

# Recognizing appropriate representation of indigenous knowledge in design practice

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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the need for designers to follow clear, concise, workable practises to engage appropriately and ethically with indigenous knowledge on projects involving the graphical depiction of indigenous culture. Incorporating indigenous symbols into visual communication design strategies impacts a wide range of stakeholders and therefore requires a sensitive approach with broad consultation in regard to permissions and intellectual property rights; issues can be worked through if respectful practice methods are applied. This paper acknowledges cultural appropriation is not new and that creative, cross cultural interpretation and expressions of hybridity should be encouraged. However respectful communication, consultation, and collaboration are required whenever commercial application of indigenous culture is attempted. To demonstrate the need for clarity, three case study examples will be presented, each with design solutions involving the use of graphical depictions of indigenous culture and each selected due to the varying degrees of stakeholder engagement undertaken in the design process. The introduction of the ladder of stakeholder engagement theory is a new concept introduced in this paper that can be employed to better consider the appropriate and ethical engagement of designers with indigenous knowledge.

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## KEY WORDS :

*Typographic legibility; Text layout; Academic texts; Search reading; Perceptual level of reading*

## The Challenge

In today's global economy, visual communication designers must work with multiple stakeholders and create design solutions that appeal to a diverse range of recipients, each of whom hold a strong emotional investment in the representation presented. With multiple stakeholders there exists an increased potential for debate, dissent, conflict, and miscommunication. Of particular note, the authors recognize the need for designers to follow a clear, concise, workable process to address the concerns of all stakeholders when working with indigenous knowledge on projects involving the graphical depiction of indigenous culture. This paper asserts the need for information and guidance to help designers be more aware of the context in which they are working, as it is a difficult landscape to navigate especially when identifying what is appropriate and what is appropriation.

Three case study examples will be examined demonstrating the challenges surrounding concerns of identity creation and visual representation of indigenous communities in communication design. Revealing differing levels of engagement with stakeholders, the results of this research proposes designers need to embed procedures of stakeholder engagement in design practice to work appropriately and ethically with indigenous knowledge. Introducing this as a new concept to assist designers with their awareness of the context in which they are working, this paper identifies the ladder of stakeholder engagement as an internationally relevant, solid foundation upon which to create an understanding of suitable processes and procedures to better consider the concerns of the client, consumer, designer, and community.

McCoy states: "As professional designers, we have developed an effective body of theory, method, and form to deal with both the sender and message. Now we must do the same for the receiver component of the communications equation" (2006, p.203). In earlier research, Buchanan took a similar position when he explained that despite the impact of mass-production, the solution is to no longer design for a universal audience, or national groups, or even large market segments; "the task is to design for the individual placed in his or her immediate context" (1998, p.20). In agreement to McCoy's comments, Marcus (2004) discusses digital environments and the impact of cultural differences in the ways people engage with graphical layouts. Marcus argues that cross-cultural user-interface designers need to account for dimensions of cultures when they consider potential design strategies and adapt these to the needs of different locales. He points out that there may be cultural biases in traditional industry usability precepts and that deep cultural influences affect the way people think, act, and feel. The symbolic design object selected triggers cultural associations and hence the need to address the symbolic issues of culturally driven representation.

These comments highlight the necessity for visual communication to remain personal in its communication strategies. However, when designing in a cross cultural context where the communication must work with a range of culturally diverse audiences and a broad range of stakeholders, it is difficult to appeal to the multiple recipients who hold a strong emotional investment in the message being sent. In this situation, the stakeholder base expands and the varying levels of appeal increase exponentially. Adding another level of complexity to the discussion is when the design is a graphical depiction of indigenous culture. It does not imply that designers need to have an expanded knowledge of all cultures or indigenous culture, nor does it claim to explain what is appropriate or inappropriate. It does however assert the need for designers to seek information on a case-by case basis and to understand respectful methods of engagement. Designers should not feel a need to avoid the issue; they simply need to start relevant projects with a blank canvas, listen, not make assumptions, and embark on the process without preconceived ideas. They need to be aware of the emotions of the stakeholders, the strong feeling deriving from one's circumstances, mood, or relationships with others (Oxford Dictionary, 2015). Stakeholder sensibilities should be respected and included for effective communication and acceptance.

Despite admirable attempts to navigate a transparent and ethical approach to design involving the graphical depiction of indigenous culture, debate, dissent, conflict, and miscommunication are still evident. It is a complex area to navigate and the associated difficulties have been avoided for many years, particularly in Australia. Discourse involving the indigenous knowledge engagement by non-indigenous involves issues of appropriate or inappropriate representation, self-determination, national identity, reconciliation, and power balance. Knowledge ownership (intellectual property), sharing, and hybridity are at the center of this discussion. Conversely, denying access to knowledge can perpetuate a climate of cultural ignorance. As Socrates stressed, "There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance" (1925).

To demonstrate the need for clarity in stakeholder engagement to address ethical transparency, three case study examples will be presented. Each case study example involves the use of graphical depictions of indigenous culture and was selected due to the varying degrees of stakeholder engagement in the design process. Other examples could be chosen; however, these examples were identified to demonstrate key points in our discussion. Evident were different levels of consultation and engagement with variable outcomes. The first example of the Venezuelan government's rebranding of public museums and galleries was widely criticized due to the lack of stakeholder consultation. The second example of Urban Outfitters use of Navajo imagery is an example where there was blatantly no consultation. The final example of Air Pacific's rebrand of Fiji Airways by FutureBrand was conducted with consultation; however, ownership was contested late

in the design process. When mapping the level of stakeholder management from each case study, an ability to categorize engagement in design process is shown to offer clear guidance to designers working in a cross-cultural context and to inform their practice.

## Venezuelan Government's Rebranding of Public Museums and Galleries

In 2005 the Venezuelan government set out to rebrand its major cultural institutions including several iconic public museums and galleries. The new visual identity program replaced a series of very popular and long-standing icons with a single unifying mark. The singular representation was based on a traditional symbol from the Venezuelan aboriginal group called Panare.

After the launch of the new program, the Ministry of Culture in Venezuela was widely criticized for the new design. It was felt that many of the previous logos represented Venezuela's rich history of pre-Hispanic influences and were superb examples of modernism in its purest form having been developed by some of Venezuela's great, internationally recognized designers. They were identities of significant cultural value as they were "extremely sophisticated and evidence different strategies of hybridisation between canonical modernist forms and autochthonous" (De La Barra, 2013).

The Venezuelan design community overwhelmingly agreed that to replace such well-established visual identities should require a broad based consultation process involving all cultural stakeholders. According to the Venezuelan design community, the government imposed change without any consultation with the Panare people, the local design community, or design associations. As a result, there was a strong feeling that the change was disrespectful to the highly regarded designers of the original logos. There was a growing belief that the government managed to successfully alienate itself from both the Venezuelan designers and the Panare community whom they were championing. Prominent Venezuelan visual communicator, John Moore's, sentiments reflect those of the local designers:

Important identities, developed by leading Venezuelan designers, which formed part of Venezuela's cultural heritage have been erased. The principal problems are the loss of identity, personality and especially the history of each museum and the appropriation of a sacred aboriginal image for public use in a context where the audience does not understand its significance. This is contrary to an official identity strategy, which would allow each museum to conserve its own personality. This controversial approach has divided the staff of the museums and even the ethnic group that is the source of the imagery (Personal Communication, February 2006).

Apart from the issues of brand identity, Venezuela's introspection reflects a much larger global issue, the appropriate, ethical, and respect-

ful use of indigenous visual iconography. Although intentions may have been valid, the lack of stakeholder engagement and the lack of consideration of the stakeholder base resulted in a negative response to the design strategy. This issue is particularly important when designers are required to visually represent aspects of national identity and engage with indigenous design knowledge to achieve representation.

## Urban Outfitters' Use of Navajo Imagery

The second example involving the use of indigenous imagery in design practice reflects upon a total lack of consultation and engagement with all stakeholders. Renown for creating controversy, Urban Outfitters (Inc.), a clothing retailer based in the United States of America, has "in various attempts to look rebellious ... come under fire for selling clothing relating to the Holocaust, anorexia, addiction and racial stereotypes" (Short, 2014). Urban Outfitters in 2011 introduced a line of Navajo-branded clothing and accessories including underwear and a liquor flask. Using geometric shapes throughout the design applications, Urban Outfitters called the range "Navajo" and sold the retail items in stores and online.

Months after sending the clothing retailer a cease-and-desist letter demanding it stop using the "Navajo" name, the Navajo Nation, in February 2012, sued Urban Outfitters. In response, Urban Outfitters removed the products from their website. However, as Urban Outfitters markets and retails its merchandise in more than 200 stores and online, products with the "Navajo" name were still being sold through other company brands (Landry, 2013). The lawsuit filed alleged "trademark violations and violations of the federal Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990, which makes it illegal to sell arts or crafts in a way to falsely suggest they're made by American Indians when they're not" (Fonseca, 2012). The Navajo Nation representatives stated the designs were "derogatory and scandalous", particularly when the sale and consumption of alcohol is banned on the reservation<sup>1</sup>.

Historically, the Navajo worked in silver and wool (Landry, 2013), creating items for household uses or adornment. Yet with the arrival of Anglo settlers, and their subsequent discovery of the Navajo crafts, arts and crafts have become part of a broader economic landscape. As a result, Urban Outfitters countered the claim by arguing that "Navajo" has become a generic term for a style or design.

In court documentation Urban Outfitters argued that the

<sup>1</sup> "The Indian Arts and Crafts Act, passed in 1990, came as a response to individuals and corporations that misrepresented products as Indian-made. The law prohibits any marketing or sale of items in a manner that falsely suggests they are made by American Indians" (Landry 2013).

Navajo Nation had not taken action against other third parties who had used the term Navajo and had therefore forsaken any rights to that name. The company claimed that the term “Navajo” was “widely used in the industry and by customers to describe a design/style or feature of clothing and clothing accessories, and therefore, is incapable of trademark protection” (Landry, 2013). Urban Outfitters claimed it is common for designers to borrow from other cultural groups, and therefore the company sought “a declaration of non-infringement and cancellation of the tribe’s federal trademark registrations” (Associated Press, 2013). The company also asserted that selling “hip clothing and merchandise” to “culturally sophisticated young adults” in no way competes with Navajo arts and crafts, which generally are not sold in “specialty retail centers, upscale street locations and enclosed malls” (Fonseca, 2012). Urban Outfitters alleged that nothing in the store, its layout or the manner in which the goods were sold suggested Urban Outfitters was marketing or selling projects supplied by the Navajo Nation. The counterclaims requested a declaration of non-infringement from the Navajo and the cancellation of the tribe’s federal trademark registrations.

On April 3, 2013, U.S. District Judge C. LeRoy Hansen declared Urban Outfitters’ counterclaim against the Navajo Nation American Indian tribe was invalid, finding the tribe had sufficiently pled its case. “The factual allegations are ... sufficient to show that the mark is likely to create confusion in the marketplace” (Bishop, 2014). The New Mexico federal judge declared that the geometric prints and designs were fashioned to mimic and resemble Navajo Indian tribal prints, patterns and designs, and the Navajo Nation was plausible in their allegation of violation of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act prohibiting the misrepresentation in the marketing of American Indian arts and crafts products.



**Air Pacific’s Rebrand of Fiji Airways  
by FutureBrand**

In contrast to the complete lack of consultation demonstrated by Urban Outfitters, a critically acclaimed design for Fiji Airways, designed by FutureBrand and launched in Fiji October 10, 2013, demonstrates a process of consultation and engagement leading to a well received, award winning design solution. This example highlights how cultural traditions can be reinterpreted to create unique and sincere representation of place, people, and life through design (Kennedy, 2013).

FutureBrand was asked to develop an identity, which was authentic, respectful, natural, and handmade (Kennedy, 2013) and co-created a new identity system with Makereta Matemosi, one of Fiji’s most acclaimed and respected Masi artists. The aim was to celebrate traditional Masi art – an ancient art that embodies the spirit and stories of Fijian culture. Their

methodologies were considerate of the Fijian community as FutureBrand consulted with indigenous representatives to appropriately incorporate ancient motifs across a range of applications. The framework established was inclusive, respectful, acknowledging indigenous ownership, combining traditional visual culture into a commercial branding strategy. The final design has become a proud symbol for the country of Fiji and its people with an end result reflective of a respect for the meanings and use of Fijian symbols (Kennedy, 2013). As FutureBrand states in its case study document, the “brand identity’s flexibility accommodates numerous applications, yet consistently captures the unique elements of Fiji and its culture” with an aim to “redefine a national airline to embody the values and unique spirit of Fiji with a brand experience that would not only create advocacy for the airline itself but create a proud symbol for Fiji and its people” (FutureBrand, 2013)<sup>2</sup>.

The co-creation process and methodology developed and delivered by FutureBrand was both inclusive and respectful. However, prior to launch of the design, Fiji Airways placed an advertisement in the Fijian newspaper requesting copyright for the designs. There was strong objection to handing over the designs to Fiji Airways under trademark laws. These designs were understood to belong to Fijian women and were required to remain available to the Fijian people and their communities. The motifs are easily recognizable, were created by artisans in times past, and are considered as cultural inheritance having been handed down between generations over extensive lengths of time. It was explained in blog discussion; “these items reflect our cultural heritage, have significance and are often used in cultural and traditional ceremonies. The creation of these cultural items are a source of living for many people in Fiji and the Pacific” (Peceli, 2013). Virisila Baudromo, executive director of the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement (FWRM) made a statement explaining Fiji Airways was directly contravening national, regional, and international standards and was in direct violation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW] “as women in Fiji are still the primary producers of such Masi designs, and therefore various economic, social and cultural rights of women would be directly and indirectly affected by such an illegal and unethical trademark system” (Peceli, 2013). It was understood that ownership was not that of Fiji Airways to control, and the matter has been resolved in favour of the Fijian people.

The Air Pacific’s rebrand of Fiji Airways example demonstrates human inequity, reflective of Hofstede’s Power Distance model of culture dimension. Hofstede formulated his model of culture dimensions based on surveys and interviews with several hundred IBM employees, originally in 53 countries during (1978-1983). The battle between status and overall equality

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2 Three Masi motifs were used on the aircraft’s exterior to represent Fiji Airways: first the Teteva symbol, which represents the airline, its values, and the spirit of Fiji; second the Rova motif placed on the aircraft engine, symbolizing the warm greeting Fijians extend to visitors; finally, the Makare motif which appears around the border of the Teteva on the tail, represents clear water flowing on a white sandy beach (Kennedy, 2013).

is defined as one of the basic issues in human society (Hofstede, 1984, p.67). The unacceptable hierarchical order of society is reflected in the ambitions of some cultural groups to strive to equalise the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power. Studies of colonialism and post-colonialism theorize the actual or metaphorical demonstration of oppression (Moon, 2001, p.102). Colonialism is based on the creation of stories, paintings, and the visual narratives of the new arrivals and how they see the new land to which they have moved. It also involves the consequential displacement or dispossession of indigenous people who are forced to change their cultural narratives. The effect on individuals and their societies impacts language, stories, and beliefs as people are forced to adopt the traditions of the newly arrived settlers. Post-colonialism, the reassertion of a culture that has previously been oppressed by the arrival of a different culture occurs with the resurgence of the minority culture and the backlash that changes the dynamics back to the power of the minority group. Expressions are evident as writers, readers, critics, and visual communicators express the political struggle of colonised people. It is a resource to assist in the interrogation of privilege, power, and inequity (Lazeel, 2012, p.4). The colonised people succeed in re-establishing their language and stories, moving away from the dominant culture; the culture of the newcomers.

The case study examples highlight how choices in the use of visual imagery with a strong cultural connection require consideration. The inappropriate choices of imagery by the dominant cultural group, the borrowing or taking of a valued cultural item, is commonly referred to as cultural appropriation and can be considered equivalent to theft. Ultimately, a moral problem exists if cultural appropriation leads to a loss of income for the original culture and threatens the perceived authenticity or the identity of the original group. Threats may arise in four ways: first, the appropriation of goods by outsiders leading to a false portrayal or caricature image of the original culture; second, the borrowing of ideas and art styles leading to the inability of original owners to further use the ideas and images; third, the use of cultural artefacts or cultural representations by people with different standards to those presented by the original culture; and finally, the unauthorised use of a culture's identity. The case study example of the Urban Outfitters' use of Navajo imagery threatens the community in each of the four categories listed above. This example demonstrates a false portrayal of the culture, the borrowing of ideas leading to the original owners inability to use the images, appropriation by people with different standards to those of the original culture, and unauthorised use of images.

According to Ziff, Pratima, and Rao (1997), cultural appropriation involves a multifaceted dynamic web of forces including politics, power, degradation, and values. They define cultural appropriation as "the taking from a culture that which is not one's own - of intellectual property, cultural expressions or artifacts, history and one's knowledge". Ziff et.al then ask, "what does it mean by taking? What values and concerns are implicated in

the process of appropriation? And how, if at all, should we respond?" (1997, p.1). While some see cultural appropriation as theft, problematic, and unacceptable, others see it as innocent, perhaps useful or even an essential part to the development of a culture. Their interpretation is that it can help to generate interest in the original group, increase the value of traditional or original items, and perhaps bring a culture to a broader audience. Having a cross-cultural aesthetic appreciation can enrich our understanding of different cultures and essentially honour their accomplishments. According to Hal Duncan, "simply representing a culture in terms of artifacts, practices and persons doesn't mean you are laying claim to those artifacts, following those practices, mimicking those persons. It doesn't mean you're doing a big land-grab on that cultural territory, setting up a fence, and saying 'This is mine now'" (Duncan 2006, p.1). Instead you are honouring the cultural group by broadening their appeal. "Local design cultures are both challenged and enabled by the increasing globalization of the marketplace" (Fiss 2009, p.3, p.3) and the use of cultural artifacts. European artisans have been appropriating other cultures for centuries such as in the application of Chinese and Japanese styling in design objects. Kunsthau Zurich, the Museum for Modern Art in Zurich, regards Japanese art as fundamental to the development of Modernism. The museum points out that all the great masters of French painting admired and drew inspiration from its pictorial motifs and characteristic style (Kunsthau Zurich, 2015). This French art practice was referred to as "Japonisme" and remained influential long into the 20th Century.

The problem with determining if there has been an issue of cultural appropriation comes in defining factual information about that culture. This is often difficult to do when appreciation of a culture is deeply rooted within members of that culture. Individuals are conditioned in aesthetic appreciation through non-formal modes of articulation acquired over time and not formally articulated (Heyd, 2003, p.39). Becker (2012) recognizes the layered complexity of creating design that is aesthetically pleasing as well as ethically considered. Becker highlights the need to make explicit methods of ethics to assist with understanding what constitutes the right action to take to avoid bias and group affinities. The concern is the desire of industry to develop ethical work practices as design considers the environmental, social, and economical dimensions of its work. Within that, and more specific to the context of this paper, one must also recognize the intellectual property and cultural ownership rights of people. Coombe (1998), an anthropologist and lawyer, highlights the need to formally recognise those rights of indigenous peoples. She recognises the transportation of local knowledge taken to new locations as people travel between communities, and the fluid, porous, layered nature of communities make delineation and control difficult. "Any new regime of rights will have to be accompanied by a related set of exemptions that are relevant to the different forms of knowledge to be protected and their likely uses, if it is to be congruent with human rights principles" (Coombe, 1998, p.82).

However, designers are not the arbiters of what is right and wrong and instead should focus on determining the intermediaries who have the authority to act on behalf of the custodians of the indigenous knowledge, in a process that is indigenous led. This paper is not about censorship, overt protection, or the promotion of the containment of cultural visual iconography. The authors aim to challenge designers to consider what is appropriate and what not to appropriate, meaning designers always consider these concerns in their design practice. In all cases, determining appropriate use should remain with the owners and defenders of indigenous knowledge.

## Stakeholder Theory

Research into the practices of stakeholder theory provides insight into the process that could be utilized in design practice to circumvent some of the conflict commercial enterprise has had when using graphical depiction of indigenous culture and the impact this conflict has had on the balance of power. Stakeholder theory is a frame of organisational management and business ethics that addresses morals and values in managing organisations. This business theory acknowledges the forces at play in business and addresses the strategies required to establish and maintain an ethical practice considerate of all participants. Traditional business practice is based around a competitive culture resulting in winners and losers; however stakeholder theory aims to build a culture of mutual benefit.

Stakeholders are defined as those groups who have a stake in or claim on the firm, specifically including suppliers, customers, employees, stockholders, and the local community, as well as management in its role as agent for these groups (Evan and Freeman, 1988). As defined by Freeman (2010, p.vi), "A stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of a corporation's purpose." The principles of stakeholder theory propose that management is required to "acknowledge and actively monitor the concerns of all legitimate stakeholders" (Friedman and Miles, 2006, p.151) and must take the interests of the stakeholders into account in decision-making processes. They must listen, communicate, and adopt processes sensitive to the concerns of the stakeholders. Managers should work cooperatively with their stakeholders, acknowledging the potential conflicts between their role and the legal and moral responsibility they hold for the interests of others, addressing these with open communication and appropriate reporting. (Friedman and Miles, 2006, p.151).

The complexity of the stakeholder relationship involves many forces at play regarded as obstacles. For example, if a strong financial return is the primary motivation of investors, how does one convince them of the value of broader stakeholder considerations? Stakeholder theory suggests that the firm should be managed for the benefit of its participants and

that management has a fiduciary obligation to stakeholders to act as their agent. It takes the premise that shareholder, investors, and managers need to appreciate and understand that "the 'social responsibility' of business, properly understood, is not an odd number of extraneous obligations of the businesses and corporations. It is the very point of their existence" (Solomon, 1993, p.180). The organizations that recognize the wants and needs of the stakeholders can greatly improve their future opportunities whereas failure to recognize the impact of stakeholders on an organization can significantly impact on reputation (Brower and Mahajan, 2012, p.328).

Based on an ethical business paradigm, stakeholder theory proclaims that in order to achieve sustainable success over time, companies must keep the interests of customers, suppliers, employees, communities, and shareholders allied and moving in the same direction. To have all stakeholders sharing a united vision is deemed more ethical and productive in the long term. This theory is highly applicable for the research of appropriate use of indigenous knowledge in design practice given its professional practice position of success based on mutual respect. Traditionally, stakeholders in the cultural and design fields have worked in isolation of each other's interests, either deliberately or through ignorance. An aligned stakeholder approach can be of mutual benefit to all constituents, ultimately leading to a more ethical, respectful, and visible acknowledgement. Introducing these concepts to designers in professional design practice would assist awareness of the context they are working.

## Social Identity Theory

Although stakeholder theory is relevant to design practice, it does have some shortcomings. Identification of stakeholder grouping has been described as vague and limiting (Crane and Ruebottom, 2012, p.77) and a fundamental challenge for any system seeking to ensure an appropriate representation. The generic map of basic stakeholder categories has typically listed owners/financiers/stakeholders, customers, employees, suppliers and competitors. The primary group is identified by their economic relationship to the company and the secondary group is based on community groups (Crane and Ruebottom, 2012, p.80). This arrangement of group membership is not representative of all of the stakeholders who may engage with an organization, and in the case of indigenous representation and the use of indigenous visual references, their position in the stakeholder groups is poorly defined as a secondary group based on community.

For this reason, Crane and Ruebottom (2012) recognized the need to review stakeholder theory, combining this with social identity theory to recognize the need for group cohesion and action with varied categories of stakeholders. Crane and Ruebottom (2012, p.80) identify the

need to move away from generic definitions of stakeholders to identification of stakeholders by their needs and interest. This provides the opportunity to better understand the community stakeholders and create a level of value based on importance to the group. To assist with our understanding of this altered construct of grouping, social psychologists explain that group members attempt to see their group as a different entity from other groups. They are motivated to look at the positive attributes of their group and preserve and protect these differences to achieve a positive group distinction, which in turn increases their loyalty to their group. Tajfel and Turner (1986) defined this act as Social Identity Theory, whereby individuals see their belonging to cultural identities. People have a positive group distinction with their own culture and therefore remain loyal to the membership of that group. They become proud of their differences, and often it is not until they have contact with other cultures that they have an increased awareness of their own differences and feel the need to protect those differences.

To understand this further, culture plays a significant role in social identity theory. Culture is defined by the codes that produce meaning to a group. It can be said that culture embodies the most prominent or powerful that has been thought or said of a group in society maintained through shared values and systems of representation (Hall, 1999). Cultures have a complex set of rules, prohibitions, permissions, values and classifications. Kress (1988, p.12) explains that these codes appear as normal and natural to the general population. As a result, we accept these sets of rules as the natural order of how things should be. People who share a language, a history, and a way of life have connections that run very deep. "Culture gives us a mirror upon which to look and see ourselves, after which we model ourselves" (Simmons, 2006, p.1). According to Usunier (1996, p.383) our own thought framework is established automatically and unconsciously and reflects the values of our national culture, something we do not choose. This allows us to evaluate people, interpret situations, and defines the attitude we should adopt to communicate and negotiate with others from our culture. "Where customs differ, communication is difficult, time is short, and attention spans are limited, both parties are likely to "code" observations in the most efficient way possible" (Pitchford, 2008, p.97) giving people the opportunity to reduce complex information to smaller and more manageable proportions.

Taking into consideration the social identity connections of stakeholders recognizes the emotional connection groups of people have with the corporation or company with which they participate. Business demonstrates the application of such theories. Scott wrote in his article titled *The Concepts, Evidence & Implications of the Stakeholder Theory of a Corporation*:

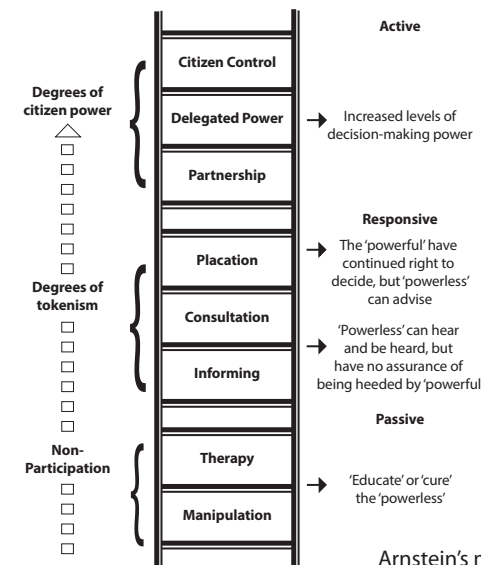
Researchers who study corporate management have identified many companies that focus on stakeholders. The Body Shop is a classic stakeholder theory case study. The natural cosmetics manufacturer and retailer became defined by the activism of its founder. The company adopted a social activist purpose, establishing recycling measures, refusing to test its

products on animals and sponsoring various social-change programs. When the company's commitment to these goals was questioned, the Body Shop's management provided detailed reports to its shareholders, suppliers, customers and other stakeholders to assure them that the company's conduct fulfilled the promise of its brand image. Other successful companies that use stakeholder methods include Johnson & Johnson, Merck, Google and eBay (Scott, 2015).

## Ladder of Stakeholder Management and Engagement

In addition to the need to consider the social identity of the stakeholders within the theory of stakeholder theory, there is also a need to provide clarity in the process to engage the stakeholders. Friedman and Miles (2006) propose the *Ladder of Stakeholder Management and Engagement* as a set of

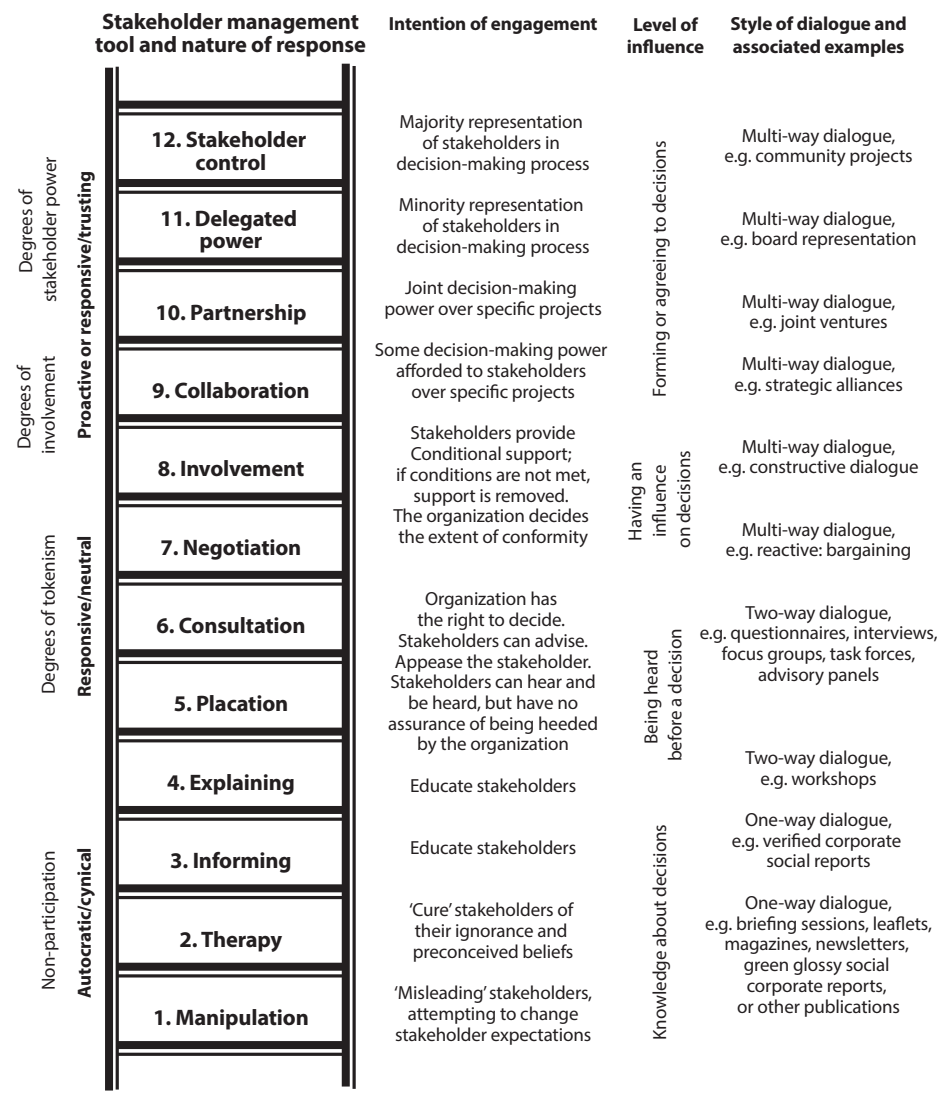
FIGURE 1



guidelines that address the power asymmetries that typify the engagement process. This adaptation of Arnstein's 1969 *Ladder of Participation* offers a comprehensive framework to consider in relation to indigenous knowledge in design practice. The premise of Arnstein's model is based on citizen participation equating to citizen power, redistributing the power so those voices not commonly heard and excluded in the political and economic process may be included in the future (Arnstein 1969, p.216). There are several steps in the ladder representing the numerous levels of engagement required. In summary, the lower rungs of the ladder are based on limitations of stakeholder power to influence decision-making, whereas the top three steps are defined as *Partnership*, *Delegated Power* and *Citizen Control* resulting in complete citizen control over decision-making.

Arnstein's model offers a useful structure for design practice, and although "it was intended for application within public policy, with some modification and development it can provide a clear and useful framework for analyzing stakeholder management practices" (Friedman and Miles, 2006, p.161-162). Arnstein's model contained eight rungs as outlined in Figure 1 above. He admits however that the model presented is an overview of reality, simply defining the level to which stakeholders are able to achieve decision-making power. There have been various redesigns of Arnstein's original model, and the number of rungs may vary according to application (Friedman and Miles, 2006, p.161, Tritter and McCallum, 2006). Some

FIGURE 2



examples have five rungs that reflect various aspects of user involvement; others attempt to incorporate degrees of participation and quality of engagement, and still others have applied the model to work in specific contexts. The model presented by Freidman and Miles is a twelve-step ladder identifying specific levels suitable to stakeholder management and engagement in design practice. Within this model, the first four rungs are non-participatory, educating stakeholders with a one-way dialogue of reports and briefing sessions. The second stage, the next three rungs,

FIGURE 3



**Fiji Airways**  
 working with Futurebrand

**Venezuelan Government**  
 rebranding of museums and galleries

**Urban Outfitters**  
 product range

presents degrees of tokenism where two-way dialogue of focus groups and interviews are conducted to consult with stakeholders prior to the organization making a decision. The third level, the next three rungs, increases the involvement of the stakeholders in a constructive dialogue through collaboration and partnership leading to joint decision-making over specific projects. The final level, with the last two rungs, offers levels of stakeholder power and stakeholder control with representations of stakeholders in the decision-making process<sup>3</sup>.

The twelve-step stakeholder ladder helps us understand the complexity of stakeholder engagement. It clearly identifies issues associated with a lack of commitment and, although a proposal put forward by the authors, demonstrates a clear concept of the level of stakeholder consultation required to achieve a clear, concise, workable practice. As previously identified, issues can be worked through when respectful practices are applied, and the stakeholder ladder provides one method to identify the level of engagement required. The authors propose the highest level of the twelve-step ladder, relinquishing authority to the indigenous community as the most ethically appropriate step.

It is not necessary to have all stakeholder relations conducted at level 12; however, for the purpose of this area of investigation, it can be seen to be beneficial to conduct consultations regarding indigenous imagery granting stakeholders power in the decision-making process.

Reflecting on the case study examples presented in this paper, the first case study of the rebranding of Venezuelan museums and galleries, the Venezuelan government did not consult with all of the stakeholder groups holding a strong emotional investment in the original design

3 This discussion aligns with the principles of participatory design practice. Participatory design is one of methods that may be used in the higher rungs of the ladder of stakeholder management to ensure stakeholders have an active multi-dialogue role in the decision-making process and therefore forms one tool in the kit available to achieve collaborative discourse. The area of focus in this paper, however, is on the relationship between the corporate organization and the various stakeholders engaged with that organization, the level of engagement required to achieve the desired outcomes, and not the design process of engagement.



solutions. Both the Panare people and the Venezuelan design community presented the strongest opposition to the rebranding strategy; however, the level of engagement was informing rather than collaborative and hence low on the *Ladder of Stakeholder Management and Engagement*. In the second case study of Urban Outfitters, the level of engagement was manipulative and misleading with a clear attempt to change stakeholder expectation. In the final case study example of Fiji Airways, the decision for assignment of copyright of the design negated the consultation with the community at the very end of what can be defined as a successful process. Considering this in light of Friedman and Miles (2006) *Ladder of Stakeholder Management and Engagement*, it can be considered that throughout the design process conducted by FutureBrand, the intention of engagement was very high in the consideration of stakeholder power, yet in the final stage, Fiji Airways worked within the lower rungs of the ladder in a manipulative manner through its advertisement seeking copyright assignment from the creators without consultation. Having developed a strong partnership, stakeholders required further control in the ladder of participation with majority representation in the decision making process. This clearly represents the strong emotional connection the stakeholders hold with the design strategy to be implemented.

## Conclusion

Communicating a point of difference is a challenge for designers as the world rapidly continues on its path of globalization. This paper aims to propose a way forward regarding indigenous representation by suggesting a new emphasis to help designers grapple with the associated sensibilities and to help them determine what is required to achieve effective, respectful outcomes. Principles of stakeholder management stress the need to manage stakeholder engagement and to determine a degree of involvement that is suitable to the problem being addressed. Stakeholder theory and social identity theory, combined with the structure of Friedman and Miles (2006, p.162) *Ladder of Stakeholder Management and Engagement* provide a detailed method of mapping the level of consultation with stakeholders in the design process. In the instance of identity and representation in design practice, the level of engagement must be high.

Examining each rung of the ladder determines the need to involve the community in the higher rungs of the *Ladder of Stakeholder Management and Engagement* to provide majority representation of stakeholders in the decision making process. Had a more succinct, open, and transparent process been followed, the outcomes of each of the case study examples presented would have been very different. A combination of utilizing social identity theory with stakeholder theory and recreating the ladder of participation provides a solid framework for developing guidance

to best practice when navigate the use of indigenous iconography in design. The concept of considering the interests of all stakeholders aligns with the theoretical premise of this research, which proposes shared knowledge, open, transparent, and ethical discussions of imagery use. Designers cannot, and should not, work in isolation when working with indigenous knowledge; there must be mutual benefits for all stakeholders especially the cultural custodians. This implies the need for collaboration between an even wider set of stakeholders and recognition of the broader stakeholder base in design practice. Given the unique challenges of designing in these refined areas of cultural representation, and the examples from the case studies outlined in this paper, a new set of criteria for stakeholder engagement can be recommended. The next step is to formalize the tools to ensure suitable stakeholder engagement with a case by case considerations to assist designers ethically and appropriately when working in cross-cultural contexts.

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