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Utilising an Indigenous Qualitative Information Analysis Method: An Example of the Application of Thought Ritual


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Utilising an Indigenous Qualitative Information Analysis Method: An Example of the Application of Thought Ritual

Abstract

This paper aims to provide a worked application of Thought Ritual as an Indigenous data (information) analysis tool. Thought Ritual is unique in providing an Indigenous underpinning to Indigenous research and promotes the use of cultural methods to analyse collected information. This worked example explores the use of Thought Ritual and dissects the four stages of the analysis tool: (1) connection, (2) diversity, (3) interaction and (4) adaption. Thought Ritual can be difficult to apply due to ambiguity with the associated stages. Due to the recent development of Thought Ritual, there remained limited application of the tool. This worked example of Thought Ritual as an Indigenous information analysis tool supports and extends upon what is currently known about Thought Ritual.

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Ethics Approval Statement

Ethics approval was obtained from the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) (2071/23) and subsequent reciprocal approval was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Wollongong.

Keywords

Information Analysis, Thought Ritual, Indigenous methodology, qualitative research

This paper provides a worked application of Thought Ritual as an Indigenous qualitative information analysis tool. Thought Ritual is an Australian Indigenous authored, designed, and developed analysis tool created by Tyson Yunkaporta and Donna Moodie (2019). Thought Ritual aims to move away from traditional Westernised approaches to research analysis, promoting the voice of Indigenous peoples and culture while methodically upholding rigour in information analysis (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). This tool prioritises the integration of Indigenous cultural practices and knowledge, particularly emphasising reflexivity throughout the analytical process (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019).

As it currently stands, there are limited analysis methods that have been developed with a cultural lens (Harfield et al., 2020). Yunkaporta and Moodie (2019) acknowledge that while there has been progression in Indigenous methods for information collection, there is still a lack of approaches for information analysis. Although Indigenous information collection methods are important, Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing should inform every stage of the research process, including analysis (Drawson et al., 2017). Failure to have Indigenous underpinning at all stages can lead to the “*perpetuation of colonisation*” and alter the findings of the research to inaccurately represent the perspectives of Indigenous people (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019 p. 1). Therefore, the selection of Thought Ritual holds particular significance in accurately representing Indigenous peoples and their lived experiences in the research analysis process (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). This paper aims to explore the stages of the Thought Ritual tool and provide insights into its application in research involving Indigenous peoples. The strengths and limitations of the information analysis tool will also be examined, with a focus on discussing key aspects of its effectiveness in supporting Indigenous informed research.

What is Already Known About the Thought Ritual Analysis Tool?

Thought Ritual reflects Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing and is congruent with Indigenous research methodologies (Wilson, 2008; Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). Thought Ritual challenges dominant Western approaches to information analysis and shifts the focus to research that is by, with and for Indigenous Community (Dreise &

Mazursk, 2018; Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). The discovery and application of Thought Ritual introduces a method for information analysis in research with Indigenous peoples that enables and respects the cultural knowledge and understanding of Australian Indigenous peoples throughout the research process.

The Thought Ritual information analysis tool consists of four stages, (1) Connection, (2) Diversity, (3) Interaction and (4) Adaptation. These stages are designed to be iterative and overlap to reflect Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Each of these stages align with the principles of Indigenous theory (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019, p. 2). According to Wilson (2020, p. 77), the principles of Indigenous theory include the three R's: Respect, Reciprocity, and Responsibility, which serve as a guide for conducting research with Indigenous peoples. Yunkaporta and Moodie (2019) developed the information analysis tool with these principles as the foundation.

What Does This Paper Add?

This paper aims to provide a worked application of Thought Ritual as an Indigenous data (information) analysis tool. Yunkaporta and Moodie (2019) created the tool and since its introduction to the academic world, there is no widely available literature explaining the application of the tool for information analysis. By providing a detailed worked example, this paper offers a perspective on how Thought Ritual can be applied in research that uses yarning as an information collection method. This paper clarifies the tools stages and provides a worked example for other researchers utilising Thought Ritual as an information analysis tool. Additionally, the paper offers a perspective on including non-Indigenous researchers into Indigenous-led research, while maintaining Indigenous perspectives.

Description of Thought Ritual Stages

Stage one is referred to as Connection and involves identifying relationships and shared variables amongst the collected information (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). The Connection stage requires the researcher to immerse themselves within the research field, acting as a variable within the information, to enable the researcher to embrace subjectivity and ensure adherence to cultural knowledge (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). Yunkaporta and

Moodie (2019) encourage researchers to utilise visual aids during this stage such as images, maps, and diagrams to enhance the understanding of the connections.

Stage two, known as Diversity, involves identifying similarities, overlaps or differences amongst the connections identified in the first stage. This identification occurs with others, such as participants or Elders, through storytelling and collaborative dialogue (yarning) (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). Yunkaporta and Moodie (2019) recommend stage two to be embedded in Indigenous narrative and use the process of yarning. Yarning ensures all voices within the research team are heard, and according to Yunkaporta and Moodie (2019), ensures an element of rigour in the analysis process.

The third stage, Interaction, includes *“the transfer of energy, matter and information between elements within the information set”* (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019, p. 3). The Interaction stage moves the collected information into a more spiritual space using cultural metaphors or expressions recognised in Indigenous culture. Yunkaporta and Moodie (2019) state these can include images, storytelling, dancing or walking on Country. This cultural expression enables the collected information to be transferred into practical findings. Interacting with the information in this way facilitates the researcher to visualise the collected information in a new way and uncover deeper insights going into the fourth stage of Thought Ritual.

The fourth and final stage is Adaptation, which places emphasis on identifying patterns, feedback loops and chains of cause and effect, guided by cultural practices (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). This stage requires researchers to have an open mental capacity to enable the final stage of information analysis. Yunkaporta and Moodie (2019) indicate open-mindedness may occur when researchers go through a process of deep reflection or accessing findings through spiritual or ancestral connections. This process is underpinned by Indigenous ontology and has roots in communicating with ancestors.

Despite the stages of Thought Ritual being organised into discrete stages, the analysis method is not strictly linear. The stages are iterative and often overlap, enabling a fluid and evolving process of analysis (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). Researchers may

revisit earlier stages as new insights emerge, deepening their understanding of the relationships and patterns within the information collected. For example, connections established in the Connection stage may be expanded during Diversity, while cultural practices in the Interaction stage can inform transformative insights in Adaptation. This approach reflects the interconnected nature of Indigenous knowledge systems, enabling researchers to continuously engage with and refine analysis through relational, cultural, and ancestral lenses (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019).

Step-by-Step Application of the Tool

This section will recount the activities undertaken to utilise the Thought Ritual information analysis tool for a research project. The aim of the research project was to explore the influence of connection to Country on the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of undergraduate university students who identify as Indigenous (Gee et al., 2014). Therefore, the participants included were undergraduate students enrolled on a part or full-time basis who identified as Indigenous. The research project was underpinned by Indigenous theory, which informed the methodology and methods for the research (Wilson, 2008). The method used for the research's information collection included undertaking a research topic yarn within a yarning circle. Research topic yarn is defined as a; “[y]arn that takes place in a un or semi structured research interview. The sole purpose is to gather information through participants' stories that are related to the research topic” (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 40). The yarning circle was facilitated by Indigenous members of the research team.

The Thought Ritual information analysis tool was selected as the method for information analysis as it aligned with the methodology for the research. The four associated stages of the Thought Ritual tool were used to guide analysis and was conducted as a research team. The research team consisted of two Indigenous women and one non-Indigenous woman, all with expertise rooted in healthcare related disciplines. The team began the research with developing ways of working and creating shared values that were upheld throughout the research. It was important for the research team members to all prepare by familiarising ourselves with the Thought Ritual tool stages. The limited literature

available on the application of the Thought Ritual tool created the need for the research team to reach a shared understanding on how to apply each stage.

Stage One: Connection

The first stage of the information analysis required the members of the research team to identify connections (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). Stage one involved sitting in a circle and reviewing the collected information from the research. Reviewing the information included listening to the recording of the research yarning circle, reviewing the transcript, and listing the connections evident in the yarn. Connections included elements shared amongst participants within the collected information from the yarning circle. Through collectively yarning about connections, the findings of stage one were collated within a table, whilst considering the research aim and question (See Table 1).

Table 1

Yarning Circle Connections

- Identify as Indigenous
- Undergraduate students
- Some students were from the same Country
- Students felt the need to return to Country often
- Connecting to Country can be a method for de-stressing
- Students had strategies for connecting to Country
- Students feel a disconnection from Country when away from Country
- University commitments take away time from connecting to Country

Stage Two: Diversity

The Diversity stage involved conducting a collaborative yarning circle as a research team to identify relationships, then individual elements within these relationships (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). Collaborative yarning is defined as a; “[y]arn that occurs between two or more people where they are actively engaged in sharing information about a

research project and or a discussion about ideas. Collaborative yarning in research can involve exploring similar ideas or bouncing” (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010, p. 40). The collaborative yarn involved members of the research team and consultation from an Aboriginal Advisory Committee to ensure the information analysis process privileged Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

Drawing on the collaborative yarns, based on the connections identified in stage one and the objectives of the research, three relationships were identified in the second stage. For example, relationship one was recognised as *“Students identified an understanding and significance of the Cultural Determinants of Health”*. The Cultural Determinants of Health are the protective factors that align with a strengths-based perspective and include Country; Indigenous beliefs and knowledge; Indigenous language; family kinship and Community; cultural expression and continuity; and self-determination and leadership (Lowitja Institute, 2023; Parter, Murray, et al., 2024).

Once these relationships had been identified, the team reflected on the connections from stage one to discuss the similarities, differences, and overlaps. The team first concentrated on identifying similarities and differences within the individual relationships. The similarities were identified as being a consistent element amongst the collected information, or a common finding that emerged amongst the participants, research team and throughout the yarning circle. For relationship one, we identified a similarity as; *“moving off Country contributes to students' connection and understanding of Country.”*

Whilst the differences were an inconsistent element, a less present finding that distinguished the participants and research team. For relationship one, the difference was *“some of the students understood their connection to spirituality and ancestors, whilst other students did not touch on this.”* The similarities and differences were recognised for each relationship based on the listed connections from stage one. This stage of Diversity must be considered prior to identifying the overlapping element/s of the relationship.

Finally, from the literature available, the overlap was the most difficult to distinguish for each of the relationships. The research team agreed the overlap was the emerging

finding from the similarities and differences that provides the overarching significance and central focus of each relationship. For relationship one, the team identified the overlap as: *“students all identified they have a connection to their culture; however, the degree of their connection was different amongst the field. With an understanding that connecting to Culture is a lifelong process.”* The research team presented the elements of the three relationships within a table that groups the connections identified in stage one. Table 2 represents an example of the findings for relationship one from the Diversity stage of Thought Ritual.

Table 2

Tabular Example of Diversity Stage

Relationship one: Students identified an understanding and significance of the Cultural Determinants of Health

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving off Country contributes to students’ connection and understanding of Country. • Students identified the significance of connecting to kin and family. • Students identified connecting to mind and body through noticing emotional cues and responding to these.
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the students understood their connection to spirituality and ancestors, whilst other students did not touch on this.
Overlaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students all identified they have a connection to their culture; however, the degree of their connection was different amongst the field. With an understanding that connecting to Culture is a lifelong process.

Stage Three: Interaction

Stage three of the Thought Ritual information analysis tool is Interaction, which involves the use of cultural metaphors to develop an understanding of elements within the collected information (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). By this stage in the analysis, the research team felt they had an in-depth understanding of the information. Stage three included the research team using storytelling and deep personal reflection of our cultural understanding to represent the collected information. From this point, the research team considered the information and imagined a cultural metaphor of circles and how a circle is representative of Indigenous culture and the research findings.

To begin the analogy and metaphorical application of the circle, the research team reflected on how a circle has no definite beginning or end point and all elements within the circle are interconnected. The research team then reflected on how circles are a consistent symbol within Indigenous culture and complemented the research findings. For example, the circular nature of yarning circles and the circular nature of conversations that arise within them. The circular metaphor was evident through participants sitting in a circle and the conversation following an anticlockwise direction. The circle enabled all participants to be connected and without the contribution of each participant, there would not be a complete circle (Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2014). Further, the circular metaphor is consistent with the circular underpinnings of Indigenous research methodology and frameworks. For example, both the Indigenous paradigm (Wilson, 2008) and the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework (Gee et al., 2014) explored in the research followed a circular notion.

Stage Four: Adaptation

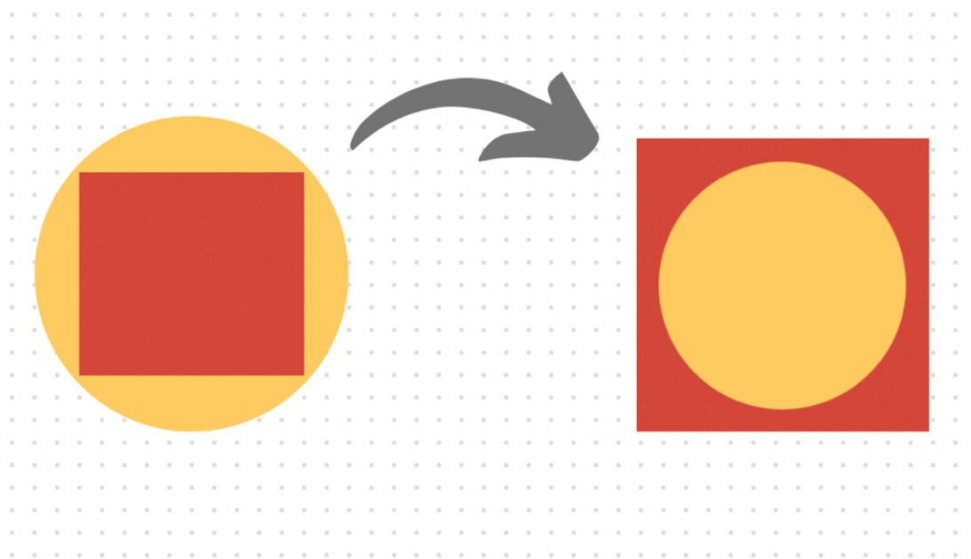
Thought Ritual's fourth stage of information analysis tool builds on the findings from the third stage and involves deep reflection on Indigenous knowledge (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). The research team identified the symbolism of a circle reflects the participant's culture, their connections, and the research findings and underpinnings. From here, the research team applied open-minded reflection to imagine how this circular

metaphor is evident within the university context. The research team compared the analysis of Indigenous circular thinking and square thinking, which is embedded within Māori culture (Wahl, 2020). The concept considers the metaphor “*trying to fit a square peg in a round hole*” (Wahl, 2020), which will be explored throughout this section.

The analogy of “*fitting a square peg in a round hole*” considers that Indigenous university students are trying to adapt to the university learning experience and curriculum, however, are facing significant barriers when doing so (Wahl, 2020). Wahl (2020) argues that square thinking takes over and replaces our circular thinking as Indigenous peoples. Although Indigenous circular thinking and way of life are still evident, the square distracts and overrules this way of thinking. The analogy of circular reformation is depicted below.

Figure 1

Reformation of the Circle



Strengths of the Thought Ritual Analysis Tool

The Thought Ritual information analysis tool poses many strengths as an Indigenous rooted information analysis tool. The grounding in Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing ensures Indigenous voices are privileged and information collected in research is analysed through an Indigenous lens, instead of a Western view (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). Further, the analysis tool also enables relational thinking to promote a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of the collected information. By encouraging

collaboration with others and community engagement within the stages of analysis, Thought Ritual respects collective knowledge production (Wilson, 2008; Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). Additionally, the tool is iterative, with stages that overlap and evolve to support reflexivity (Wilson, 2008; Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). The Thought Ritual tool is a flexible, culturally relevant method that promotes relational thinking for deeper insights and analysis of information within research projects.

Limitations of the Thought Ritual Analysis Tool

Since Thought Ritual's introduction to the academic world, there has remained no current published application of the information analysis tool to a research project. This lack of literature is a limitation to the research through ambiguity around the application of the tool, limited clarification on the interpretation of the stages and uncertainty around the definitions of 'similarities, differences and 'overlaps' (Stage two of tool: Diversity). While the research team successfully utilised the tool as a guide for analysis, it cannot be overlooked that the absence of a concrete example leaves room for uncertainty in the interpretation of the tool's stages. Therefore, this paper provides the research team's perception of applying the tool with an understanding that it is open to interpretation dependent on the methodological context.

Qualitative information is pivotal in providing in-depth representation of the collected information, however due to the qualitative nature of Thought Ritual as an approach to information analysis, there is an evident potential for subjective interpretations made by the research team (Lundberg et al., 2022). As it stands, qualitative research tends to rely on the researcher's perspectives and interpretation of the collected information, and this production of subjective information means that it is not generalisable and not representative of differing perspectives (Bumbuc, 2016; Damaskinidis, 2017). The research team aimed to minimise this through following the systematic approach of Thought Ritual and conducting the information analysis as a group (Galdas, 2017). Within the group, there was an inclusion of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members, and this may potentially reduce the risk of subjectivity by incorporating a greater diversity amongst the researchers. However, the

inclusion of a non-Indigenous member remains an inherent limitation as Thought Ritual requires a deep understanding of Indigenous cultural practices, including the use of metaphors, storytelling, and ancestral connections.

Discussion

Thought Ritual provides a rigorous approach to information analysis, however, there is no descriptive exemplar of its application to collected information. As an information analysis tool, it is important to consider key principles of research through contemplating the tools' rigour, credibility, reflexivity, and trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017). Writing a worked example of the steps creates a detailed and creative analytical standpoint of the collected information whilst promoting trustworthiness through transparency with the use of the tool and its application to collected information. The documentation of the analysis process in qualitative research is key to ensuring rigour and trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017). Rigour in Indigenous research is relative to relational accountability by upholding the three R's when interacting with researchers, participants and community and use as an overall underpinning to the research (Wilson 2008). Relational accountability is inbuilt into the research's design, implementation, and dissemination, therefore able to address rigour as a research principle (Rix et al., 2019; Wilson, 2008).

Thought Ritual further promotes trustworthiness through enabling researchers to draw on key quotes from information collection to support the identified findings from the analysis (Yunkaporta & Moodie, 2019). Thought Ritual encourages credibility through sharing the key findings from the analysis with participants. This process is known as member checking and ensures that participants perspectives are reflected and represented appropriately within the final analysis (Wilson, 2008). Member checking involved sharing the transcription with participants from the yarning circle for review prior to analysis; this ensured the participants feel their voice is appropriately represented in the transcription (Wilson, 2008). Finally, Thought Ritual promotes reflexivity through placing researchers within the research field who can consider all elements of the information collected. Reflexivity is important in qualitative research by enabling researchers to take an insider position in the

research and avoid projecting personal world views, values, and unconscious bias onto the research's findings (Bumbuc, 2016).

The research design was underpinned with Indigenous theory that informed the methodology and methods for the research, however, included a non-Indigenous researcher in the research team. Due to the research focusing on Indigenous undergraduate students, Indigenous culture and representing Indigenous voices, there is a risk of the non-Indigenous researcher not connecting with the content and therefore facing challenges when interpreting the collected information (Skille, 2021). It is important to identify that although the research team included a non-Indigenous researcher, the majority of the research team identified as Indigenous, with the lead being Indigenous (Wilson et al., 2020). Within the research, Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and researchers collaborated at the cultural interface within university context (Nakata, 2007). The inclusion of non-Indigenous researchers offers these individuals to take on the role of acting as an ally or accomplice and support the Indigenous community (Finlay, 2020; Parter, Gwynn et al., 2024). The cultural interface of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers therefore served as a benefit to the research through creating opportunities for more allies and promoting Cultural Safety (Nakata, 2007; Parter, Gwynn, et al., 2024).

To ensure there is a successful decolonised approach to information analysis, there needs to be a consideration of the Cultural awareness and Cultural Humility of all the research team members (Foronda et al., 2016). Cultural awareness is inclusive of one's ability to be understanding and sensitive when communicating and collaborating with individuals from a differing cultural group, and this can be enhanced through prior preparations. In consideration of the preparations the research team undertook to ensure cultural awareness, the team developed ways of working which all members adhered to and clearly outlined the contributions, research underpinnings and aims of the research. The established ways of working acted as a guide for undertaking the research relative to our shared values and assist in decision making. Moreover, the non-Indigenous member of the research team had previously been involved in a curriculum redesign program for tertiary

education that focused on embedding Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing and had undertaken Cultural Safety training prior to contributing to the research. These preparations enabled the non-Indigenous researcher to have a developed sense of self-awareness and understanding of representing Indigenous voices within research (Kilian et al., 2019). In this context, the inclusion of a non-Indigenous researcher added a layer of diversity, differing perspectives, and interesting insights to all stages of the research while still privileging Indigenous voice (McCartan et al., 2022). This research is a key demonstration of the valued contributions non-Indigenous researchers can make when equipped with a respectful appreciation of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (McCartan et al., 2022).

This paper clarifies the stages of Thought Ritual and addresses the ambiguity arising due to limited application of the tool. The initial challenge faced by the research team was the interpretation and understanding of the need to identify overlaps within the second stage (Diversity) of Thought Ritual. The research team was able to promptly identify the similarities and differences within the collected information, however, when faced with identifying the overlaps, felt there was a vague definition as to what this entailed. The research team first selected the similarities and differences and reflected on our group interpretation and definition of the overlap. Through discussion, the research team have considered the definition of an overlap to be the overarching significance and central focus of each identified relationship. The research team is aware that subjective interpretation of the definition of overlap is inevitable and therefore contributes to the ambiguity associated with this stage.

Conclusion

Thought Ritual as an information analysis tool is a significant step in the right direction of the creation and application of research that is grounded in Indigenous underpinnings and ways of knowing, being and doing. Thought Ritual is a newly developed tool to assist in undertaking research surrounding Indigenous peoples and culture, however since its creation there has been no application of the tool. This paper provided a worked example and expanded on the understanding of the tools' application on research conducted

with Indigenous undergraduate students. Highlighting the stages of Thought Ritual and a detailed exemplar of its use is key in enabling other researchers to replicate the stages and provides some clarification on its application. Thought Ritual as an analysis tool enables all researchers to dive deep into personal reflexivity and view the research field in an alternative approach to what Westernised approaches to information analysis often provide.

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Conflicts of interest

None.

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