

# The Value of Sophisticated Indigenous Ways of Being-Knowing-Doing Towards Transforming Human Resource Development in Ways that Contribute to Organizations Thriving and Addressing Our Existential Crises

Human Resource Development Review  
2022, Vol. 21(4) 391–409

© The Author(s) 2022

Article reuse guidelines:

[sagepub.com/journals-permissions](https://sagepub.com/journals-permissions)

DOI: 10.1177/15344843221134351

[journals.sagepub.com/home/hrd](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/hrd)



## Keywords

Human Resource Development, Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing, Research with Indigenous peoples, Indigenist research, Transformation, Paradigm Shift, Western worldview, Existential Crisis, Organisations, Organisational Development

“If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” Lilla Watson, a Murri visual artist, activist and academic.

“All humans evolved within complex, land-based cultures over deep time to develop a brain with the capacity for over 100 trillion neural connections, of which we now only use a tiny fraction. Most of us have been displaced from those cultures of origin, a global diaspora of refugees severed not only from land, but from the sheer genius that comes from belonging in a symbiotic relation to it. ... Perhaps we need to revisit the brilliant thought paths of our Palaeolithic Ancestors and recover enough cognitive function to correct the impossible messes civilization has created...” [Yunkaporta, 2019](#), pp. 2–3

“Instead of stepping forwards *and looking into the future for solutions* we have to walk backwards into the place inside us all where the answers already lie and have always been waiting.” [Kingsley, 2018](#), p. 195

Across the world we are experiencing existential crises that emerged from the compounding effects of the interactions of COVID, disasters, climate change,

environmental destruction, poverty, food and water shortages, war, crime, domestic violence and substance abuse. Parallel, our individual and collective human resources have been steadily declining – we are getting physically and mentally sicker, our cultures and societies are becoming increasingly dysfunctional, and our build structures are going off in flames, being swept away by water or being destroyed as result of earthquakes and wars. All dimensions of life are implicated by these crises. The crises interact in a vicious down-ward spiral that creates significant, escalating and evolving human resources challenges (e.g., the strategic thinking challenges posed by burnout, staff shortages, turnover, working from home, supply-chain disruptions). While many organizations, and their employees, contribute to the environmental challenges we experience, they also have the great potential to contribute to solving these crises. Human Resource Development (HRD) research and practices are positioned to assist organizations to fulfil this great potential.

The novel nature of these challenges means that they cannot be addressed using a ‘business-as-usual’ approach; new ways of being, knowing and doing are needed. Einstein<sup>1</sup> emphasized that ‘a new type of thinking is essential if mankind is to survive and move toward higher levels’, suggesting that solving the crises requires transforming the fundamental beliefs, worldviews or mindsets that are at the source of what we created in the outer world. This line of thought implies that for HRD to contribute to organizations and their employees thriving in tumultuous times it needs to transform what realities HRD researchers and practitioners consider, what knowledges HRD perceives as valid and thus creates, how these knowledges are created and by whom, and how HRD increases the value and impact of these knowledges in more dynamic and evolving environments.

There are many realities and knowledges HRD researchers and practitioners can consider. In this editorial, we invite you to consider that HRD could greatly learn from Indigenous peoples about their realities and knowledges by working with Indigenous peoples, and offer some insights into how Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing could expand HRD research and practice in useful ways. These insights emerged from us working two-way. Prof Lāwurrpa Elaine Mahypilama is an Australian Aboriginal Elder from the Waramirri clan and an academic who lives in the very remote Indigenous community Galiwin’ku. A /Prof Petra Buergelt and Prof Douglas Paton are two Western allies who have been working with Lāwurrpa and other Indigenous peoples in Australia and Taiwan for over 10 years. We hope that sharing our perspectives will contribute to inspiring and liberating HRD scholars to embark on a transformative journey into largely uncharted territory to expand the value of HRD research and practice not only for organizations but for humanity and all life on earth.

Indigenous and Western peoples working two-way is a transformative learning journey. For Western researchers this journey is challenging as it entails a lot of letting go of existing knowledges, uncertainties and mistakes. Yet, this journey is also exhilarating and energizing as it involves discovering and learning about oneself and one’s relationships with the diverse facets of the environmental context in which one lives and works. Engaging in this transformative journey would give HRD researchers

an access to a completely new realm of reality that makes visible new knowledges and opens the possibility of different kinds of knowledges being seen as valid and valuable. These ontological and epistemological shifts would trigger different research aims, questions, and designs that generate new knowledges that would support people in the Western world remembering and cultivating spiritual, cultural and social practices that enable us to interact and co-exist with other humans and the natural world harmoniously; to organise and govern society including organisations in ways that support living in harmony with self, others and nature; and to relate to and appreciate all dimensions of our environment in ways that moves us towards living truly meaningful and fulfilling lives.

We start this journey by exploring how worldviews, research, culture and society and research interact. Next, we will share some Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing that offer ways for addressing the challenges Western organizations face and for saving the world, which are related to holistic and relational systems thinking and multiple intelligences, including emotional intelligences. Then we will shed some light onto how we could learn from and with Indigenous peoples by working together two-way. We will conclude by exploring how learning from and co-creating knowledges with Indigenous peoples and allies could transform HRD research and practice in ways that contribute to developing human resources in ways that contribute to addressing our existential crises.

## **Understanding Worldviews, Research, Culture and Society Interactions: The Access to Fully Developing and Utilizing Our Human Resources and to Save Us and the World**

To be able to start accessing and genuinely understanding Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing, we first need to become aware of our philosophical worldviews and how they are linked to how we live; our own Western worldview, how it developed, and its impact on life; and how our Western worldview impacts on what we research and how we research. Research in the Western world has become increasingly disconnected from the philosophical beliefs about the origin and development of the universe (cosmology), the nature of reality (ontology) and the nature of knowledge (epistemology). In the Western world, we largely conduct our research without considering what beliefs or worldviews we hold with regards to these three fundamental areas of life. Yet, the worldviews we hold guide how we as human beings, individually and collectively, interact and co-exist with other humans and the natural world (ethics), how we organise and govern society including organizations (politics), and how we relate and appreciate environmental experience and live meaningful lives (aesthetics). Similarly, the worldviews we as researchers and practitioners hold profoundly influence research and practice - what we inquire into or pursue, what questions we ask, what knowledge we deem valid, and how we go about inquiring, producing and sharing knowledges.

Whilst Western and Indigenous peoples around the world share a common origin, they developed and live according to very different philosophical worldviews and thus created different ways of being-knowing-doing (Buergelt et al., 2017a; Buergelt & Paton, 2022a, 2022b). In the Western world, we predominately developed and live based on a worldview that is masculine, patriarchal, totalitarian, positivistic, rational, reductionistic, separatist, objective, static and anthropocentric, and is limited to the physical world that can be observed. As a result, we developed, for example, hierarchical, bureaucratic ways of organizing human resources.

Over millennia, the Western worldview has suppressed human resources to maintain the status quo, which has been creating increasingly disharmonious relationships that have led to the diverse existential crises we are increasingly experiencing. The major disempowering and damaging impact of this worldview is that it has and still is domesticating and colonizing us, which is separating and disconnecting us from our most powerful human resources: our true, primordial nature; the invisible, feminine spiritual world; our ancestors and ancient Laws/wisdom; and our role as custodial species. That is, the Western worldview separated us from our Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing that we too had before the domesticating and colonising that occurred and still is occurring throughout much of the world.

In contrast, Indigenous cultures are holding and evolving matriarchal, metaphysical, unified, equalitarian, extra-rational, holistic, connected, relational, subjective and fluid worldviews that includes parallel to the physical world the invisible spiritual dimensions of life. These Indigenous worldviews led to Indigenous peoples skillfully, diligently and systematically observing, experiencing, reflecting and learning to create highly sophisticated ways of being-knowing-doing based on nature laws. Indigenous peoples recognize and value the wisdom of nature and thus organizing themselves in ways that reflect and model nature. Accordingly, organizational structures, for example, are self-organising, emerging, flexible and adaptive, and build sustainable social-environmental relationships that foster connectedness.

Indigenous worldviews led to creating conditions, including organizational systems and processes, that facilitate the remembering and full unfolding of our human resources that enable us engaging with others and the environment in ways that guide people to live in harmony with ourselves, others, and nature, and ultimately creates harmony and the flourishing of all creatures. Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing are liberating us; they show us how to break free from the shackles of domestication and colonization.

The positivistic Western worldview also influenced research. Mainly white middle class male scholars focused solely on and cultivated quantitative research to support the maintenance of the prevailing dominating Western worldview that aims to domesticate and condition people to produce a capable workforce that has highly specialized skills that enable them to work. Accomplishing this aim required and thus led to suppressing worldviews that are challenging the Western worldview and liberate innate human resources including those of women, other cultures and Indigenous peoples, and imposing the Western worldview and culture. Quantitative research was used to generate evidence for justifying colonisation (Smith, 1999).

However, this Western worldview is increasingly challenged by discoveries in metaphysics, and scholars and practitioners from parts of the population that have been suppressed by the prevailing Western worldview - Indigenous peoples, women, people with different genders, people from diverse cultures and disciplines - have been joining forces to liberate themselves and all humans by returning to, building upon and further developing philosophical paradigms that are akin to, and can thus build a bridge to, Indigenous worldviews. Building upon the work of their ancestors, many famous ancients, philosophers and artists developed over millennia, they uncover, bring to the fore and further develop a wide variety of alternative worldviews that are explicitly aiming at liberating, empowering and emancipating peoples, cultures and societies including organizations and employees.

Indigenous peoples in particular offer ways of being-knowing-doing capable of addressing the challenges that Western organisations and employees face. These ways of being-knowing-doing lie at the heart of human resources and human resource development dimensions, and have profound implications for the functioning of organisations including visions, missions, leadership and employee selection and training, team development and management, governance and leadership.

## **Indigenous Ways of Being-Knowing-Doing Offer Ways for Addressing the Challenges Western Organizations Face**

Perceiving reality through the eyes of Indigenous peoples would fundamentally shift how we see organisations and human resource development and thus how we organise organisations and develop human resources. Building upon the work of [Griffith \(2014, 2015\)](#), [Yunkaporta \(2019\)](#) and our own experiences and work ([Buergelt et al., 2017a](#), [Buergelt et al., 2017b](#); [Buergelt & Paton, 2022a, 2022b](#)), we will share how applying Indigenous worldviews and ways of being-knowing-doing to organisations might change how we perceive organisations and what we would know about how organisations and human resource development would function best. We leave it up to you to discover for yourself how this perspective is different to the Western view and the many ways it suggests regarding how we could transform HRD research and practice in ways that are more functional for organisations, employees and society.

Ancient/Indigenous peoples see reality as an open, infinitely complex, interconnected, self-organising, dynamic and self-renewing system of life and know that ancient/Indigenous Law perfectly continuously balances the needs of all parts of the system ([Griffith, 2014, 2015](#); [Yungaporta, 2019](#)). They know that we humans are a part of this system and are the designated custodian species of this reality whose role it is to sustain creation by caring for and looking after all of creation on earth, in the sky and in between both. They also know that all entities, including ourselves, interact in reciprocal relationships and thus each interaction impacts the whole system. This worldview suggests that to fulfil our custodial role and to solve our existential crises, we need to be able to understand complex systems.

If we would view organisations and HRD through an Indigenous lens, we would perceive organisations as being part of complex system (large environment they are embedded in) whilst also being composed of equal parts/members (e.g., employees, teams, departments) that carry the intelligence of the whole. That is, we would understand that organisations are both an equal part of a larger system as well as consisting of equal parts. We would also understand that organisations are autonomous yet interdependently connected and are interacting freely within complex heterarchical patterns of relatedness and communal obligation with other organisations. We would realise that the more optimally organisations are supporting all the parts of the systems they are a part of, fulfilling their needs and purposes as well as supporting all their parts, the more optimally they will function. We would be aware that for organisations to flourish they need to care for and look after the other systems they are a part of (e.g., employees, teams, departments) and consistently balance the needs of their parts with the needs of the organisations. At the same time, we would know that the purpose of the organisation is to care for and look after its parts (e.g., community/society, NGOs, businesses) and consistently balance their needs with the needs of the other parts.

If we perceive reality from the Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing, we would view organisations, and their parts (e.g., employees, teams, units), as being self-organising, patterned and adaptive in ways that maintain the balance/harmony of the wider system they are part of and its parts/members. We would be aware that each part/member is unique as each part/member has a soul that contracted to fulfil a specific purpose and contains within itself unique gifts – spiritual and physical faculties, virtues, knowledges and abilities. We would know that the more each part is nurtured in ways that enables it to fully express its uniqueness, the more the organisation will function optimally. We would then realise that to fulfil their purposes optimally, organisations need for each employee, team and department to grow into fully expressing their uniqueness and thus support this growth as best as possible. We would know that this self-expression is facilitated by organisations creating conditions that draw out the unique faculties, virtues, knowledges and abilities from within its parts (employees, teams, units) to cultivate them to the fullest potential. Drawing out from within is the true nature of education, which is reflected in its Latin roots *educare* ‘to draw out, bring up’ and *ducere* ‘to lead’. In Indigenous cultures education is craftfully designed to draw out the unique inner gifts, aligned with how our minds learn naturally and embedded in every interaction throughout peoples’ lives.

If we would know Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing, we also would know that to function fully people have to be in their perfect place in the system, be autonomous, be connecting and interacting with relevant others and groups, and be diversifying. We would be aware that these aspects enable the systems to utilize the inherent diverse unique capabilities that facilitate growth and the capacity to adapt in agile and optimal ways to dynamic and changing internal and external conditions. Thus, we would make sure that we get to intimately know parts so we can assist them fully being themselves, finding their place in the system and fulfilling their role. We would also know that understanding complex systems and fulfilling our roles in these systems

requires holistic thinking so we are able to examine things from many points of view, especially those that are opposed to your own, and draw attention to the importance of connecting and interacting with people who have different viewpoints.

If we remember the ancient/Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing, we would know that to ensure balance of the entire system, self-organising, patterning and adapting must emerge organically. We would also know that to allow creation to emerge through the free movement of all systems parts, governance of organisations would to be organised in ways that surrenders control, respectfully observes and interacts in non-intrusive ways with diverse other systems, all parts, and the connections between them, to enable autonomous self-organising and adapting in ways that maintain the balance. Thus, we would organise governance in ways that are participatory, distribute power and monitor its use collectively, and enable governance process to support socially just and inclusive beliefs and practices. We would ensure that the governance system and processes give everybody agency in the decisions making by including them into making decisions and resolving disputes.

Viewing reality from Indigenous belief systems, we would recognise Elders as the knowledge keepers, who accumulated a wealth of experiences, knowledges and wisdom throughout their lives. We would respect them as leaders and educators who show the way, guide, mentor, model and pass on knowledges. We would know that the older they get, the more they are able to draw out and fully express their unique wisdom from within. Thus, we would revere them, see and use them as mentors and models, listen to them and follow what they are saying throughout their lives until they die. The Elders, in turn, would know that their role is to ensure that each member expresses her/himself as fully as possible by coming to higher knowledge levels in every interaction they have with diverse peoples and other creatures from birth and throughout their lives until they die.

Coming from Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing, we would know that knowledge is living because it is constantly created in our interactions and thus would ensure that we are creating complex communities/ecosystems of practice that enable these interactions to occur. We would know that the communities/ecosystems of practice are transformative and innovative open systems which are constantly naturally adapt as result of ongoingly being transformed through our everyday two-way interactions among and between spirit-ancestors, land-place, people, and groups of peoples. We would know that we need to keep the systems open and freely interacting, and that we need to freely interact and adapt within systems. We would be aware that if we continue to control systems, they will continue to fail, because we would know what [Yunkaporta \(2019, p. 59\)](#) emphasises: “Creation is in a constant state of motion, and we must move with it as the custodial species or we will damage the system and doom ourselves.”

Aboriginal/ancient Law entails sophisticated knowledges and practices that enabled Indigenous peoples to be intimately connected to the system and live in balance/harmony with the diverse systems dimensions, to keep narcissists that act in self-interest and the detriment of the whole society in check and to ensure ongoing

connection and support among and between humans and other living entities. Yunkaporta (2019), for instance, offers five interconnected ways of thinking that together create the holistic thinking required to understand and maintain open systems; provide deeper insights into, and demonstrate, ancient/Indigenous cosmology, ontology and epistemology and axiology; and point to further sources of and solutions to our existential crisis. These five ways are kinship, story, dreaming, ancestor and pattern mind.

Indigenous peoples also offer spiritual, cultural and social ways to draw out from within and cultivate their unique multiple intelligences and emotional intelligence, which would assist creating organisations that are effective and contribute to saving and creating a better world for all. Mathematical-logical, verbal-linguistic, musical-rhythmic, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, visual-spatial, naturalist, spiritual, existential and moral intelligences (Gardner, 2011) and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2021) will become increasingly important in our lives generally, and for organisations specifically. Mounting research shows that increasing disasters/pandemics and automatization resulting from digitalisation and AI push organisations and employees at all career levels to value and cultivate multiple intelligences, including emotional intelligence (Crummenerl et al., 2019). The cultivation of these intelligences enables us to learn how to reconnect with and take care of our ourselves, each other and nature; to be open and capable to adapt to changes; to build and maintain healthy relationships and work together effectively to fulfill both one's own needs and the needs of others for the higher good of all; to prevent being automated out of a job; and to maintain our position as masters of AI (Crummenerl et al., 2019). According to Goleman (2021), the most common *achilles* preventing effective collaboration is our deeply ingrained habit of poor listening. To collaborate we need to become aware of not listening, transform it and replace it with habits that facilitate deep listening.

Whilst increasingly more companies see benefits, and thus the need for selecting for and cultivating emotional intelligence (Crummenerl et al., 2019), they largely neglect the other intelligences. Additionally, there is a lack of knowledge of how to select for and develop multiple intelligences and emotional intelligences at all career levels to build highly intelligent organisations (including people, culture, systems). Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing contain and cultivate to very high degrees *all* of the multiple intelligences and emotional intelligence. Importantly, Indigenous peoples created and fine honed over millennia sophisticated Indigenous worldviews-knowledges-cultural practices and social systems designed to deliberately cultivate all of these intelligences to the highest degrees possible.

We offered brief insights into some aspects the sophisticated Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing that we believe would be of immense value to organizations and employees and thus meaningful for HRD researchers and practitioners to understand. Accessing and comprehending these knowledges and practices requires working together two-way with Indigenous peoples on country to learn from them. Working together two-way can be accomplished by using long-term participatory, emancipatory, transformative qualitative and Indigenist research designs that enable Indigenous and



Western researchers exchanging, synergizing and transcending Indigenous and Western knowledges. Indigenous cultures offer a wealth of knowledges regarding ways of being-knowing-doing that facilitate working together two-way, which we believe would be of value for HRD research and practice alike. Out of the many Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing that facilitate collaborating and thus developing human resources (e.g., kinship, reciprocity), we offer next three specific highly valuable Indigenous ways as an example: *Garma*, *Ganma* and *Dadirri*.

## **Indigenous Ways of Being-Knowing-Doing for Working Together: *Garma* and *Ganma* – Walking Two-Way and *Dadirri* – Deep listening**

Whilst *Garma*, *Ganma* and *Dadirri* have been generously offered by Indigenous peoples living in Northern Australia, what they point to is universal to Indigenous peoples across the world as they are reflecting nature. Given that all life is governed by natural laws and humans are part of the natural world, nature provide sophisticated knowledges that govern how human beings interact with each other and other creatures (Buergelt et al., 2017a, 2017b; Griffith, 2015; Yunkaporta, 2019). For Yolŋu peoples in East Arnhem Land, *Garma* symbolises that all aspects of life are living in interconnected symbiotic relationships that benefit all. *Garma* guides Yolŋu to walk together side-by-side engaging in two-way learning that nurtures and supports everybody. *Ganma* is a metaphor that represents for Yolŋu peoples the natural processes that occur when rivers flow into the ocean and fresh and salt water are meeting in the mangroves. When fresh and saltwater combine, they create foam at the surface - new knowledges that creates deeper understanding while maintaining their distinct identity as the foam contains at its most essential level parts of both and thus “retains individual particles of both fresh water and salt water, which continue to carry their own identities and memory” (Sharmil et al., 2021, p. 6).

The same process needs to happen when people with diverse perspectives and knowledges, including Indigenous and Western people, walk and work together: they need to respectfully share knowledge two-way and co-create new knowledges that benefit, nurture and support everybody involved whilst also valuing, respecting and maintaining the distinct knowledges and identities of the people involved in the two-way exchange. A metaphor from our Western culture would be the orchestra; while each player and instrument play together in harmony to create the music, the more the players and instruments maintain at the same time their unique identities the higher quality the music will be. To be able to work together harmoniously, everybody needs to also engage in *Dadirri*.

*Dadirri* is a way of being-knowing-doing that Dr. Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr (1988, 2003), an Elder from the Australian Ngangikurungkurr clan, gave to the Western world as a gift to facilitate Indigenous and Western peoples connecting and working together two-way (Sharmil et al., 2021; West et al., 2012). The way of being *Dadirri* is referring to is at the core of all Indigenous cultures and is based on knowing that we are existing

in relationship with our self and others including people, ancestors, animals, plants and minerals, and that these relationships need to be harmonious to ensure health, well-being, development and growth. *Dadirri* ensures harmonious relationships by people consciously slowing down; being quiet, still and fully aware; observing what is happening and emerging outside and within one's self in each moment; listening deeply with all physical and spiritual senses; waiting; and reflecting to connect with, become fully present to and commune with our inner being that is inside us that calls us and that knows, and with all of life/nature - other people and creatures. *Dadirri* also enables us to recognize that we share a common origin but are diverse manifestations of this life force, which facilitates people caring for and relating to each other, and thus collaborating. *Dadirri* enables accessing our inner knowing that guides us towards the most appropriate actions.

Indigenous and Western researchers who use *Garma*, *Ganma* and *Dadirri* as guiding methodologies are walking alongside each other, members of organisations and communities, building relationships, exchanging knowledges and learning from each other for mutual benefit, and interacting respectfully and in culturally appropriate ways. This process creates trust and empathy, more meaningful exchanges, and deeper understanding of each other's worldviews and experiences through the eyes of the other and from the standpoint of the other. This process generates the co-creation of new knowledges that utilizes, synergizes and transcends relevant knowledges from both cultures and inspires change and transformation (Brearley, 2015; Garrett & Chase, 2021; Sharmil, et al., 2021). Being still, listening deeply and sharing two-way draws out the inner being and innate wisdom. Utilising *Garma*, *Ganma* and *Dadirri* gives us a pathway to research that is more contemplating (Janesick, 2015; West et al., 2012), transforming and liberating by facilitating transformative learning and education (Freire, 2017; Mezirow, 1991), and igniting appropriate actions (West et al., 2012). Importantly, these processes reunite research and education. Applied to HRD practice, *Garma*, *Ganma* and *Dadirri* would enable leaders and employees to ongoingly deepen and expand the diverse aspects of emotional intelligence, which would ensure that organisations are contributing to creating harmonious relationships.

## **Learning from and Co-creating Knowledges with Indigenous Peoples and Allies: Transforming HRD Research and Practice**

HRD researchers learning from and working together two-way with Indigenous peoples and allies, and engaging with the diverse social constructionist philosophical paradigms and Indigenous worldviews would lead to profound shifts in HRD research. HRD research creating new knowledges would, by extension, lead to profound shifts in HRD practice. In terms of research aims and research questions, for instance, HRD research might critically inquire into and make explicit:

- What are the impacts of the dominant Western worldview on HRD research in terms of research aims, questions and research approaches?

- Which human resources does HRD research focus on and why, and which human resources does HRD research neglect and why? What the impacts of both trends on human and organisational health, performance and fulfillment?
- When was the concept of work created and why? Why do organisations in Western cultures operate in domesticating and colonizing ways? How are the diverse ways in which work is organized in Western cultures contributing to domesticating and colonizing? What are the impacts of these practices on people, families, communities, societies and nature?
- What human resources did and do ancient/Indigenous cultures value and why? How did and do ancient/Indigenous cultures develop these human resources?
- How did Indigenous cultures organize themselves? Why did they organize themselves in these ways? What are the benefits of these spiritual, cultural and social practices for peoples, families, communities, societies and nature?
- How can we best work together two-way long-term with Indigenous peoples and Western allies who know about the ancient/Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing? What cultural and social environments do we need to create to be able to work together two-way long-term?
- How could we reimagine human resource development, work and organisations utilizing both Indigenous and Western knowledges?
- How could we best inspire and facilitate employees, leaders and organisations to shift their worldviews, individuate and cultivate multiple intelligences including emotional intelligences to enable them to work harmoniously within and across open systems, and fulfil individually and collectively their roles?

To fulfil the new research aims and answer the new research questions that emerge from the interplay of the growing understanding of new philosophical paradigms, perceiving reality in different ways and interpreting existing literature in new ways, HRD researchers would engage in multipronged interconnected endeavors to create knowledges. Firstly, HRD researchers would work together with Indigenous peoples and allies two-way long-term utilizing Indigenous and culturally appropriate Western philosophical paradigms and research designs. We provide some guidance how this could be done below. Secondly, HRD researchers would be synergising the vast knowledges developed in specific areas of human resource development to generate holistic frameworks that reflect the complex and evolving nature of reality, knowledges and practices critically and comprehensively. Thirdly, HRD researchers would increasingly look beyond their discipline to utilize and integrate knowledges produced by other disciplines, practitioners and cultures that enables the expanding and deepening of their understandings of dimensions related to HRD that transcends discipline, culture, and practitioner specific understandings, whilst gaining more nuanced understandings.

Fourthly, HRD researchers would co-create knowledges by co-designing, co-implementing, co-evaluating and co-refining long-term local initiatives that contribute to the liberating, empowering, emancipating and cultivating of human resources

with peoples from diverse disciplines, cultures and practitioners. The local knowledges are continuously exchanged with the different scales to contribute to the time-close learning of the other parts of the system at the diverse scales. The knowledges shared within the system are, at the same time, continuously utilised in the local initiatives. This approach enables everybody involved continuously engaging in two-way contributing and learning, enabling all parts of the system to learn quickly from the other parts. That is, the artificial separations between research, education and practice as well as disciplines and cultures would be dissolved; they would be (re)united once again and interact in harmony.

Lastly, HRD researchers would engage the ‘wheel of science’ (Wallace, 1971) that includes both induction and deduction in a spiral-like process and select or assemble the qualitative and quantitative methodologies and methods that emerge as most suitable for each step of the continuous research process. That is, the qualitative and quantitative research – induction and deduction – would once again interact and feed into each other to continuously build, refine and adapt knowledges. While these embedded and interconnected ways of knowledge co-creation might seem futuristic and unattainable, if we want to survive and thrive we need to deliberately engage them. Indigenous peoples can guide us in this endeavor as they have highly sophisticated systems and processes for knowledge co-creation that have enabled them to live healthy and well for over 60,000 years, and to adapt to substantial changes in their environments.

Western HRD researchers and practitioners working successfully together with Indigenous peoples two-way requires using diverse social constructionist/interpretive and Indigenous philosophical worldviews, and privileging qualitative and Indigenous methodologies and methods for collecting, analyzing and exchanging knowledges. Based on our experiences, we suggest that Western HRD researchers and practitioners use as philosophical lens for guiding their research and practice philosophical paradigms that are akin to Indigenous worldviews such as the relational paradigm salutogenic paradigm (Antonovsky, 1990; Strümpfer, 1990), complex adaptive systems theory (Adams et al., 2013; Coetzee, Van Niekerk, & Raju, 2016), social-ecological systems theory (Berkes et al., 2008; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Partelow, 2018), symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Charmaz, 2014), and narrative theory (Abrams, 2016; Bruner, 2004).

In terms of methodologies, we propose to utilize critical Indigenous research (Chilisa, 2020; Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 2008; Kovach, 2015; Smith, 1999), garna, danma and dadirri (Brearley, 2015; Stronach & Adair, 2014; West et al., 2012; Ungunmerr, 1988) as overarching Indigenous methodologies. Within these overarching Indigenous methodologies, we suggest adapting Community-based Indigenist Participatory Action Research (Ali et al., 2022) to organisations by creating Organization-based Indigenist Participatory Action Research (OBI-PAR). OBI-PAR is best merged with ethnography (Hammersley, 2006); social constructionist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), mixed methods (Mertens, 2019) that complements qualitative research with Indigenous quantitative research (Walter & Anderson, 2013), and arts-based research (Fraser & al Sayah, 2011) methodologies.

This combination of methodologies would imply employing an iterative, ongoing process of systematically observing, inquiring and experiencing Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing to develop tentative theories (inducting), using these theories to transform what and how we do things (actions/practice), evaluating how what we are doing works, and co-creating how to refine and adapt what we are doing to changes in the system (deducting). Research using these methodologies would need to (re)unite disciplines (inter- and transdisciplinary) to understand the complexity and to (re)unite research-education-practice to capture and respond to change over time.

Data collection methods that are culturally and methodologically most appropriate and suitable for working two-way with Indigenous peoples include participant observation (Hammersley, 2006), yarning circles (Fredricks et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2013), conversations (Kovach, 2015), episodic interviews (Flick, 2018), diverse artistic expression (Fraser & al Sayah, 2011) and diaries/journals (Alaszewski, 2006; Corti, 1993). The data collected is most suitably analysed using grounded theory techniques (Charmaz, 2014) and narrative theory analysis strategies (Riessman, 2008). The co-constructed knowledges are best represented in diverse ways that are most suitable to the intended audiences ranging from traditional scientific publications to diverse art forms including stories, paintings, songs, dance, photos and theatre. Two-way feedback yarning circles with participants have also been highly valuable in our experience (Ali et al., 2021b).

Synergising diverse philosophical paradigms, methodologies, and methods for collecting and analysing data yields the most comprehensive and deep understandings as long as the selected research design elements are aligned with the philosophical paradigms in which the research is grounded. We provide some insights into how working together can look like in practice elsewhere (Ali et al., 2021a, 2021b; Buergelt et al., 2017; Buergelt et al., 2021; Manymak Energy Efficiency Project Consortia, 2016).

From our perspective, HRD research and practice designed and conducted using these research design elements would bring forth highly innovative HRD research and practice that contributes to assisting organizations in the Western world shifting their paradigms and creating organizations that contribute to us humans fulfilling our custodial role/obligation to sustain creation. Because these organisations would operate in harmony with larger systems and support these systems as well as create harmonious relationships with their employees/members and conditions that enable them to fully express their uniqueness, they would contribute to healing the causes of the diverse existential crises and to creating conditions for life to flow and all creatures to thrive again.

## **Conclusion: Fulfilling the UN's SDGs through Indigenous Ways**

Our existential crises make it increasingly essential for us to individually and collectively remember and cultivate our unique individual and collective human

capabilities. Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing are highly sophisticated spiritual, cultural and social ways based on natural LAWS that can assist us in the Western culture to remember and cultivate our unique individual and collective human capabilities. Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing have been systematically and diligently developed over at least 60,000 years and have proven their value in that they ensured that Indigenous peoples not only survived but thrived despite substantial changes over the same length of time. We tried to open the door to these ways to show their great potential for HRD research and practice to transform in ways that address the challenges organizations and employees face as well as the multiple and compounding crises that threaten our existence.

The Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing we explored in this editorial in relationship to HRD offer highly sophisticated pathways with concrete actions for transforming our world and fulfilling the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by all UN Member states in 2015. Consequently, finding out about, experiencing, remembering and understanding Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing, and developing new ways of being-knowing-doing that draw upon both Indigenous ways being-knowing-doing and appropriate knowledges created by Western science, would build a strong foundation for realising those SDGs that are truly meaningful and developing new meaningful SDGs. Critically, Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing would reconnect us to our designated role as custodians and to our primordial nature, and restore the balance/harmony and health of all creatures living on earth including people and earth itself, which would fulfill all meaningful SDGs (Buergelt et al., 2017a, 2017b, Buergelt & Paton, 2022a, 2022b).

Applied to HRD, for example, modelling the sophisticated interconnected kinship patterns governed by governance processes based on natural LAW would mean that all members of organisations would truly partner and support each other in accomplishing the mission and vision of the organisation. The mission and vision of the organisation would be genuinely aimed at partnering and supporting the thriving of all people connected to the organisation (SDG 16 and 17) in ways that facilitate living in sustainable, equal, inclusiveness, peaceful, creative and socially just ways (SDGs 11, 10, 16). Organisations, including the land they are standing on, would belong to all its members and society at large (commons), and reflect deep and extensive knowledges of how to have every member of the organisation thrive. Both aspects would establish equality between all people including genders (SDG 5). Organisations operating in these ways would contribute to creating for everybody living in conditions that support their physical, spiritual, psychological, social and ecological thriving, eliminating poverty and hunger (SDGs 1 and 2). Organisations would use lifelong, holistic, multipronged, and embedded passing on of ways of being-knowing-doing that align with how humans learn and remember best (SDG 4). Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing would enable people knowing how to live in healthy, harmonious relationships with themselves, each

other and nature that ensured the availability of clean water (SDG 6) and healthy ways of living on land and water (SDG 14, 15). Living according to Indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing would enable us fulfilling our designated role as custodians of all life, which would prevent damaging extreme natural events (disasters) and climate change, and enable us to adapt to changes in our environment as result of changes in the climate (SDG 13).

The awareness of the knowledges offered in this editorial puts HRD researchers and practitioners at a critical junction – continuing to contribute to perpetuating the Western culture that created our existential crises and our suffering and likely perishing or partnering with Indigenous peoples and walking together two-way to create pathways towards our joint liberation and thriving individually and collectively. Which pathway will you choose and dedicate yourself to?

Petra T. Buergelt 

*University of Canberra, Canberra, AU*

Läwurrpa Elaine Mahypilama

*Charles Darwin University, Darwin, AU; University of Canberra, Canberra, AU;  
YALU Aboriginal Corporation, Galiwin'ku, AU*

Douglas Paton

*Charles Darwin University, Darwin, AU; University of Canberra, Canberra, AU*

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **ORCID iD**

Petra T. Buergelt  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5248-2644>

### **Note**

1. 'The real problem is in the hearts of men' [Michael Amrine interview with Einstein] (1946, 23 June), *New York Times Magazine* as quoted in Icarus falling (2009, 24 June), Einstein enigmatic quote [Blog post]. Retrieved from [icarus-falling.blogspot.com.au/2009/06/einstein-enigma.html](http://icarus-falling.blogspot.com.au/2009/06/einstein-enigma.html).

## References

- Alaszewski, A. (2006). *Using diaries for social research*. London: Sage.
- Adams, L., Hester, P. T., Bradley, J. M., Meyers, T. J., & Keating, C. B. (2013). Systems theory as the foundation for understanding systems. *Systems Engineering*, 17(1), 112–123.
- Abrams, L. (2016). *Oral history theory* (2nd ed). London: Routledge.
- Ali, T., Buergelt, P. T., Maypilama, E. L., Paton, D., Smith, J. A., & Jehan, N. (2021a). Synergy of systems theory and symbolic interactionism: A passageway for non-indigenous researchers that facilitates better understanding indigenous worldviews and knowledges. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 25(2), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2021.1876300>
- Ali, T., Buergelt, P. T., Maypilama, E. L., Paton, P., Smith, J., Yunggirrja, D., Dhamarrandji, S., & Gundjarranbuy, R. (2021b). Facilitating sustainable disaster risk reduction in an Australian Indigenous community: Reclaiming power by reviving Indigenous knowledges and practices through two-way partnerships. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(3), 855. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18030855>
- Ali, T., Buergelt, P. T., Paton, D., Smith, J., & Maypilama, E. L. (2022). Synergy of systems theory and symbolic interactionism: A passageway for non-Indigenous researchers that facilitates better understanding Indigenous worldviews and knowledges. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology: Theory and Practice*, 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2021.1876300>
- Antonovsky, A. (1990). The salutogenic model of health. In R. Ornstein, & C. Swencionis (Eds), *The healing brain: A scientific reader* (pp. 231–243). New York: Guilford Press.
- Berkes, F., Colding, J., & Folke, C. (2008). *Navigating social-ecological systems: Building resilience for complexity and change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and methods*. Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Brearley, L. (2015). Deep listening and leadership: An Indigenous model of leadership and community development in Australia. In C. Voyageur, L. Brearley, & B. Calliou (ed.), *Restoring Indigenous leadership: Wise practices in community development* (pp. 91–127). Banff, Canada: Banff Centre.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, E. M. (2004). Ethnography as narrative. In M. Bal (Ed), *Narrative theory: Critical concepts in literary and cultural studies (131-144)*. New York: Routledge.
- Buergelt, P. T., & Paton, D. (2022b). Restoring the transformative bridge: Remembering and regenerating our Western transformative ancient traditions to solve the riddle of our existential crisis. In A. Nicolaidis, S. Eschenbacher, P. T. Buergelt, Y. Gilpin-Jackson, M. Welch, & M. Misawa (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of Learning for transformation* (pp. 806–830). New York: Palgrave.
- Buergelt, P. T., Maypilama, E. L., Bukulatjpi, D. Y., Gundjarranbuy, R., Dhamarrandji, S., Ali, T., Paton, D., & Smith, J. (2021). Genuinely working two-way with Indigenous communities



- utilizing both Indigenous and Western worldviews, knowledges and practices. Northern Territory, Australia: Darwin Convention Centre.
- Buergelt, P. T., Maypilama, L. E., McPhee, J., Dhurrkay, G., Nirrpuranydji, S., Manyurrpuy, S., Wunungmurra, M., Skinner, T., Lowell, A., & Moss, S. (2017a). Working together with remote Indigenous communities to facilitate adapting to using energy wisely: Barriers and enablers. *Energy Procedia*, *121*, 262–269. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.egypro.2017.08.026>
- Buergelt, P., & Paton, D. (2022a). Facilitating effective DRR education and human survival: Intentionally engaging the transformation education-paradigm shift spiral. In H. James, R. Shaw, V. Sharma, & A. Lukasiewicz (Eds.), *Disaster risk reduction in the Asia Pacific* (pp. 97–122). Sydney: Palgrave MacMillan/Springer.
- Buergelt, P. T., Paton, D., Sithole, B., Sangha, K., Campion, O. B., & Campion, J. (2017b). Living in harmony with our environment: A paradigm shift. In D. Paton, & D. Johnston (Eds.), *Disaster resilience: An integrated approach* (2nd ed, pp. 289–307). Springfield, Ill: Charles C Thomas.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: Sage.
- Chilisa, B. (2020). *Indigenous research methodologies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication.
- Coetzee, C., Van Niekerk, D., & Raju, E. (2016). Disaster resilience and complex adaptive systems theory. *Disaster Prevention and Management*, *25*(2), 196–211. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DPM-07-2015-0153>
- Corti, L. (1993). *Using diaries in social research*. Surrey: University of Surrey.
- Crummenerl, C., Pendlebury-Green, A., Buvat, J., Khadikar, A., Sengupta, A., & Shah, H. (2019). *Emotional intelligence – the essential skillset for the age of AI*. Paris: Capgemini Research Institute.
- Denzin, N., Lincoln, Y., & Smith, L. T. (Eds.). (2008). *Handbook of critical and Indigenous methodologies*. London: Sage.
- Flick, U. (2018). *An introduction to qualitative research* (6th ed.). London: SAGE.
- Fraser, K. D., & al Sayah, F. (2011). Arts-based methods in health research: A systematic review of the literature. *An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*, *3*(2), 110–145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2011.561357>
- Fredricks, B., Adams, K., Finlay, S., Fletcher, G., Andy, S., Briggs, L., Briggs, L., & Hall, R. (2011). Engaging the practice of Indigenous yarning in action research. *ALAR: Action Learning and Action Research Journal*, *17*(2), 8–20.
- Freire, P. (2017). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Penguin.
- Gardner, H. (2011). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.
- Garrett, F., & Chase, S. (2021). Deep listening” in buddhist studies: Teaching and learning during a pandemic. *Religions*, *12*(6), 387. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/rel12060387>
- Goleman, D. (2021). *Leadership: The power of emotional intelligence*. More Than Sound LLC.
- Griffith, J. (2014). *A country called childhood: Children in the exuberant world*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Berkeley.
- Griffith, J. (2015). *Savage grace: A journey in wildness*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Berkeley.
- Hammersley, M. (2006). Ethnography: problems and prospects. *Ethnography and education*, *1*(1), 3–14.

- Janesick, V. J. (2015). *Contemplative qualitative inquiry: Practicing the Zen of research (Links to an external site)*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast.
- Kingsley, P. (2018). *Catafalque: Carl jung and the end of humanity*. London: Catafalque.
- Kovach, M. (2015). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Manymak Energy Efficiency Project Consortia (2016). Manymak energy efficiency project: Final report. [https://energyconsumersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Manymak-Energy-Efficiency-Project\\_Indigenous-Essential-Services-NT.pdf](https://energyconsumersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Manymak-Energy-Efficiency-Project_Indigenous-Essential-Services-NT.pdf)
- Mertens, D. M. (2019). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods*. New York: Sage.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Partelow, S. (2018). A review of social-ecological systems framework: Applications, methods, modifications and challenges. *Ecology and Society*, 23(4), 36. <https://doi.org/10.5751/es-10594-230436>
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Sharmil, H., Kelly, J., Bowden, M., Galletly, C., Cairney, I., Wilson, C., Hahn, L., Liu, D., Elliot, P., Else, J., Warrior, T., Wanganeen, T., Taylor, R., Wanganeen, F., Madrid, J., Warner, L., Brown, M., & de Crespigny, C. (2021). Participatory Action Research-Dadirri-Gamma, using Yarning: Methodology co-design with Aboriginal community members. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 20, 1–12. Doi: [10.1186/s12939-021-01493](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-021-01493)
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonising methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). London: Zed Books.
- Stronach, M., & Adair, D. (2014). Dadirri': Reflections on a research methodology used to build trust between a non-indigenous researcher and indigenous participants. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 6(2), 117–134. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.933119011399333>
- Strümpfer, D. J. W. (1990). Salutogenesis: A new paradigm. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 20(4), 265–276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/008124639002000406>
- Ungunmerr, M.R. (1988). *Dadirri: Inner deep listening and quiet still awareness*. Miriam-Rose Foundation. <https://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/dadirri/>.
- Ungunmerr-Bauman, M. (2003). Editorial: Against racism. *COMPASS: A Review of Topical Theology*, 37(3), 1. <http://compassreview.org/spring03/1.html>
- Walker, M., Fredricks, B., Mills, K., & Anderson, D. (2013). Yarning as a method for community-based health research with Indigenous women: The Indigenous Women's wellness research program. *Health Care for Women International*, 35(10), 1216–1226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07399332.2013.815754>
- Wallace, W. (1971). *The logic of science in sociology*. Chicago: Aldine Atherton.
- Walter, M., & Anderson, C. (2013). *Indigenous statistics: A quantitative research methodology*. London: Routledge.

- West, R., Stewart, L., Foster, K., & Usher, K. (2012). Through a critical lens: Indigenist research and the dadirri method. *Qualitative Health Research*, 22(11), 1582–1590. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732312457596>
- Yunkaporta, T. (2019). *Sand talk: How Indigenous thinking can save the world*. Melbourne: Text Publishing.

### Author Biographies

**Petra T. Buergelt** is an A/Professor at the University of Canberra. She is an award-winning interdisciplinary social scientist and Sylff Fellow. Using qualitative and Indigenist research, she is working at the nexus of disaster risk reduction and recovery, Indigenous/ancient worldviews-knowledges-practices and transformation to contribute to creating a paradigm shift from Western to ancient/Indigenous paradigms. Petra has been co-leading research with Indigenous communities in Australia and Taiwan since 2014. Currently, she is co-leading with L̄awurrpa a team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers that are working two-way on “Waka Ngurrkanhayngu: Regenerating the existence of life”, which aims at reducing the risk of natural and social disasters by reviving and strengthening Indigenous law, culture and governance in remote Indigenous communities. She serves on the Executive Committees of the Collaborative Indigenous Research Initiative (UC) and International Transformative Learning Association.

**L̄awurrpa Elaine Mahypilama** is an A/Professor at Charles Darwin University and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Canberra. She is from the Waramirri clan, a senior Yolŋu educator and one of the founding members of the research organisation Yalu’ Marŋgithinyaraw. L̄awurrpa was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from CDU in 2013 in recognition of her being widely respected for her high level of expertise in developing and conducting culturally responsive and high-quality research with diverse universities and territory, state and national organisations for over 30 years. L̄awurrpa is an author on many publications and has presented at numerous conferences across Australia and internationally. L̄awurrpa recognised that non-Indigenous researchers often fail to understand the complexities of an Indigenous worldview, and that this lack of understanding is significant when conducting research. To address this, she has consistently acted as a facilitator to assist non-Indigenous researchers to better understand their processes within a Yolŋu worldview.

**Douglas Paton**, Ph.D., is a Professor at Charles Darwin University (Australia), an Adjunct Professor at the University of Canberra, an Expert Advisor on Community Resilience with the World Health Organization and has worked with UNESCO and the UN Office of Disaster Risk Reduction on disaster risk reduction policy. He develops and tests theories of community resilience with a specific focus on cross cultural and multicultural issues. He has published widely on disaster risk reduction.