to innovation. She calls her approach relational systems thinking (RST), which we explain further below. It was created to decolonize systems thinking and “incorporate multiple ways of knowing, in a respectful way, into the practice of awareness-based systems change.”

Relational systems thinking asks people to become aware of the entire system, including the tangible and intangible, the living and not living, and over the past, the present, and the future. It centers attention on relationships, with self and others, for mutual benefit. Under this perspective, many of the complex issues we face today as a society, such as climate change, derives from our disconnect from these relationships.

Relational systems thinking is not just an intellectual effort; it is also an emotional experience. This process of bridging perspectives, in practice, is not only about learning new things but also about unlearning others, about removing barriers, rekindling innate capacities for connection, and tapping into knowledge that is already there. RTS understands this shift in mindset as a key piece to systems thinking, which will allow for deep seeing, sensing, being present and shifting systems.

*“Decolonizing systems thinking starts with decolonizing and rehabilitating our senses. Because there is a knowing in our sense that we need to uncover and cultivate.*

**-Otto Scharmer**

# The Promise of Relational Systems Thinking For Corporate Innovation

Integrating multiple ways of knowing assures inclusion and diversity, as people from different backgrounds will engage more with education and knowledge production if they see themselves reflected in which knowledge is disseminated and how. Besides fomenting social equality, integrating multiple ways of knowing produces better science practices and richer knowledge. Innovation calls for the ability to think in new and transformative ways, and integrating people and ways of thinking coming from diverse backgrounds is a way to achieve it.

There is also a protective function to diversity. In biology, diversity is closely linked to resiliency and adaptability. Leveraging the concept of biomimicry (innovation inspired by nature), the application of these insights to systems means that the more diverse we are, the more we are protected from and adaptable to impactful changes coming our way (such as all those under the sphere of climate change). Further, Indigenous approaches to organizing promote inclusion of non-dominant individuals, which is critical in today's business and learning environment that is increasingly embracing equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Including Indigenous knowledge systems in fisheries research and management has led to technological shifts that improve fisheries selectivity and sustainability. Indigenous peoples manage only 25 percent of the world's land, yet it holds 80 percent of the biodiversity. Although still nascent in its application to the corporate innovation process, RST has the opportunity to revolutionize how corporations innovate and how executives see their place in the world.

Who creates knowledge and how are crucial questions to understanding what is informing our innovation practices? At a systems level, we will need a diversity in knowledge to provide sustainable solutions.

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