

Indigenous Social Entrepreneurship: The Gumatj Clan Enterprise in East

Arnhem Land

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Abstract

Despite a continuing commitment by the Australian Federal Government to develop entrepreneurial business opportunity by Indigenous people as a strategy to reduce their socio economic disadvantage there is scant documentation of rigorous assessments of sustainable Aboriginal enterprises. This paper delineates an Indigenous social entrepreneurial business that is gaining traction in the Gove Peninsula of East Arnhem Land of Australia. A conceptual framework focuses attention to the phenomenon of visionary leadership for fostering value creation, innovation and social capital, to create a pathway for alleviating poverty and enhancing the socio economic environment of an Indigenous community. An appreciation of the role of existing social structures, the imperative of operating at the local level, and the importance of cultural heritage are vital components in the pursuit of economic and social goals of sustainable Indigenous social entrepreneurship.

Key words: *Indigenous, social entrepreneurship, Aboriginal, community, Australia*

Introduction

The Federal Government has demonstrated enthusiasm for Australian Indigenous people to establish small businesses, and thereby increase their economic independence. This notion has emerged from a great deal of independent investigation that reveals Australian Indigenous people are likely to experience an array of persistent social indicators impacting physical and psychological health (Wilson, Stearne, Gray & Sagers, 2010). Disproportional to non Indigenous Australians Aboriginal people have a greater vulnerability to poverty (Brotherhood, 2002; Homelessness, 2011); die earlier than non Aboriginal people from diseases such as renal failure, heart disease and diabetes (ABS, 2011, d'abbs & Maclean, 2008); are likely to have greater rates of incarceration (McGuirk, 2011); more likely to live in unsanitary conditions (Jonas, 2003; Pholi, Black & Richards, 2009, Rowley

et al., 2008); and experience extensive problems with substance abuse (Midford, Maclean, Catto, Thomson & Debuyst, 2011; Wilson et al., 2010). The manifestation of these contingent social problems has compelled Australian governments to generate a range of policies and initiatives, including small business development, to broker better employment outcomes for Indigenous people (Australian Government, 2007). Underpinning these business and employment programmes is the view that lessening the high unemployment rate of Indigenous people, and increasing their wealth will address the low socio economic status experienced by Australian Aboriginal people (Australian Government, 2010; Submission, 2001).

An emphasis on promoting sustainable entrepreneurial employment for Australian Indigenous people is founded on two main planks. First, the key social indicators of economic health and social well being are believed to be consequences of lower household incomes, higher unemployment rates, and a dependence on public and community welfare payments (Giddy, Lopez & Redman, 2009; Open for Business, 2008). To combat the disparity between Indigenous and non Indigenous health, wealth, and well being, the Australian government has demonstrated a commitment to develop employment programmes and strengthen workforce participation to foster businesses owned, managed, and operated by Australian Indigenous people (Australian Government, 2007; Foley, 2006). The second plank is linked to the promoted contexts of the Australian Indigenous entrepreneurial activity. Often the initiatives have focussed on tourism ventures and art centres that have been identified as avenues for pathways to greater economical and community development (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010). However, the contemporary literature discloses the installation of a substantial number of these programmes has not led to a significant increase in Australian Indigenous entrepreneurship (Furneaux & Brown, 2008; Russell-Mundine, 2007). This outcome attracts greater investigation.

Indigenous entrepreneurship has magnetised considerable academic interest, but a consensus on how to broker sustainable entrepreneurial employment is yet to emerge. Although well intended endeavours to transfer theoretical frameworks generated from knowledge acquired across

Indigenous populations, with different customary social institutions, have been unhelpful (Peredo, Anderson, Galbraith, Honig & Dana, 2004). Another criticism advanced by Foley (2007) is seldom have the contributions had an Indigenous voice, which may account for the generalisations, misconceptions and ambiguous shortcomings in the literature (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). More definitive is the work of Russell-Mundine (2007), who identified a number of resource barriers (i.e., business acumen, education), and economic hurdles (e.g., capital, land tenure), that are likely to be encountered by Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs.

Recognition that unemployment and poverty are linked to social disorders the Australian Federal Government has installed agencies for funding Aboriginal enterprises. In April 2001 Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) was created to assist enthusiastic Indigenous aspirants, who may be deficient in initial business competencies, by providing financial assistance and business support, advice on financial planning, and marketing training. In spite of this initiative it is often reported that despite the number of Indigenous communities turning to tourism as a vehicle for attaining a sustainable economic future (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010) these businesses fail beyond the seed funding stage (Furneaux & Brown, 2008). More recently, Johns (2011) has argued that until the dignity of work and effort is made to master those educational skills, that will enable adjustment to the market economy, Indigenous social and economic progress is unlikely. Adopting this course will require throwing away a great deal of cultural heritage, but there may be an intermediate phase, which is the counterpoint of this paper.

Conceptual Framework

A framework for operating social Indigenous enterprise with mainstream acceptance in the wider Australian community is presented as Figure 1. This paradigm enables the relevant attributes of Indigenous entrepreneurship to be managed and controlled in the pursuit of the common good of the clan in new venture creation. The framework also indentifies a pathway, shown by the arrow headed lines A and B, for the venture to become a commercial undertaking without recurrent

government funding injections. These concepts are shown in Figure 1 by the three annotated circles and the two pathway connectors A and B.

[Put Figure 1 about here]

The conceptual model of Figure 1 has three main parts. First, is the enterprise vision which is both strategic and operational. The strategic goal (of the organisation described in this paper) is to acquire economic and social development for the clan while the operational goal is the structural arrangements and business practices that will be enacted by the members for reaching the goal. Second, is the central annotated circle, which is the organisation in a transitional phase from the third annotated circle to a future state with ideals of personnel succession planning as well as corporate governance and compliance. The third (bottom) circle is representative of many Australian Indigenous communities practising wildlife harvesting in cultural frameworks modestly aligned with ancient traditional lifestyles. Within this third category are a number of Indigenous enterprises struggling to obtain a sustainable future.

This paper describes an Australian Indigenous enterprise in the transitional stage (i.e., central circle). The enterprises is the Gumatj Corporation (GC), which is a Yolngu clan, that is operating a variety of timber related and other small businesses on the Gove Peninsula in East Arnhem Land of the Northern Territory (NT). An underlying driver of the initiative is to provide opportunity for employment and to create within members higher levels of self esteem and responsibility. The functional goal is to reduce substance abuse (i.e., tobacco, alcohol, drugs, glue and petrol sniffing), to remove the need for welfare to which many clan members are wedded, and to build better communities by resolving persistent community problems (e.g., housing, furniture, unhealthy lifestyles).

Foundation for Australian Indigenous Entrepreneurship

The Indigenous people (i.e., Yolngu) of East Arnhem Land are one of the most socially and economically disadvantaged groups in Australian society. Many of these people are highly dependent on welfare, few are employed in mainstream jobs (Altman, Biddle & Hunter, 2005; Altman, Gray & Levitus, 2005; Giddy et al., 2009), and across a spectrum of gender and age a number of Yolngu people experience self harm and suicide rates greater than the national average (Wurst, 2009). Moreover, substance abuse (e.g., cannabis, karva, alcohol, glue sniffing, and tobacco) is a lifestyle risk (Anglicare, 2009; Lee et al., 2008). Indeed, recognition that the Yolngu people of East Arnhem Land have acquired the highest incident of smoke induced lung cancer among Australian Indigenous communities may have been the underpinning for the Menzies School of Health Research to undertake a programme to discover how to reduce Indigenous smoking (Menzies Funding, 2010).

It is frequently acknowledged that Australian Aborigines have relatively low levels of acquired English literacy and numeracy. When compared to mainstream Australian society Indigenous students in the remote regions of northern Australia perform markedly worse on literacy and numeracy tests (Bradley et al., 2007; Wallace, Curry & Agar, 2008). Helen Hughes (2008) generally targeted the NT Education Department for failing to deliver literacy and numeracy to levels that will equip Indigenous graduates with the competencies needed to obtain employment in the wider community; she particularly identifies the Nhulunbuy schools. Yet, the low levels of these important vocational competencies persist (Daff & Pearson, 2009; Kral, 2009; Pearson & Daff, 2008; 2010). The magnitude of educational disadvantage poses particular social problems in the spatially concentrated rural outlands. For instance, a high proportion of the Yolngu people in the Gove Peninsula reside in substandard living conditions, and especially in the remote communities infectious diseases (i.e., scabies, diarrhoea), generally attributed to poor hygiene and unsanitary

conditions, can reach epidemic levels (McDonald et al., 2008; Rowley et al., 2008). Overall many of the Indigenous people in the remote NT outstations/outlands are vulnerable to a range of social factors, physical illness and poor mental health (Menzies, 2011).

A purposeful action by the Australian government to reduce the marginalisation of Aboriginal people is the notion of Indigenous entrepreneurship. Following the 1967 commonwealth referendum, which removed discriminatory clauses in Aboriginal affairs, Australian governments implemented a range of business related programmes to provide finance for Indigenous enterprises (Smith, 2006). For instance, the Commonwealth Capital Fund for Aboriginal Business Enterprises was installed in 1968, and IBA was established in 2001 (Australian Government, 2007; Smith, 2006), to provide financial assistance for Indigenous business ventures. Although the intention was to overcome the disadvantages experienced by Indigenous people, and to strengthen their economic independence, a latent caveat that the usage of public funds was to closely adhere to responsible financial governance had a dominant effect on subsequent political events. Two significant shifts were a reliance placed on Aboriginal people when the Whitlam Labor government adopted the construct of Indigenous self determination in 1972 (Anderson, 2007), and the emergence of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner (ATSIC) in the 1990s as a representative structure to have executive control over many Commonwealth funded Indigenous Affairs programmes (Sanders, 2002). In 2004 the Howard coalition government announced an intention to abolish ATSIC on the grounds that there was a lack of accountability for funds received and expended. Nevertheless, government resources for funds for Aboriginal people are available through mainstream departments.

Confidence for commitment to encouraging the growth of Indigenous small business is likely to be founded on the knowledge that Australian Aboriginal people have demonstrated entrepreneurial acumen. Credible written evidence can be found in the log of HM Sloop *Investigator*, captained by Matthew Flinders, when charting the Australian coastline from 1801 to 1803. This source records large fleets of paus in the northern waters that came from the Celebes, and were sailed by the

Macassans who traded with the Yolngu (Russell, 2004; Searcy, 1909). The trading existed for over 300 years, only to be terminated in 1907 by the South Australian government, which was responsible for the governance of this land that was later to become the NT.

Indigenous entrepreneurship in East Arnhem Land has attracted literary interest. From the mid 20th Century there has been an ongoing delivery from a number of authors (e.g., Berndt & Berndt, 1999; Cawte, 2010; Worsley, 1955), describing how for centuries the Indigenous people conducted business within the clans and with the seafarers who came to trade with the Aborigines of Arnhem Land. The literature is indebted to the accounts of how from the 1920s to the 1960s the Methodist Church employed Indigenous people from a number of Yolngu clans in an extensive entrepreneurial enterprise of milling soft wood timber at Milingimbi and Elcho Island (McKenzie, 1976; Shepherdson, 1981). More recently, Pearson and Rota (2010) described how a particular Yolngu clan, the Rirratjingu, is engaging in entrepreneurial activity at Yirrkala on the Gove Peninsula through the contemporary corporation of Bunuwal Industrial. Narrated by Pearson and Helms (2010a; 2010b; 2011) is the entrepreneurial hard wood timber business that was initiated some 100km south of Nhullunbuy in the late 1990s by the Gumatj Yolngu clan. The material presented in this paper delivers a more comprehensive account of the Gumatj business providing a transitional paradigm for sustainable contemporary entrepreneurship rooted in the inseparable considerations of community culture and social capital.

Indigenous Social Entrepreneurship

The emergent Australian Indigenous entrepreneurship literature has three prominent streams. First, since the establishment of the Commonwealth Capital Fund for Aboriginal Business Enterprises, which was established in 1968, there has been a steady promotion and commitment by Australian Governments, in unison with State and Territory authorities, for the facilitation of Indigenous small business (Australian Government, 2007, 2010; Open for Business, 2008; Submission, 2001). Tourism has become popularised by Australian governments since the early 1980s as a promising pathway

for greater economic development of Indigenous people and their communities (Furieux & Brown, 2008; Russell-Mundine, 2007; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010). Although the level of enthusiasm for Indigenous entrepreneurship has gained various degrees of momentum during the past 50 years a succession of government policies (Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010), has not channelled Aboriginal partnerships and alliances into sustainable small business (Australian Taxation Office, 2009; Birdsall-Jones, Wood & Jones, 2007; Buultjens et al., 2010).

A second impediment to the growth of Australian Indigenous entrepreneurship is reflected in the constitutional arrangements governing Aboriginal affairs. Emerging from the Colonial administration, which spawned considerable debate "...about how to deal with the Aboriginal problem" (Kaplan-Myrth, 2005: 69), the new Commonwealth Government embraced the construct of assimilation. This reform was geared to manifesting a regime where Australian Aboriginals would abandon their heritage to become 'European', by the government instrumentalities placing strict restraints on Indigenous people. In effect, Aboriginals were forced to live in government reserves or mission centres, they were disposed of all assets, and their segregation from mainstream Australian society prevented them from participating in political processes or business (Anderson, 2007; Smith, 2006).

A radical departure from these discriminatory conditions, that denied Aboriginal people fundamental citizenship, occurred in the 1960s with the rhetoric of self determination and variants of self management to provide a platform for sources of job creation and national wealth (Saunders, 2002). Commitment by the Commonwealth Government to Indigenous commercial and economic development and asserting an indirect role in the financial support of a number of disparate Aboriginal welfare programmes is demonstrated in the creation of a numbers of instrumentalities (e.g., Indigenous Training Employment Centre, Regional Tourism Development), to give assistance in Indigenous business proposals (Birdsall-Jones et al., 2007; EISC, 2007; Foley, 2006). The transference of power (from the States), together with the creation of ASTIC, to manage the financial arrangements of Commonwealth Aboriginal programmes, has not been accompanied with recognition of the identified barriers to Indigenous entrepreneurship (Furieux & Brown, 2008;

Russell-Mundine, 2007), and delineated goals. Consequently, seldom have the installed practices been founded on sound empirical knowledge on how Indigenous entrepreneurial activity is to be integrated with social cultural substance (Foley, 2010; Pholi et al., 2009).

The promotion of Australian Aboriginality business ventures, with paradigms that lack Aboriginal community and cultural norms is the third barrier to Indigenous entrepreneurial success. In the mainstream literature is captured a prevailing view that the primary function of entrepreneurship is to obtain a profitable outcome for the principal advocate (Hindle & Moroz, 2009; Kukoc and Regan, 2008), but Australian Aboriginal contexts are considerable different to the dominant Australian society (Altman, 2003; Foley, 2003). Indigenous people are stereotyped as having few assets, low educational attainment, and lacking business acumen (Buultjens et al., 2010; Furneaux & Brown, 2008; Giddy et al., 2009; Russell-Mundine, 2007), which are factors impeding their attainment of economic independence. These features manifest in remote regions of Australia, and particularly in the NT, where most Aboriginals live in outland communities on their ancestral lands endeavouring to survive in sustainable hybrid economies (Altman, 2002; Foley, 2008). In these rural centres, where wildlife harvesting is practised, success is not measured in terms of tangible assets, but in the pluralism of familial relationships, religion, and spiritual connections with the landscape to resolve pressing community issues by social entrepreneurship.

Australian social entrepreneurship is rooted in Indigenous clan survival. The main objective of the early Aboriginal tribalised social enterprises was to exist in harsh physical environments by pursuing common good benefits. Within these arrangements the fabric of kinsmanship, gift giving and education for sustenance was flavoured with violence and infanticide to preserve the adult cadre. In the modern world a great number of Australian Aboriginals are attracted to living in remote regions where Johns (2011) contends they believe they can practice their cultural heritage. But few have been able to discard the subsidised economy (i.e., CDEP, welfare), and consequently, hybrid economies have emerged. Understanding the phenomenon of Indigenous social entrepreneurship,

which has potential to provide a pathway to economic integration, with the dominant market economy, has become a continuing major challenge for Australian governments.

Social entrepreneurship, which embraces both basic business functions and social networking interactions, is culturally acceptable to Australian Indigenous people. A number of scholars (Dacin, Dacin & Matear, 2010; Jones 2007; Peredo & Chrisman, 2006; Yunis, 2006) have contributed to raising the profile and growing importance of the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship. These authors have presented social entrepreneurship as a hybrid commercial model, unlike traditional business, that does not measure successes by profit alone, but operates to resolve pressing social problems, which have not been satisfactorily addressed by traditional business means. A feature of social entrepreneurship is that it has the capacity to amalgamate both social capital with cultural values, two elements that are vital for entrepreneurial success. The GC has embraced the social entrepreneurship paradigm as a sustainable strategy to pursue economic and social development of the clan.

The Gumatj Corporation (GC),

Site

The GC has headquarters in the former Marngarr Community Government Council offices at Gunyangara. This Indigenous organisation is a not for profit entrepreneurial venture that was established on 1st July, 2007, with the primary objective of pursuing sustainable economic development and ultimately independence from Australian government welfare and subsidies. The main fixed assets are on traditional lands in east Arnhem Land of the NT of Australia. More specifically, the central management functions are at Gunyangara some 15km by road west of Nhulunbuy, while the operational timber operations (Galkula area), the Garrathiya cattle station and the tourism facilities at Port Bradshaw are generally south of Nhulunbuy. These locations are shown in Figure 2. The town of Nhulunbuy is inextricably linked with the Rio Tinto Alcan mining operations, which are less than 20km from the townsite.

[Put Figure 2 about here]

Participants

The respondents are Gumatj clan members. This group of people, who are about 500 in number, are a set of the Yolngu nation. These people are the traditional land owners of parts of east Arnhem Land as their forebears were the first Indigenous Australians to occupy the region some 50,000 years ago. Indeed, their forebears were the first Australian international entrepreneurs, who traded with the Macassans (from the Celebes), from the 17th century until about 1904 when the South Australian government (then responsible for the administration of the territory), cancelled the fishing licences. Hence, the Gumatj clan has a rich entrepreneurial heritage.

Vision

The leaders of the GC have a vision for overcoming the economic and social disadvantages experienced by clan members. Specifically, the global goal is to create sustainable jobs, income, educational opportunity, and career paths for members free from government financial subsidies and welfare. In practice, the clan would operate the businesses on ancestral lands for which the members hold holistic and spiritual connection (i.e., *Dreamtime*). Operationally, the clan would conduct a number of interrelated small businesses (e.g., timber, tourism, cattle products). For instance, the timber interests would provide accommodation and buildings at the Garrathiya cattle station for employees to be engaged in maintaining the cattle herd and the cryovacing of meat. Subsequently, others (mainly women) would be employed in modern kitchens at Gunyangara, to prepare wholesome meals for sale to the community, and particularly the Indigenous people to encourage them to decline consumption of less healthy 'fast foods'.

Structural Arrangement

The GC has a relatively simple tall structure. Embedded within the organisation are the ethnically associated ideas of the world's oldest extant societies intertwined with Yolngu law and pragmatic rules as to how clan members are to behave. Unequal relationships, stability, and protection of family, virtuous behaviours as well as the persistence and perseverance of dominant values (i.e., evaluating, behaving, perceiving) are endorsed by an executive of six family elders. All clan members have a knowledgeable place within an arrangement that incorporates four senior managers (i.e., Chief executive officer (CEO), general manager (GM), financial manager (FM), and a human resource management manager (HRMM), who report to and administer the vision and directions given by the six elder executives.

In spite of personnel responsible for coordinating the task roles of work units organisational success is reliant on the actions of the four identified senior managers. A feature of traditional Yolngu organisation is the pervasiveness and extensiveness of oral communications as most clan members (although able to converse in a variety of mother tongues and English) are seldom able to read competently or write the written format. The adoption of Western management principles by the GC is at an embryonic stage, which initiates a set of operational challenges for the four senior managers. Historically, Yolngu society is loosely connected, and in times of geographical separation and poor mobile phone network coverage, control and coordination of both routine and non routine jobs intensifies novel networking to sustain feudal cultural traditions of social harmony, robust relationships, and the sensitive issue of face. Nevertheless, the urgency of contemporary business is reflected in the adopted framework, with interlocking managerial functions between elders and lower clan members that is illustrated by Figure 3.

[Put Figure 3 about here]

Gumatj Corporation Accomplishments

During the past 15 years there has been an escalating generation of tangible achievements on the Gumatj clan ancestral lands. In the early 1990s the Garrathiya (land of the cycads) cattle station was established, and the herd size was increased to 350 Bramah cattle by 2010. The capacity was increased with a further 350 stock with calves in late 2011. A feature of the establishment of the cattle station was the construction of a homestead for the station manager by private contractors, while 30 year old sea containers were placed on the site for accommodating the employees. These Indigenous Yolngu men tendered the cattle and erected the initial fences and basic facilities. Over time the fences were extended, the creek beds were bridged and other essential structures (e.g., bores, tank stands, bridges, sheds, gates) were built. One prominent non timber structure erected by the men was the steel holding yards some 10km north of the homestead where the cattle could be mustered and held for blood testing by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Services.

The development of the Garrathiya cattle station created a need for an economic supply of building timber. A necessity for structural timber led Mr Galarrwuy Yunipungu, head of the Gumatj clan, to engage the Jack Thompson Foundation, which made available Mr Mofflin. By the close of the 1990s Indigenous employees from Garrathiya were being instructed by Mr Mofflin how to fell NT stringy bark (*eucalyptus tetradonta*), trees from the nearby savannah forest, and how to operate a Lucas Mill, to mill the logs to boards, planks and beams. Initially, these flat faced timber members were used for the tops of tank stands, bridge decks or verandahs as the rest of the structures were constructed in the traditional architecture of debarked logs.

After the mid 2000s the creation of fixed assets intensified. A requirement for greater numbers of employees at Garrathiya was met by the building of a 12 person accommodation unit with an

accompanying ablution block and an adjoining kitchen. On completion of this project an architecturally designed five room timber bunkhouse was constructed so the Yolngu men could vacate the sea containers (Pearson & Helms, 2010a). The need for additional Indigenous housing provided the foundations for the building of a large architecturally designed timber house at Dhanya on the shore of Port Bradshaw, by members of the Gumatj clan (Pearson & Helms, 2010b), and four houses at Gunyangara. Provision for robust furniture in these and other Indigenous dwellings has been attained by Yolngu men designing and building tables and beds in a small workshop at Gunyangara. All of the timber for these projects has been milled by Indigenous Yolngu men working in the savannah forest in a region west of Dhanaya.

The GC has established a number of operational facilities on their ancestral land at Gunyangara. During 2010 a team of Yolngu men built a timber barrier around the periphery of a large sports oval to prevent motor vehicles driving on the reticulated grass surface. The barrier was constructed of many sections of 3 metre long debarked logs fastened atop short vertical log stumps with all the timber painted white. Earlier in the year Indigenous men of the Gumatj clan erected 1 metre high cyclone fences on the boundary lines of the 23 houses at Gunyangara. A training centre with accommodation facilities for visiting tutors and an instructional area for the vocational education of Yolngu men and women was built in early 2010. In the latter half of 2011 a number of transportable units were refurbished to provide a primary school at Gunyangara to be operational by the 2012 school year. The provision of teaching personnel by the NT Ministry of Education will obviate the need to daily bus the Indigenous children the 15km to the Nhulunbuy primary school. Throughout September and October 2011 infrastructure development at Gunyangara included a horticulture nursery, a coffee shop, and the commencement of a large store. These projects had considerable involvement by the Yolngu men, particularly the timber work, and the components will provide social facilities for the Indigenous people who live at Gunyangara or the nearby remote Aboriginal communities on the Gove Peninsula.

The GC is engaged in a range of economic projects with some at the feasibility stage. At the operational level is the Nhulunbuy waste management facility that treats all the domestic waste from Nhulunbuy, Yirrkala and Gunyangara as well as the Rio Tinto Alcan mining and refining sites. This waste facility is owned and operated by the GC. Additional waste recycling services (and green waste) are provided at the transfer station that won the 2008 NT Chief Minister's award for the best regional waste facility. The Garrangali crocodile farm, also owned by the GC, is in care and maintenance while discussions are being held with industry established operators. Arnhem Seafoods, which imports bulk wholesale seafood from Darwin to be resold in Nhulunbuy, and to the Gove Peninsula communities, is owned by the GC. In September 2011 the capacity of the seafood business was extended by the purchase of a boat that is capable of undertaking commercial fishing in the Port Bradshaw region.

The GC is on the cusp of developing a range of labour intensive industries on the Gove Peninsula. For instance, 5km north of Dhanya, and on the shore of Port Bradshaw is the GC site of Spring Camp. This facility, which has three, self contained, two bed room cabins (i.e., fresh water, ablution block, solar power) is intermittently leased to Nhulunbuy residents. The site can be further developed as it is accessible from the Garrathiya cattle station (20km road/track), and thus, within the range of Indigenous labour. Moreover, the fishing venture at Port Bradshaw and the slaughtering of cattle provide underpinning for the employment of Indigenous women at Gunyangara in terms of preparation of wholesome meals for sale to the community. High quality kitchens have been built and the NT Health Department will give instruction in hygiene and health care. Furthermore, as the Gumatj clan men have been employed in dwelling construction the corporation is intending to expand into community house maintenance and construction services.

Discussion

The GC enterprise fits nicely with the field of interest of Indigenous social entrepreneurship. When defining social entrepreneurship Dacin and colleagues (2010: 38), highlight that while there have

been many advanced definitions within the literature there is consensus the phenomenon is "... an ability to leverage resources that address social problems.". Led by the clan leader Galarrwuy Yunipungu with his extensive political and industry connections acquired over two decades as the Chairman of the Northern Land Council, a fledgling Indigenous venture has flourished in the remote East Arnhem Land of Australia. Driven by the vision of getting his people off welfare and the associated ills (i.e., substance abuse, violence, unemployment) has driven the pursuit of delivering economic independence to the Gumatj clan members through the establishment of a sustainable Indigenous organisation with common good goals (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). Blending economic and social value creation (Jones, 2007) by systematically adding social capital a range of tangible resources, and aspects of cultural heritage brings about change to provide a pathway to resolve social market failures (e.g., employment, housing, health) of successive Australian governments.

In spite of the reported precariousness of Australian Indigenous business the GC was able to address the identified barriers. A great deal of literature (Bultjens & Fuller, 2007; Foley, 2003; Weaver, 2010) acknowledges the relevant economic barriers, and the resource obstacles preventing the sustainability of Indigenous entrepreneurship in Australia. The economic barriers, which encompass financial capital and access to land (Australian Government, 2007; Furneaux & Brown, 2008; Open for Business, 2008; Russell-Mundine, 2007), were acquitted as GC is a recipient of mining royalties and has considerable native titled land. Business acumen, a lack of infrastructure, access to industry as well as education have been categorised as resource barriers to Australian Aboriginal small business (Australian Government, 2007; Foley, 2006; 2010; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010). Counterbalancing these impediments the GC engaged contributing expertise from within the clan and from the wider community (e.g., Forestry Tasmania, Fairbrother Builders), acquired vital operational infrastructure (i.e., Marngarr Community Office, constructed properties), and built on traditional practices, networks and structures (Foley, 2007; Kilpatrick, Field & Falk, 2003), to establish corporate governance and regulatory requirements to facilitate a sustainable enterprise in the dominant Australian business culture. The acute blending of these several components enabled

the GC to capture features of knowledge, trust, and cooperation, the traditional concepts of entrepreneurship and environmental preservation which have higher primacy in Indigenous communities than economic considerations.

Indigenous clan members in an entrepreneurial unit are seldom aligned with mainstream economic principles. This position was succinctly expressed by Hindle and Moroz (2009), who wrote that while rational economic theory advances the primary function of the venture, which is to obtain a profitable outcome for the principal entrepreneur, Indigenous contexts hold different norms and values for the members. In remote Australian Indigenous communities where few meaningful jobs exist and survival is a struggle, lifestyles become wedded to welfare, kinsmanship and gift giving is embraced. Consequently, within Australian Aboriginal pluralist societies greater prominence is given to customary social networks, preservation of the family and cultural values (Foley, 2006) as well as a close attachment to ancestral territories (Altman, 2003). Yet government policy and departmental support endeavours to separate ideal business development from the social issues, which may explain why there are few successful Australian Indigenous businesses (Furneaux & Brown, 2008; Russell-Mundine, 2007; Weaver, 2010; Whitford & Ruhanen, 2010). Integrating the collective community based orientation with a desire to operate on ancestral lands with their own resources has potential to nurture a sustainable entrepreneurial enterprise.

A salient characteristic practiced in the GC enterprise is the notion of a hybrid economy. Indigenous people living in remote Australian circumstances are likely to be engaged "... in a fundamentally different customary economy" (Atman, 2002: 35) based on wildlife harvesting. Many NT Indigenous people reside in seasonally occupied small remote communities termed outstations (Altman, 2003; Coombs, 1993) where residents actively participate in fulfilling their aspirations of living on traditional lands for which they hold spiritual and religious connections, are able to access government financial support and/or stores, and pursue hunter gatherer pursuits. Both authors have been privileged to be on the land of the traditional Indigenous owners and to observe families *long grassing*. Under these conditions the Indigenous groups may come to Nhulunbuy or large NT centres

for tangible goods (i.e., clothing, finance), but are armed with spears and traditional digging sticks, and then return to savannah forest to pursue a traditional life style. Yet in some instances only days earlier the male members may have been undertaking meaningful work with mechanical equipment or electrical power tools. Nevertheless, Australian government policy and departmental initiatives that encourage Aboriginal Indigenous entrepreneurship fail to appreciate the enduring values underpinning the strong cultural continuities of these people. Members of the GC, who clearly have a preference for the social economic and ecological benefits achievable when practicing a hybrid economy, have stepped away from the government promoted Western principles of a market economy.

The current GC entrepreneurial venture is in a transitional stage providing Indigenous members an opportunity to generate social value while identifying opportunities to marketise transactions. Emerging from an ancient society with 50, 000 years of heritage the GC is being guided toward the dominant Australian market economy. The process is likely to be a relatively long time as event the dimly recorded trade with the Macassarse did not onset a "... radical change in [the Yolngu] Aboriginal society" (Worsley, 1955: 9). Nevertheless, the arrangement enables members to practice kinship, gift giving and familialism preservation (the core of Indigenous culture and traditional structures), when endeavouring to sustain basic physiological and safety needs in relatively harsh conditions. Building social capital and acquiring skills within a broad range of clan members, who can then engage in useful vocations, enables reconfiguration of solutions to civic problems and the delivery of sustainable new communities (Nicholls, 2006). This transformational phase facilitates focussing of attention on increasingly dynamic competence and demanding market places, while the entity can continue to be a recipient of government support to generate financial as well as social returns.

Conclusion

The material presented in this paper has four major implications for Australian Indigenous entrepreneurship. An observation of primacy is the GC has installed an Indigenous social enterprise that has been successfully developing for some 20 years. This result is a remarkable achievement given the reported lack of sustainability of Australian Indigenous enterprises. Indeed, once the government financial assistance for seeding the business has been expended often the firm falters. The longevity of the GC enterprise and the acceleration in the quality and quantity of tangible assets, the growth in social capital as clan members are engaged in the escalating number of meaningful vocational opportunities are discernable valuable achievements. Overall, the emerging landscape of the enterprise leads to an inescapable conclusion the model employed by the GC has considerable strengths that do not manifest in Australian Indigenous businesses that emphasise free market economy arrangement to which the Australian government has been committed.

Achieving a pathway through the several identified barriers to Australian Indigenous entrepreneurship is a second important implication. A body of literature has specified numerous obstacles to Indigenous enterprise sustainability, and this work devotes information why Australian Aboriginal small business initiatives do not always flourish. Frequently, economic barriers (i.e., capital, land tenure, profit distribution) are highlighted. But in an interview with Mr Gallarwuy Yunipungu the first author was told while mining royalties have been helpful, only a small amount of money is required. The availability of land and the accompanying resources as well as profit distribution through the traditional customs and conventions of gift giving are options available to other Indigenous clans, that have been less enthusiastic about foregoing welfare and government subsidised work. Even succession, which exists as etiquette of the clan social system inhibiting lower hierarchical members assuming positions of responsibility, has been attenuated. Within extant Indigenous communities are embedded cultural endowments as well as member obligations and expectations and how the GC has channelled these elements within the entrepreneurial business context is a second important implication of this study.

The third significant implication from the study is the GC members were able to pursue hunter gatherer behaviours that supported the entrepreneurial process. In remote Australian Aboriginal communities wild life harvesting is fundamental to the building of social, ecological and cultural values and through continual existence of the clan exploited the opportunity to renew existing assets or invest in new configurations. Although the understanding of these production systems is limited they are substantially distinct from contemporary business ventures aligned with market economy principles designed to profit a few stakeholders. Despite not being easily interpreted Indigenous social entrepreneurship advances specific legitimate social and environmental objectives, that often have not been attainable by commercial business practices in poor and social disadvantaged populations. An opportunity to employ a hybrid model to maintain the extensive cultural heritage as well as responsibility and stewardship of sea and land resources provides the binding energy for respectful other working partnerships. Across this socio economic spectrum the overarching mission of bringing sustainable solutions to unmet civil social problems is an objective of primacy that is significantly different to the secondary focus of operating with compliance to market forces and regulatory requirements.

The fourth implication to emerge is sustainable Indigenous social entrepreneurship will attract a holistic rejuvenation. At the clan level reformation of conventions and practices embedded in 50,000 years of rich heritage will necessitate an evolutionary process. The expectation is some traditions will be displaced and a range of ancient protocols will be diluted with new rules across successive populations. Understandably, the process will be relatively long and possibly never ending as persistent evolving competitive pressures and challenges, from both within and external of the clan will revolutionise a new collective ideology to embrace opportunities of strategic choice. The alternative is clan oblivion. This pace of change will also be exercised at the individual level. Giving attention to new market conditions and technological development to extend the life cycle of the clan will be contingent on a range of competencies to overcome the continual emergence of different barriers and obstacles. And while members may hold a portfolio of strengths their

community membership is a condition of social cohesion, which is placed at considerable risk in the pursuit of personal profit making within the realm of market economy criteria. Consequently, the GC venture is being facilitated with a sustainable hybrid social entrepreneurial framework that provides a vocational opportunity for every clan member.

References

Figure 1. Evolution of traditional structure to a contemporary framework

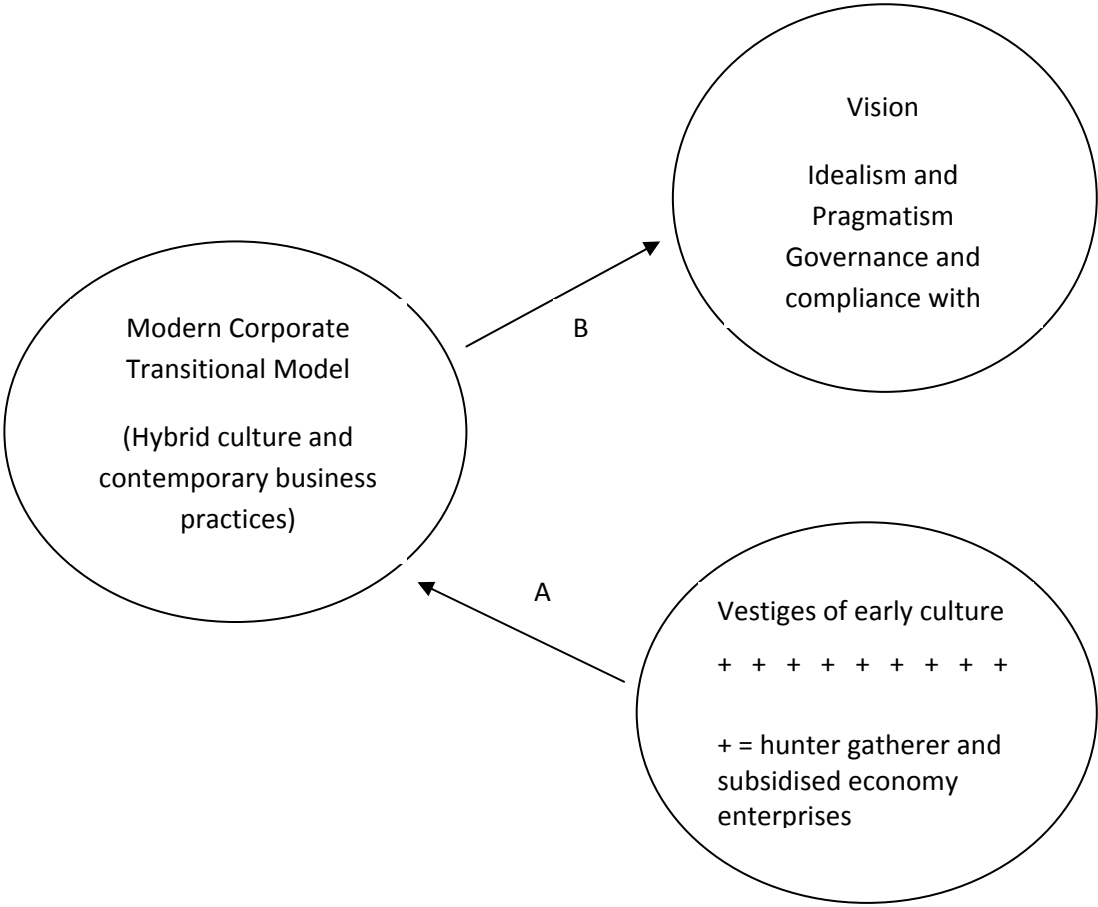


Figure 2. Places of interest on the Gove Peninsula in East Arnhem Land



Figure 3. Schematic representation of the Gumatj organisational structure

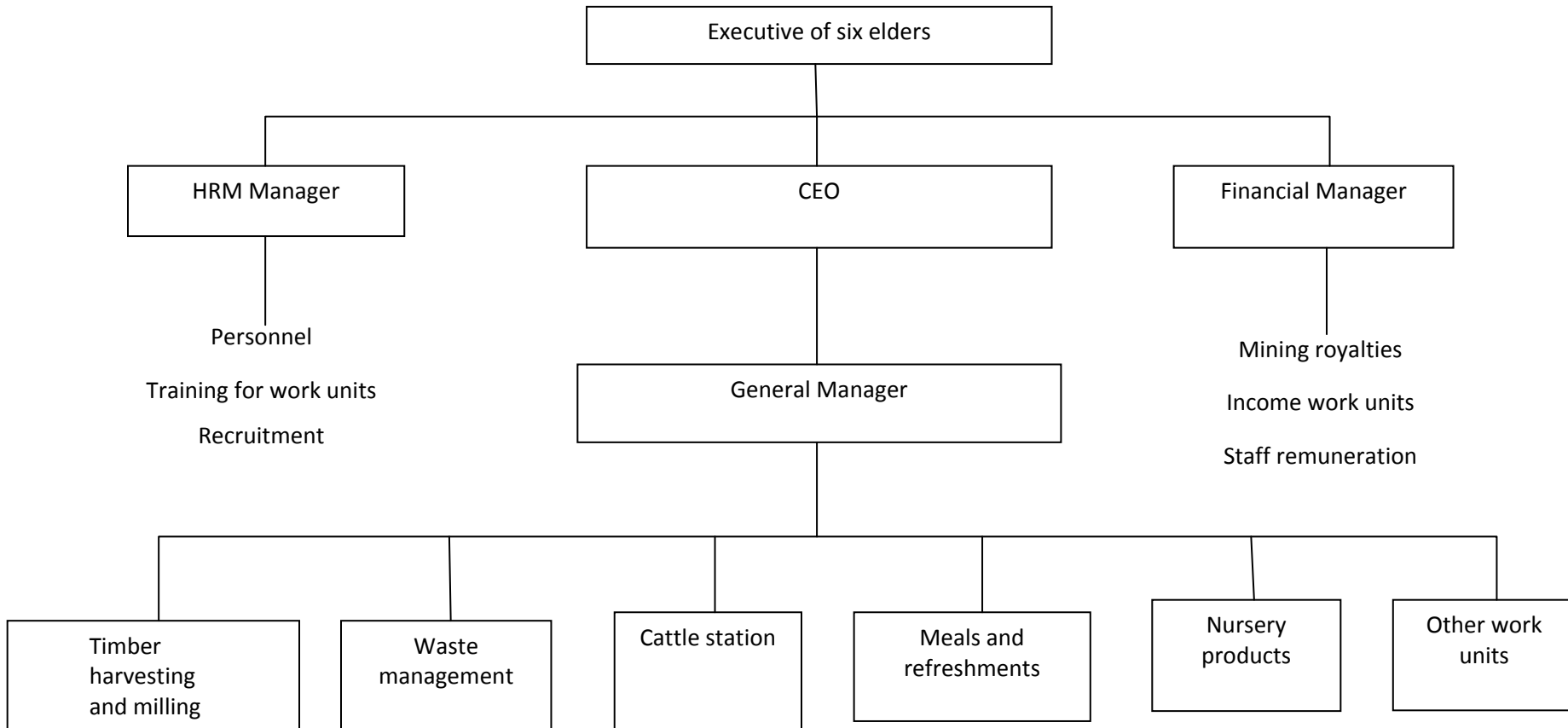


Fig. 3. Schematic Gumatj Corporation Structure