

## **Améliorer la gestion environnementale grâce à la participation des peuples autochtones**

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### **Résumé :**

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L'objectif de cet article est d'examiner comment la participation des peuples autochtones peut améliorer les pratiques de gestion environnementale des organisations du secteur de l'extraction des ressources naturelles. Basée sur une approche qualitative et des entrevues semi-dirigées réalisées auprès de 33 répondants, cette étude souligne l'implication environnementale d'une catégorie particulière de partie prenante rarement considérée dans la littérature sur la gestion. Nos résultats soulignent les questions de gestion des risques, les objectifs de légitimité de l'entreprise et les exigences réglementaires qui sous-tendent ce type d'engagement environnemental. Nous identifions également les principales pratiques et les principaux avantages de collaborer pleinement avec les peuples autochtones sur les questions environnementales, en particulier en termes de connaissance des écosystèmes locaux et des sites sensibles, de gestion de la biodiversité, de développement des valeurs environnementales au sein de l'organisation, et de soutien à la surveillance environnementale. Cet article contribue à la littérature sur la gestion environnementale et les relations entre les organisations extractives et les communautés autochtones. Les implications managériales et les pistes de recherche futures sont également abordées.

**Mots-clés :** gestion environnementale, peuples autochtones, licence sociale pour opérer, participation de la communauté, relations avec les parties prenantes

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## **Améliorer la gestion environnementale grâce à la participation des peuples autochtones**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The extractive industry (i.e. mining, gas and oil extraction, forest harvesting) has often been reproached for the range and gravity of its environmental and social impacts (e.g. Hilson 2012; Kitula 2006; Whitmore 2006). This industry often extracts raw materials and natural resources in remote, environmentally and socially sensitive locations (Boiral et al. 2018; Parsons 2008; Whitmore 2006). In many cases, these locations are protected areas inhabited by indigenous communities with various cultural specificities and a strong attachment to their land (Howitt 2012; MacKay 2004; O'Faircheallaigh 2013b). As a result, extractive organizations have been facing increasing pressures, particularly from indigenous communities located near operation sites. Indigenous, aboriginal, or native peoples<sup>1</sup> can be defined as “populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions” (International Labour Organization 1989). To respond to the pressures from these stakeholders, organizations have implemented various collaborative and community-based initiatives intended to address specific needs and requirements, including environmental protection (Jenkins and Yakovleva 2006; Kemp et al. 2011; Owen and Kemp 2013). Such initiatives are generally characterized by the engagement or involvement of indigenous peoples whose values, traditions, and land rights need to be seriously considered by organizations (Kepore and Imbun 2011; Lockie et al. 2008; O'Faircheallaigh 2013a).

The objective of this paper is to analyze how involving indigenous communities can improve how organizations in the extractive sector manage environmental issues. The analysis of such involvement has clearly been overlooked in the literature and is important for ethical, managerial, and environmental reasons. First, although indigenous people represent around 370 million individuals across the world and occupy a large proportion of the land area, their rights,

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the concepts of indigenous, aboriginal, and native people are considered as synonymous.

traditions, and knowledge have often been ignored or violated by states and organizations alike (Corntassel and Bryce 2012; Oldham and Frank 2008). Those violations raise serious ethical issues (e.g. land rights, protection of customs and religious traditions, and the preservation of natural habitats and sacred areas) that are often closely linked to the protection of environmental resources on which aboriginal people depend for their survival (Adeola 2000; Meyer 2012). In this perspective, involving indigenous people in extractive organizations' environmental objectives and programs responds to an ethical requirement for more justice for local communities, in part by providing opportunities for their participation in activities that can significantly affect their traditional way of life. Second, such involvement can improve an organization's social license to operate (SLO), which is needed to ensure the social acceptability of activities that may have significant environmental and social impacts (Boutilier 2014; Parsons et al. 2014; Prno and Slocombe 2012). Although the search for social acceptability has been highlighted in many studies on corporate-indigenous relationships (e.g. Crawley and Sinclair 2003; Lertzman and Vredenburg 2005; Meesters and Behagel 2017; Murphy and Arenas 2010; Whitmore 2006), the finer details of native people involvement in the environmental practices of organizations have clearly been overlooked in the literature. Third, indigenous peoples' involvement in environmental issues could help not only to prevent conflicts, but also to manage complex environmental issues such as biodiversity conservation and environmental impact monitoring, which require a good knowledge of the surrounding ecosystems. Although the relevance of traditional knowledge has been evidenced in various areas, including the pharmaceutical and medical fields (e.g. Case et al. 2005; Sidhu et al. 2007; Sidhu and Pannu 2010), there is a need to further investigate how this knowledge can be translated into organizational practices to improve environmental management.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, the literature on environmental management and relationships with indigenous populations will be presented and explained. Second, the methods of the study conducted in the extractive sector will be described. Third, the main findings will be presented. These revolve around three themes: building trusting relationships with indigenous populations, promoting environmental collaboration, and improving environmental management through indigenous peoples' involvement. Contributions to the literature and managerial implications are described in the discussion section.

## **1 ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

### **1.1 THE IMPACTS OF EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES AND PRESSURES FROM LOCAL POPULATIONS**

The development of extractive industries has been marked by strong external pressures and conflicts with local populations, particularly indigenous communities (Hilson 2002; Jenkins 2004; MacKay 2004; Whiteman 2009). These pressures concern many facets of sustainable development and have led to questions about the legitimacy or even the survival of organizations that exploit natural resources. Among other things, extractive operations have been targeted for their impacts on local ecosystems, including biodiversity loss, river pollution, hazardous waste disposal, and atmospheric emissions (e.g. Azapagic 2004; Boiral et al. 2018; Jenkins and Yakovleva 2006; Kitula 2006). They have also been criticized for a lack of consultation or insufficient partnership with local populations (e.g. Jenkins 2004; Murphy and Arenas 2010; Owen and Kemp 2013). Because extractive projects are often located on or near ancestral lands, these projects may raise serious issues in terms of respect for local traditions, access to resources, and benefit sharing with indigenous populations. Various studies have analyzed the impacts of mining, energy, or forestry exploitation on the culture, traditions, and survival of populations whose way of life is embedded within their local ecosystems (e.g. Gilberthorpe and Banks 2012; Jenkins 2004; Lertzman and Vredenburg 2005; O'Faircheallaigh 2013b). Site closures and the long-term social and environmental impacts of extractive operations have also been debated in the literature (Cooke and Johnson 2002; Laurence 2006; O'Faircheallaigh 2013a; Whitmore 2006).

Some conflicts between extractive companies and indigenous communities have received extensive media attention, illustrating the seriousness of sustainability challenges for this sector. These conflicts frequently occur in countries that are economically dependent on natural resource exploitation and that contain large indigenous communities; Canada, Brazil, and Australia are prime examples. Indigenous communities may even block extractive projects entirely. This is the case, for example, of the giant open gold and copper mine project of KGHM Ajax Mining Inc. in British Columbia (Canada). The Skeetchestn Indian Band and other First Nations communities rejected this project, which was located on their ancestral lands (McSheffrey 2017). Likewise, the CAD 6.8 billion Trans Mountain pipeline proposed by Kinder Morgan Energy Partners was strongly opposed by the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation and other communities on the basis of the environmental risks associated with oil transportation

(Van Loon 2016). Indigenous communities may also protest existing activities regarded as a threat to their survival. For example, the First Nations protest movement “Idle No More” has organized several mining-disruptive activities in Canada, including blocking rail lines and access roads to exploitation sites (Van Loon 2016). Finally, although indigenous communities may accept or support the development of certain extractive activities within their territory, they may also exert pressures on companies to obtain greater benefits, particularly in terms of financial compensation. For example, the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation and the Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation have launched legal action against the Gove Operations’ bauxite mine in Australia to obtain more royalties from the mining activities located near their communities (Davidson 2016).

Whatever the nature of the pressures from local populations, the relationships with indigenous communities and the social acceptability of extractive projects seem to have become two of the main challenges in the development of natural resource-based activities (Jenkins and Yakovleva 2006; O’Faircheallaigh 2013a, 2013b; Whitmore 2006). As summarized by the chief executive of Premier Gold Mines Ltd, “one of the big things that is weighing on mining investment in Canada right now is First Nations issues” (Gordon and Martell 2013).

## **1.2 MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS**

The literature on the relationships between indigenous communities and organizations has mainly focused on the management of institutional pressures and the search for social acceptability, particularly through communication with stakeholders and community engagement. According to the dominant literature, companies need to take into account the interests and concerns of native populations to improve the social acceptability of their operations; this is particularly true for the extractive industries (Boiral 2013; Maher 2018; Parsons et al. 2014; Prno 2013; Prno and Slocombe 2012). This search for social acceptability is often translated by the concept of the social license to operate (SLO), which can be defined as “the social approval of and support for organizational activities from stakeholders, particularly the local populations that may be affected by new project developments” (Boiral et al. 2018, p. 394). Various studies have analyzed the main factors influencing the SLO and the benefits of improving relationships with indigenous communities in the extractive industry (e.g. Crawley and Sinclair 2003; Owen and Kemp 2013; Parsons et al. 2014; Prno 2013). Among other things, the importance of dialogue and consultation with these communities prior to the development of industrial activities has been highlighted (e.g. Anguelovski 2011; Bruijn and

Whiteman 2010; O'Faircheallaigh and Corbett 2005). Such dialogue is intended to improve the social legitimacy of organizations and to prevent conflicts with local populations. Neo-institutional theory is often used to explain the measures implemented by organizations in this area (e.g. Deegan and Blomquist 2006; Hall et al. 2015; Parsons et al. 2014). According to this theory, institutional pressures and the search for social legitimacy are the main drivers of the adoption of new practices by organizations. Nevertheless, such adoptions are not necessarily substantial; they may be superficial measures intended to improve corporate image rather than to significantly change internal practices (Boiral 2012; Christmann and Taylor 2006; Hrascky 2011; Talbot and Boiral 2015; Testa et al. 2018). In short, organizational measures adopted in response to pressures from indigenous populations are not monolithic. They can be analyzed critically (e.g. as the superficial adoption of practices or impression management techniques due to the conflicting interests of organizations and stakeholders) or more optimistically (e.g. organizational change, adoption of more efficient practices, integration of CSR in core business activities).

The critical perspective on corporations and indigenous communities has been dominant in the scholarly literature, probably due to a long history of conflictive relationships. Most studies have highlighted the negative environmental and social impacts of extractive activities on local populations (e.g. Morrice and Colagiuri 2013; Szablowski 2002). Cases of the forced displacement of populations, destruction of local fauna and flora, dispossession of natural resources, or cultural uprooting are well documented (e.g. Banerjee 2000; Munarriz 2008; Szablowski 2002). Organizations' attempts to legitimate their operations near indigenous communities have been associated with a colonial or neo-colonial rhetoric by radical critical studies (Banerjee 2000; Banerjee and Prasad 2008; Munarriz 2008). Irrespective of their political lenses, most critical approaches have highlighted the conflicting interests of corporations and indigenous communities, the misunderstandings between them, the lack of transparency of reporting practices in this area, and the superficiality of corporate measures intended to improve relationships with local stakeholders. First, whatever measures are implemented to minimize environmental and social impacts, the extraction of resources in fragile ecosystems on which local populations depend appears to be fundamentally detrimental to the interests of most indigenous communities (Banerjee 2000, 2008a, 2008b; Parsons 2008). Moreover, the differing perceptions on sustainability issues of organizations and local populations can be difficult to reconcile due to cultural, linguistic, and social differences

(Meesters and Behagel 2017; Whiteman 2009). Second, corporate disclosures on sustainability issues—including relationships with indigenous communities—are often opaque, biased, and mostly intended to serve business interests rather than communicate transparent information to stakeholders (Kitula 2006; Meesters and Behagel 2017; Parsons 2008; Wang et al. 2016; Whiteman 2009). This lack of transparency provides support for the perspective that corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives are above all used as a marketing tool to control stakeholder perceptions (Basu et al. 2015; Coronado and Fallon 2010; Parsons 2008). Third, CSR initiatives have been criticized for their superficiality and lack of substantial benefits for local populations (Kepore et al. 2013; Whitmore 2006). Overall, the adverse impacts of extractive activities have been found to exceed their benefits for indigenous communities in many cases and to have long-term social and environmental consequences (O'Faircheallaigh 2013b; Whitmore 2006).

Recently, a more optimistic perspective has emerged in the literature. This perspective is mainly focused on positive achievements and the importance of community engagement for organizations, without dismissing the seriousness of environmental and social impacts of extractive activities. First, CSR and the development of trusting relationships with indigenous communities are increasingly considered as part of the core business of extractive companies (Kepore and Imbun 2011; Newenham-Kahindi 2011). Earning a SLO must then not be only based on superficial actions and public relation activities but needs to be rooted in substantial initiatives. The absence of such initiatives seriously compromises the development or even the existence of extractive activities and undermines the credibility of the industry as a whole (Fidler 2010; Imbun 2007; Ruwhiu and Carter 2016). Second, the perspectives of indigenous communities and corporations do not conflict on all projects or in all cases. Various studies have highlighted changes in the institutional environment (e.g. new regulations, internationalization of pressures for indigenous rights, tendency to develop negotiated agreements) that encourage partnerships rather than confrontation (e.g. Newenham-Kahindi 2011; Ruwhiu and Carter 2016).

### **1.3 INTERNALIZING ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES**

The literature on the management of relationships with indigenous communities sheds more light on the impacts of extractive activities on local populations, the motivations behind community engagement in this area, and its benefits and contradictions. Nevertheless, although environmental protection is essential for most indigenous communities (Lertzman and



Vredenburg 2005; Noble and Birk 2011; O'Faircheallaigh 2013a), the current literature essentially focuses on the socioeconomic and political aspects of community engagement. As a result, how community engagement can contribute, in practical terms, to improve corporate environmental management has clearly been overlooked in the literature. Likewise, the role and importance of indigenous communities in the environmental management of natural resource-based organizations are virtually ignored in the literature on environmental management, with a few exceptions (Clark 2002; Hill et al. 2012; O'Faircheallaigh and Corbett 2005). This gap in the literature requires further exploration for at least two reasons.

First, environmental issues are often at the heart of costly conflicts between organizations and indigenous populations, whose culture and way of life depend on the ecosystem. For example, as stated earlier, the KGHM Ajax open gold and copper mine project was rejected by Canadian First Nation communities just after a conference on the environmental impacts of mining and the importance of preserving ecosystems by David Suzuki, a well-known environmentalist and scientist (McSheffrey 2017). In certain regions, indigenous opposition to extractive activities has become widespread and increasingly well organized. For example, in Peru, indigenous populations have strongly opposed over 150 extractive projects, particularly in the regions of Apurimac, Ancash, and Cusco (TeleSUR 2017). Risks of environmental contamination were the main cause of these conflicts, and the new Peruvian president's decision to lower environmental standards has fueled the opposition to extractive activities across the country. In this context, whatever the regulations in place, the preservation of ecosystems and the integration of environmental issues in corporate community engagement appear crucial to prevent future conflicts and to ensure the sustainability of extractive activities.

Second, a failure to integrate environmental issues can give rise to powerful alliances between indigenous rights and environmental movements that together rally against the development of extractive projects (Clark 2002; Mills 2011). Although they are not always aligned, these movements share many common points, including a concern for the preservation of natural habitats and traditional ways of life and opposition to the exploitation of natural resources and the uncontrolled expansion of industrial activities in remote areas. Alliances between environmental and indigenous movements can significantly increase institutional pressures against extractive organizations and undermine their image on a much larger scale. For example, the Cree communities of Northern Quebec sought the assistance of Greenpeace in protecting their ancestral territory from the deforestation activities of Resolute Forest Products,



one of Canada's main forest and paper companies (Agence France-Presse 2015; Northern Ontario Business 2017). The "Resolute: Forest Destroyer" campaign implemented by Greenpeace resulted in a significant deterioration of the image of this giant forest company, which decided to sue Greenpeace for defamation. Resolute Forest Products' CAD 300 million lawsuit against Greenpeace was dismissed in court in 2017 (The Canadian Press 2017). To avoid this type of pressure, which can have a disastrous impact on corporate image and profitability, companies need to obtain the support of indigenous people and, when possible, develop environmental initiatives in partnership with them.

In this perspective, the integration of environmental management and community engagement can contribute to the conservation of natural ecosystems, respect of indigenous rights, and development of collaborative rather than conflicting relationships with local communities.

## **2 METHODS**

The objective of this qualitative study is to analyze how the involvement of indigenous communities can contribute to the improvement of the environmental management practices of organizations in the natural resource sector.

### **2.1 DATA COLLECTION**

The focus on the extractive sector is justified by its impacts on both natural ecosystems and nearby communities (Hilson 2012; Kitula 2006). Most respondents were involved in mining, forestry, or energy activities in various countries, particularly in Canada, which is one of the largest producers and exporters of natural resources. Moreover, most Canadian extractive activities are located in Northern regions traditionally occupied by indigenous communities. Over the past few decades, these communities have exerted increasing pressures on governments and extractive organizations over the recognition of their land rights, resource control, and environmental protection (Anderson et al. 2006; O'Faircheallaigh 2010). This context has fostered the creation of collaboration agreements with indigenous communities (Missens et al. 2007; O'Faircheallaigh 2013a; Wyatt et al. 2013) and the involvement of indigenous peoples in the environmental practices of organizations. The selection of extractive sector organizations was based on the Global Reporting Initiative framework database, which includes more than 47,000 sustainability reports.<sup>2</sup> The keywords "aboriginal people," "indigenous communities," and "First Nations" were used to select organizations involved in

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://database.globalreporting.org/> (consulted on May 12, 2018)

community engagement with indigenous peoples. When available, information on the managers involved in indigenous community relations was used to develop a list of contacts. Potential respondents were also found by researching professional databases, such as LinkedIn, using the keywords “aboriginal relationship” and “indigenous affairs”. Snowball sampling (i.e. the identification and selection of further relevant research respondents based on information collected from respondents) was used to complete the list of contacts and is a technique commonly used in exploratory and qualitative studies (Noy 2008; Robinson 2014; Suri 2011). When relevant to further explore the subject, governmental specialists, consultants, and academic experts in indigenous affairs were also contacted. All respondents had significant experience in the area of the relationships between extractive organizations and indigenous communities.

Potential respondents were then contacted by email. Respondents interested in participating in our study had to sign a consent form ensuring their anonymity prior to the interview, as per the research protocol approved by the Laval University ethics committee. As organizations in the extractive sector often operate in remote areas, interviews were mostly conducted by telephone or by Skype. As many other studies have highlighted, there are no significant differences between face-to-face and telephone interviews (Holt 2010; Midanik and Greenfield 2003; Stephens 2007; Sturges and Hanrahan 2004). Our semi-directed interviews were based on an interview guide covering the main objectives of the study (i.e. main trends in the relationships between indigenous people and companies, drivers for indigenous peoples’ involvement in environmental management, and improvements in environmental management through indigenous peoples’ involvement). On average, interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were conducted in English or French or, to a lesser extent, Spanish. Overall, 33 respondents were interviewed between January 2015 and December 2016 (see Table 1). Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed in their source language.

**Table 1: Status of respondents**

	<i>Managers</i>	<i>Auditors/ Consultants</i>	<i>Researchers/ Scientists</i>	<i>Other Experts</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Mining Sector</i>	9	3	0	0	12
<i>Energy Sector</i>	5	0	0	0	5
<i>Forestry Sector</i>	1	4	2	0	7
<i>Natural-Resource Sector Related</i>	3	1	1	1	6
<i>Other</i>	0	2	1	0	3

<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>33</b>
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## 2.2 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis was based on the grounded theory method, in which main themes emerge from the data rather than from pre-established hypotheses (Glaser and Strauss 2017; Suddaby 2006). Interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word. Overall, the transcriptions represented 515 single-spaced pages. They were then exported to QDA Miner software (version 4), which was used to perform the qualitative analysis. A preliminary categorization framework was created based on the data collected during the interviews. Each individual category was clearly described to ensure the validity of the data interpretation. In keeping with the inductive and iterative process involved in the grounded theory methodology, the categorization grid was dynamic and evolved as new relevant themes emerged throughout the data categorization process. Through research team discussions, new categories were created and other categories were eliminated or merged together. All transcriptions were categorized according to the categorization grid, and a double-blinded categorization was performed independently by two coders on 30% of the transcriptions. This process allowed us to validate our categorization grid and to improve it by reducing any interpretive biases of the two coders. At the end of this process, there were no significant differences between the categorizations of the two coders. Overall, 71 relevant categories were created, comprising 830 passages related to the relationships between indigenous people and companies. These categories were grouped according to two main themes:

- Drivers for indigenous peoples' involvement in environmental management;
- Improvements in environmental management through indigenous peoples' involvement.

Finally, representative passages for the main themes were selected and translated into English by the research team when necessary. Key findings related to these themes were also summarized. When relevant, certain trends were estimated, even though a qualitative grounded theory approach is usually not appropriate for quantification (Gephart 2004; Pratt 2009).

## 3 PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL COLLABORATIONS

Community engagement in extractive organizations can take various forms (i.e. health and education measures, infrastructure investment, philanthropic donations, biodiversity conservation, recruitment of indigenous people) depending on the context, the needs of local

populations, the resources available, or institutional constraints. Environmental issues tend to be an essential component of such engagement, especially for projects with significant impacts on ecosystems and that are located in natural areas near indigenous communities. The ability to work collaboratively with these communities to address specific environmental issues appears essential for the feasibility and long-term viability of extractive projects for at least three complementary reasons: risk management and conflict prevention, corporate legitimacy, and regulatory requirements.

First, according to 36% of respondents, community engagement on environmental issues contributes to reduce the risks of conflicts with local populations. Extractive activities, especially in the mining industry, can represent major investments. Opposition from indigenous communities can significantly delay costly industrial projects, undermine their feasibility, or even result in the closure of existing exploitations. Respondents frequently mentioned the financial and corporate image costs of previous conflicts with local communities. Although collaboration with indigenous people does not necessarily prevent opposition, almost all respondents who discussed this issue highlighted that the risks of conflicts can be significantly reduced through indigenous engagement and involvement on environmental issues. Importantly, environmental issues are often closely tied to cultural and social ones, and indigenous peoples' involvement can help identify sites to be protected for not only environmental but also religious or cultural reasons. Certain respondents mentioned that sacred sites can be a source of conflict, particularly if they are not well protected, and that it is important to involve indigenous people to ensure the conservation of those sites. Respondents also highlighted that natural ecosystems represent the food sources of many indigenous communities, who must be reassured about the potential impacts of extractive operations on the local fauna and flora. Overall, projects located near indigenous communities are increasingly considered to be high-risk and potentially costly activities that require specific environmental measures in partnership with local populations:

*The cost of letting an environmental issue go, the cost for the company's reputation, and of the crisis management that will follow are substantial. So, for a company, the first reflex is to see environmental issues from an economic point of view. (Consultant in the mining sector)*

*From the Aboriginal movement "Idle no more" and other past crises, we know that this can represent a risk. For example, if they chain themselves to the mine entrance because*

*they oppose it, they have a lot of media power and that might make the news from coast to coast. (Manager in the mining sector)*

*In the North, the project was actually rejected. So, the company is seeing that area as high-risk, and I heard someone joke that it's seen to be "as risky as being in West Africa." They've spent so much money trying to get this project through... (Manager in the mining sector)*

Second, around 30% of respondents mentioned the role of regulations in the development of environmental community engagement. These regulations vary from one region to another and can be applied at the federal, provincial, or local level. Moreover, they may cover different stages of extractive projects. For the mining industry, specific regulations on relationships with indigenous communities may exist at the exploration, exploitation, and closure phases. In Canada, signing an Impact and Benefit Agreement (IBA) with these communities is a common practice in the mining industry to regulate the scope of community engagement at various stages of mining activities. Although these agreements are privately negotiated and are not necessarily mandatory, they represent legally enforceable agreements used by indigenous communities to promote their rights in terms of environmental conservation, cultural site protection, and economic compensation. Similar regulations exist in various countries, such as the Indigenous Land Use Agreements in Australia. In addition to specific regulations on community engagement, the extractive industry must also take into account environmental regulations, which often include regulatory provisions regarding indigenous communities. Several respondents also mentioned that in order to access rare resources, companies increasingly need to operate in protected areas, where more stringent regulatory constraints in terms of biodiversity conservation and community engagement often apply:

*The biodiversity conservation plan needs to be developed with stakeholders and communities of interest, both local and indigenous. So we have an obligation to engage these communities on biodiversity management activities or even to invite them to participate. (Manager in the mining sector)*

*Laws and regulations must be respected. You have to go through a legislative process to obtain permits and authorizations. We have to involve Aboriginal peoples and conclude agreements with them to promote their development and respect their values. (Manager in the mining sector)*

*We try to get the indigenous people and the company on the same page about where the project actually stands and what we can actually expect in terms of agreement on economic development and environmental protection. That's where the main misalignment happens with companies. (Scientist involved with various natural resource sectors)*

Third, 27% of respondents mentioned the importance of promoting environmental initiatives in collaboration with indigenous communities to improve corporate image and demonstrate their social responsiveness. The communities that companies are pressured to engage with are not limited to local populations; they also include various stakeholders whose demands need to be addressed as far as possible (e.g. environmental groups, international institutions, financial markets, banks, customers, governmental agencies, and human rights associations). For example, a few respondents mentioned institutional pressures from environmental groups as well as the tendency of these groups to forge alliances with indigenous communities or to use the claims of indigenous communities to bolster their cause. For companies, fostering environmental collaborations with indigenous communities can help prevent indigenous alliances with environmental groups, improve the social license to operate among the local population, and enhance their corporate image at a larger scale. It also promotes self-regulation and avoids more coercive measures from governmental agencies or pressure groups:

*Currently, there are many initiatives that are undertaken voluntarily or for reputational reasons, but not many mandatory measures. (Consultant in the mining sector)*

*At the company level, I think it's mainly a question of social acceptability and image. Citizens also increasingly expect companies to adopt sustainable and socially responsible approaches. (Legal advisor involved with various natural resource sectors)*

*Environmental activists or lobbyists target First Nations and indigenous groups and try to use them to their own gain, which I think is a concern for quite a few industries and corporate players. (Scientist involved with various natural resource sectors)*

#### **4 IMPROVING ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT THROUGH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' INVOLVEMENT**

Although the improvement of internal environmental practices was rarely mentioned as a significant driver of community engagement, more than three quarters of respondents explained how such engagement has brought substantial and often unexpected benefits. Those benefits revolve around four important aspects of environmental management: knowledge of local

ecosystems and sensitive sites to be protected, biodiversity management, development of environmental values within the organization, and monitoring environmental measures.

First, 55% of respondents mentioned the role of indigenous communities in the development of environmental knowledge on exploitation sites. Although some indigenous peoples are reluctant to share their knowledge, such knowledge appears essential to extractive organizations for adapting environmental practices to the specificities of local ecosystems and identifying priority actions. Because extractive organizations mostly operate in remote areas, they are often unfamiliar with the site and the region in which they're operating. As a result, it is not necessarily clear which environmental actions should be prioritized, and this may vary from one site to another. The recruitment of experts, consultants, and environmental specialists can be costly, particularly for small- and medium-sized enterprises. Moreover, the knowledge and information that can be obtained from external experts tend to be based on technical aspects that are not necessarily aligned with the priorities of indigenous communities. Conversely, those communities tend to be seen as experts of their environment and guardians of the ecosystems upon which they depend. Their perceptions are rooted in traditional knowledge, activities (e.g. hunting and fishing), and cultural aspects that need to be considered by extractive companies, regardless of the conclusions of scientific studies (e.g. impact assessments, water quality analyses, or species inventories). The engagement or involvement of indigenous communities in the development of environmental objectives and programs is essential for the success and social acceptability of measures in this area. It also contributes to demonstrate the company's concern for local traditions and stakeholder expectations:

*First Nations are quite active in their roles of protecting local environments, and they have a deep connection to their environments, to the Earth in general. I think they are seen as people with good authority on where protective initiatives should go, and when things are harmful to the environment, they're a good indicator of where people should be placing their concerns. (Scientist involved with various natural resource sectors)*

*Talking with the local First Nations helps the company to understand the land even better, and it could help the company in their production as well by understanding what the land is like. (Manager in the mining sector)*

*First Nations have a connection to their environments. They can provide traditional knowledge of a situation to show not only the potential effects of each company, but also the cumulative effects of the industry and what has already happened in their*



*environments. And this information can be very valuable in terms of positioning a project to do the right thing and minimizing environmental impacts. (Scientist involved with various natural resource sectors)*

Second, as mentioned by 39% of respondents, indigenous peoples' involvement can significantly improve the management of biodiversity issues. Most organizations lack the knowledge and resources required to efficiently manage these issues. Moreover, they are unfamiliar with the behavior of indigenous species and the most appropriate measures for their protection. Conversely, indigenous communities have a close relationship with the local fauna and flora, which can be used as food or medicines. Several respondents from Canadian organizations mentioned specific caribou species such as the Peary and Woodland caribous, which are endangered or threatened species in certain regions. Because the caribou represents the primary source of food for many indigenous communities of the far North, protection of the caribou is essential to maintaining the lifestyle and traditions of these communities. Indigenous peoples' involvement in biodiversity conservation can take many forms (e.g. recruitment of indigenous people in the environmental department, implementation of a consultation group, or meetings with tribe leaders) and be focused on various issues (e.g. identification of endangered species, analysis of migration routes, implementation of ecological corridors, or management of invasive species). For organizations, such involvement helps to improve relationships with indigenous communities and to focus biodiversity measures on issues that indigenous communities consider essential:

*It's at the heart of their culture, so if the company is able to work with indigenous groups on something that is really at the heart of their identity, it's the best way to work together. It's one of the main gateways to conserve biodiversity and to build a better relationship with indigenous groups. (Consultant in the construction materials sector)*

*Ten percent of the workforce is indigenous. They participate in defining what biodiversity represents for them. They told us where the medicinal plants are to protect. There are also the caribou, the moose, and the Canada goose, which they also hunt. So we make sure that our projects will have the least possible impact on these species. We look at the species that provide the most ecosystem services to these populations, and we make sure to minimize our impacts on them. (Manager in the energy sector)*

*The migratory caribou population is declining, which is a major source of concern for the Inuit. This is why mining companies will join conservation programs for this species.*

*They will get involved and make sure they do not impact the caribou. (Manager in the mining sector)*

Third, around 39% of respondents highlighted the development of environmental values within the organization as a benefit of indigenous peoples' involvement. Engagement and dialogue with these population prior to the exploration project or during the operation phase tend to change the perceptions of environmental issues of managers and employees alike. Some respondents mentioned the development of a more holistic and respectful view of natural ecosystems, while others appreciated the knowledge gleaned from an experiential, spiritual, and integrated view of the environment. Around 15% of respondents highlighted that contact with indigenous people had a very strong impact on them and deeply transformed their vision of nature. Whatever its form, the involvement of indigenous communities has definitively improved corporate environmental awareness and responsiveness to issues that were often overlooked or mostly considered as an external constraint:

*We need to engage so much with indigenous people for the development of our projects that it makes us aware of their concerns, and we then become increasingly aware of these issues ourselves. (Manager in the mining sector)*

*I brought the mining engineer responsible for project development with me, and when he heard indigenous people explain that the environment is their pantry, he was really impressed. He realized how they saw it, and it really changed his own perspective. (Manager in the mining sector)*

*I've learned a lot from indigenous people. We don't realize these things living in a modern society. It was only when I've worked with indigenous people in Africa and in the North that I actually realized the importance of traditional knowledge, of a direct relationship with biodiversity, of plants they've used since forever. I was really impressed. These are not things you've learned in school as an engineer or a geologist. (Manager in the mining sector)*

Fourth, 21% of respondents mentioned that indigenous peoples' involvement can improve the monitoring of various environmental issues (i.e. sampling programs, impact assessments, maintenance of polluting equipment, site rehabilitation, or stakeholder engagement) throughout the life cycle of extractive activities. Although the proximity of indigenous communities to industrial sites is often perceived as a source of pressures and constraints, it can also facilitate the monitoring and control of environmental impacts. Such monitoring may require creating

and hiring for specific positions when industrial infrastructures are complex and spread out over a large area (e.g. a pipeline or a large mining complex). Indigenous people living in the immediate vicinity of these infrastructures are clearly well placed to hold these positions, which may require long-term involvement on the site. Some respondents also mentioned that direct indigenous involvement in monitoring reduces the risks of protracted conflicts with local populations and improves communication with stakeholders. Overall, respondents highlighted indigenous peoples' abilities in the field more than in offices. In this perspective, the presence of indigenous people on the environmental staff brings capabilities, ideas, and a vision complementary to the more technical and administrative focus of most environmental specialists:

*I think having them on staff is beneficial, because they can give you lots of good ideas, instead of going back for consultation and overwhelming them with a lot of questions at the same time. We also have a committee that works with all the bands in the area to listen to and discuss their ideas and uses this knowledge to help us better understand our environmental protection. (Manager in the mining sector)*

*We need to talk to them and involve them in environmental monitoring, in sampling, in our programs, ask them for their opinion, and if they see improvements or not. (Manager in the mining sector)*

*Indigenous people participate in studies and species rehabilitation programs. They're really going to participate, and they like it. Not just for biodiversity actions and tree planting. They are used to working in nature. So we actually involve them very, very actively. (Manager in the energy sector)*

## **5 DISCUSSION**

The objective of this paper was to analyze indigenous peoples' involvement in the improvement of environmental management practices in natural resource organizations. The findings show the importance of building trusting relationships with indigenous populations prior to developing environmental initiatives. Despite the history of conflicts and mistrust between extractive industries and indigenous communities, respondents highlighted that relationships have significantly improved, which now makes it possible to further develop environmental collaborations, under certain conditions. These collaborations are facilitated by the search for corporate social legitimacy and the proliferation of negotiated agreements, which can incorporate environmental issues. Indigenous peoples' involvement in environmental

management also contributes to the prevention of conflicts and the reduction of the risks associated with activities located in remote and often protected regions. Finally, the findings shed more light on the environmental benefits of indigenous involvement, including in terms of improving the company's knowledge of local ecosystems to be protected, management of biodiversity issues, greening of corporate values, and monitoring of environmental initiatives. First, the paper contributes to bridge the gap between the literature focused on indigenous community engagement (e.g. Anderson et al. 2006; Anguelovski 2011; Banerjee 2000; Bruijn and Whiteman 2010; Jenkins 2004) and the literature on environmental management. Although environmental protection is considered to be a key issue in the relationships between extractive industries and local communities (Hitch and Fidler 2007; Lertzman and Vredenburg 2005; Noble and Birk 2011; O'Faircheallaigh 2013a), there is a dearth of studies on how it is managed in practical terms. On the one hand, the literature on indigenous communities and their relationships with organizations has essentially focused on conflicts, sociopolitical issues, and the institutional arrangements underlying these complex relationships (e.g. Banerjee 2000; Kepore et al. 2013; Morrice and Colagiuri 2013; Whitmore 2006). On the other hand, the literature on environmental management tends to ignore the role of indigenous communities—which is major in certain sectors of activity—and remains essentially focused on organizational practices or relationships with stakeholders in general. This paper shows how the promotion of good environmental management practices and the improvement of relationships with indigenous communities are intertwined for some extractive organizations.

Second, the paper contributes to the literature on the management of external pressures and the search for a SLO. This literature has been dominated by neo-institutional and stakeholder theories. These theories show how organizations adapt—sometimes only symbolically—to institutional pressures to improve their social legitimacy and address the expectations of various stakeholders (e.g. Avetisyan and Ferrary 2013; Boiral 2012; Talbot and Boiral 2015; Testa et al. 2018). Nevertheless, although indigenous communities can represent a major source of pressures for certain sectors, they are rarely considered as key stakeholders in the managerial literature, with a few notable exceptions (e.g. Bruijn and Whiteman 2010; Crawley and Sinclair 2003; Murphy and Arenas 2010; Olabisi et al. 2017). As a result, the literature has clearly overlooked how pressures from these communities can be managed and the possible outcomes for environmental management. Moreover, the dominant scholarly literature on corporate and indigenous relationships has been dominated by critical approaches focused on tensions,

opposition, and conflicting interests rather than solutions and indigenous involvement in organizational practices (e.g. Banerjee 2000, 2008a, 2008b; Morrice and Colagiuri 2013; Parsons 2008; Whitmore 2006). Although this paper does not question the existence and importance of such conflicts, the findings shed more light on the possible avenues of collaboration with indigenous communities, motivations for this collaboration, and its benefits for environmental management. These avenues of collaboration cannot be generalized to all cases and must not be used to mask existing tensions. Nevertheless, they question the monolithic and pessimistic portrait of corporate-indigenous relationships that permeates the mainstream literature.

Third, the paper has practical implications, particularly for managers facing pressures from indigenous communities. Although environmental issues are often a source of tensions with local stakeholders, this paper shows how partnerships with indigenous peoples can contribute to reduce these tensions and improve environmental practices. Negotiated agreements with local populations should therefore systematically integrate environmental management and long-term environmental partnerships. Indigenous peoples' deep connection to the environment should be considered as an asset to improving organizational knowledge of the region and identifying the measures to prioritize. Having indigenous people on the company's environmental staff can also significantly improve the management of biodiversity issues, which is essential to ensure the SLO when extractive operations are located near or within protected or fragile areas (Boiral et al. 2018; Parsons et al. 2014; Richert et al. 2015). This paper thus contributes to the emerging literature on biodiversity management (e.g. Boiral and Heras-Saizarbitoria 2017; Boiral et al. 2018; Houdet et al. 2012; Wolff et al. 2018), which, to our knowledge, has not investigated the role of indigenous people in the improvement of conservation practices. Such involvement also appears relevant to monitoring environmental measures, impact assessments, and relationships with stakeholders. Generally speaking, indigenous peoples' involvement has been found to improve environmental awareness inside extractive organizations. Such benefits should encourage organizations that are really committed to environmental protection to recruit and train indigenous people for tasks related to programs in this area. In addition to improving environmental management, the recruitment of indigenous persons clearly contributes to reducing the tensions with indigenous communities.

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