CREATING PARTNERSHIP INTERSECTIONS: GROWING OPPORTUNITIES BETWEEN CORPORATE CANADA AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

NEW RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT MORE THAN FIVE IN SIX CANADIAN BUSINESSES ARE COMPLETELY DISENGAGED WITH CANADA’S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES. THE OPPORTUNITY NOW IS TO VIEW THIS METRIC AS AN INCENTIVE TO PARTNER WITH A COMMITTED AND FAST-GROWING COMMUNITY THAT HAS MUCH TO OFFER.

Researching Indigenous Partnerships: An Assessment of Corporate -Indigenous Relations commissioned by Indigenous Works and prepared by R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. reveals an alarming finding: 85 percent of Canadian businesses are in no way engaged with Indigenous communities. At a time when shortages of skilled workers dominate the news, when businesses are preoccupied with innovation, when federal public policy has charted a clear course toward reconciliation, and when corporate social responsibility is viewed as increasingly critical to augment customer loyalty, this news is troubling.

Over a period of six months in 2017, researchers from Malatest surveyed more than 500 Canadian medium and large businesses. They examined not only the extent to which these companies and organizations engage with Indigenous communities, but also the systems, structures and supports they have in place to spur engagement, forge partnerships and build long-term relations with Indigenous groups. Most are lacking.

The findings divide corporate Canada into four broad groups.

• **The disengaged majority** make up 85 percent of those companies surveyed. These are businesses that have not prioritized engagement in any way.
• **Engagement novices** (9 percent) have begun to understand the business case for engagement, but are prone to critical missteps, such as thinking short-term and under-committing resources.
• **Relationship developers** (4 percent) are beginning to appreciate the value of long-term partnerships, and are transitioning their efforts to create more fulsome opportunities.
• **Committed partners** (2 percent) demonstrate capacities to sustain partnerships and create positive outcomes for not only themselves, but also their Indigenous partners.

AT ODDS WITH KEY DRIVERS

On the surface, these findings paint a contrasting picture. They show that for more than five in six Canadian businesses, the notion of engaging with Indigenous partners in any kind of reciprocal manner is unfamiliar. Yet public policy and good business practices suggest that these businesses are missing potential economic and socially important opportunities. The Prime Minister specifically identified the calls to action listed in the December 2015 report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Residential Schools as being key to this process. Call to Action # 92 placed a clear mandate on corporate Canada to provide more opportunities to Indigenous peoples.

By engaging with Indigenous communities, Canadian businesses can realize a host of important immediate and long-term benefits: opportunities to expand into new markets, access to Canada’s fastest growing demographic and labour pool, enhanced corporate reputations in the eyes of Indigenous peoples and Canadians of all walks of life, and more respectful and accommodating workplace cultures—qualities that are more important than ever in the corporate world.

**THE BUSINESS CASE FOR PARTNERSHIPS**

There are other benefits to partnerships, besides. Consider the following:

• The current gross domestic product of the Indigenous market in Canada is $32 billion—more than the combined GDPS of Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador.
• If corporate Canada were to employ Indigenous workers at the same rate it employs people from the population as a whole (i.e., 39 percent), Canadian businesses would give career opportunities to more than 210,000 Indigenous workers and GDP would grow by $210 billion by 2020.
• If Indigenous people in Canada were to achieve the same education and employment level as non-Indigenous people, Canada’s GDP would increase by $401 billion by 2026.
• The purchasing power of Indigenous people is expected to increase by a factor of four as education and employment outcomes trend upwards.
• More than 250 Indigenous community development corporations—powerhouses of Indigenous economic growth—stand ready to offer scale, advantage and sophistication for complex partnerships.
• CEOs are increasingly understanding diversity as a competitive advantage and a key to improving employee retention.
• Recent consumer surveys show buying decisions are made at least in part on a company’s corporate social responsibility track record a key to growing employee retention in a global marketplace.

To learn more about the key findings of Indigenous Works’ research report into corporate engagement, visit [indigenousworks.ca](http://www.indigenousworks.ca), call 866-711-5091 or email contact.us@indigenousworks.ca.
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The business case for inclusion is clear.

OPPORTUNITY MUST KNOCK

While the partnership gap in Canada is wide, the gulf can be closed. A bridge, however, is badly needed.

Although the findings of the Malatest report suggest a high level of disengagement among Canada’s corporations, it also found that these businesses are willing to partner, given the right incentives. The problem, it seems, is that most do not understand how, or have not been incented, to start.

Nearly one-third indicate they would be willing to partner with Indigenous communities were they approached by these groups. Thirty percent believe that a change in labour-force dynamics would convince them to change their practices, and 68 percent say they would consider partnerships if they were to receive guidance from Indigenous groups, other businesses with proven partnership track records, and third-party consultants.

Opportunity, it seems, will have to knock.

CREATING PARTNERSHIP INTERSECTIONS

As a not-for-profit organization Indigenous Works is dedicated to increasing Indigenous engagement in the Canadian economy. With its new research it now sees greater opportunities to grow partnerships and to engage Canadians in strategies which leverage the intersections between Indigenous and corporate Canada.

In its new three-year, pan-Canadian strategy, Creating Partnership Intersections, Indigenous Works charts a clear course for corporate Canada and Indigenous communities to engage more, and more fully, with one another. The strategy focuses on increasing the number and frequency of Indigenous/corporate engagement opportunities, designing and customizing strategies for engagement, strategies for engagement, and developing a system of benchmarking and certification that recognizes those organizations that partner successfully.

“In Creating Partnership Intersections, we have a new strategy to grow Indigenous jobs, businesses and social development, to create important, long-term growth opportunities for corporate Canada, and to help Canada as a nation make important progress on its journey to reconciliation,” says Kelly Lendsay, President & CEO of Indigenous Works. We encourage government, Indigenous communities and businesses of all sizes and in all industries to join with us to talk about the issues and to collaborate on approaches and practices which grow the Canadian economy by building Indigenous/non-Indigenous partnerships which result in jobs, business and social development.

Indigenous Works has a long history of connecting businesses with Indigenous communities and organizations since its formation in 1998. Its partnership and workplace inclusion tools help both groups benchmark and implement partnership strategies, and practices. Indigenous Works has worked with hundreds of companies and Indigenous organizations with proven partnership and workplace solutions.

“The findings of the Malatest report suggest two things,” states Stephen Lindley, VP SNC Lavalin and Co-chair of Indigenous Works. “The first is that there are significant opportunities for corporate Canada to improve on its track record of partnerships with Indigenous communities. The second is that most businesses lack the capacity and knowledge to put in place the steps to achieve this important goal. The opportunity exists to connect these groups, and through Creating Partnership Intersections, we have a clear strategy and plan to produce results.”

CORPORATE CANADA’S OPPORTUNITY FOR PARTNERSHIP

Most Canadians understand that reconciliation between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous Canada must be a priority if our country is to preserve its high standard of living, its enviable reputation as a responsible global citizen and its track record as a superior place to invest.

The Government of Canada has made clear its desire to work toward reconciliation by making the adoption of the calls-to-action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission a priority. Corporate Canada has a responsibility to add its voice to reconciliation by creating Indigenous partnerships that offer employment, social and business development opportunities.

Through its strategic initiative ‘Partnership Intersections’, Indigenous Works looks forward to working with companies, Indigenous organizations and others to forge new engagement and partnership opportunities. These collective efforts will grow jobs, business and social development for Indigenous people and prosperity for Canada.

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