Central Coast

Transparent Technologies: Good governance and practical processes
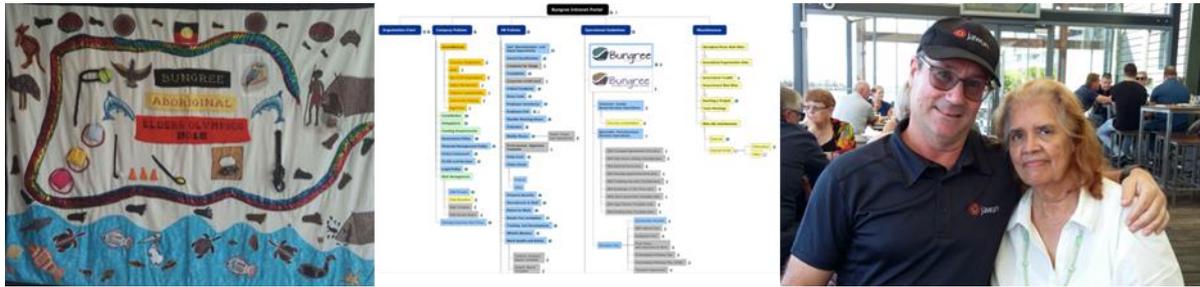
Background

The 13,000 Indigenous Australians residing in the Central Coast are the country's largest and fastest growing Indigenous populations. Yet, compared to non-Indigenous people their life expectancy is lower (their median age is 19 compared to 40), unemployment rate is double, and they consistently attain lower levels of education and income.[1] Given the broad range of services needed to address these issues and their effects, Bungree Aboriginal Association has been a vital resource for the Indigenous community since its establishment in 1995. Today it is recognised as the most successful Aboriginal service provider in the region. Through nine distinct programs, Bungree services cater to the education, employment, health, and housing needs of Indigenous children, youth, young parents, family, senior citizens, and the disabled and homeless. Offering such a variety of services is challenging but it is also how holistic support is availed to a community with diverse needs.

With its large and expanding programs, CEO Suzanne Naden knew adhering to regulations and meeting reporting requirements were necessary for Bungree to secure funding and to continue delivering much needed service to the community. This was made even more challenging with Bungree incorporating as a company in 2016. Suzanne says, *"As a multi-service agency we have many requirements to meet for the all services across the different funding streams. Our priority was for the policies and procedures to be transparent. Staff needed direct access - not to have to come to me."*

Suzanne looked to Jawun for secondee support, and a match was made with David Birrell, senior consultant at IBM. For more than three decades David had been designing tools and processes to enable teams within IBM to effectively manage business controls and meet compliance requirements. Enthusiastic, open minded, and with a 'user centred' design ethos, David brought relevant experience in delivering value on short-term projects.

Approach

As David explains his approach in his own words, the priority at arrival was placed on building trust and delivering value: *"I deliberately went slow in the first week and focused on the relationship side. I also wanted to get some deliverables out the door. I wanted to get to know everyone and hear their story – and to learn people's names!"* While David's experience and expertise aligned with the needs of Bungree, it was also this attitude that made all the difference. *"David's enthusiasm was the main thing,"* Suzanne explains. *"He was very honest that he didn't know Aboriginal people until he came here. He immersed himself. He sat down, he listened to people's stories. He took everything in. He's one of those people that come in with an open mind."*

David initiated a small project – building an organogram with Bungree employees that included their photos, positions, and departments. He shared it on a web page accessible only on the Bungree intranet. Getting everyone involved in making this also created awareness around the process and tasks related to identifying and outlining the organisational policies and procedures. With the idea

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[1] ABS(2011)

planted, David continued to build trust and goodwill by making himself available for various tasks: *"In Week 2 I initiated some Excel 101 training. I expected only a couple to attend, but the room was full. Then I worked one-on-one with people to show how Excel could be used with their data. I attended lunches, went on a trip to Newcastle with the social team, met the aunties, and made myself available to solve computer issues at short notice."*

Having built strong rapport with the Bungree team, Suzanne and David then shifted their attention to the major task at hand. *"Suzanne gave me the existing procedure manuals, but there was a lot missing and it was not structured. I had to manually copy and paste from PDF into Word documents, then convert them to HTML. It was quite tedious work."* With decades of experience helping people use technology to meet their needs, David has developed an intranet document portal that is simple and user-friendly. All relevant documents are accessible from one web page, which clearly displays where material is displayed with an information map. No search is required and the page can be maintained by Bungree staff with inexpensive software that is easy to use. David intentionally chose an approach that suited an organisation such as Bungree with its limited resource.

David not only completed the task but identified ways for Bungree staff to maintain the portal: *"I set up a template so it will be easy for Bungree staff to add more. I also prepared videos and a short procedure manual so that they and future team members can maintain the portal."*

In addition to designing a simple but effective portal to access procedure manuals, David also made himself available to support other tasks by sharing skills and carrying out pieces of work in a way that will also have lasting value for the organisation and the wider community. Suzanne notes the value added: *"David also found the time to do a couple of other web apps for the other organisations in his spare time. So he was invaluable not just to Bungree but to the community. I think everyone is going to be in a tug-of-war for IBM secondees now!"*

Outcomes

With the intranet portal designed and staff trained on using and updating it, it is now possible for Bungree staff to store and access documents in one portal, and be confident that they have the latest version. Inducting new staff members will be straightforward and it will be easy to audit for compliance. The major benefit, however, is that the Bungree team is empowered with shared knowledge of the services they provide to the community. This is a significant step towards maturity for the organisation and a tangible benefit for the community. Further, it also provides a foundation for the growth and development of the organisation. As Suzanne Naden puts it: *"The development of the intranet tool improves Bungree's ability to deliver new programs and services. Having David and IBM here was incredibly valuable. For us to pay for somebody like him to come in would have cost an arm and a leg. It was a terrific opportunity."* This kind of systems improvement greatly enhances the ability of an organisation like Bungree to meet the service needs of an Indigenous community with complex and broad needs.

Next Steps

David has since returned to Melbourne, but recalls his time in the Central Coast with fond memories: *"I feel I received more out of the assignment than I gave. I wish I had some heritage like them and was honoured to be shown so much of their historical insight and knowledge. I talk about my experiences every day to so many people and encourage them to also get involved."*

A new Jawun secondee is already at Bungree building on David's work. With the portal up on the intranet, the next step is to prioritise which of the existing policies and procedures are to be reviewed and transferred. Many existing documents will need to be updated and formatted. The current Jawun secondee is identifying a subset of the most important policies and procedures to be tackled first with Bungree staff. Prioritisation through Agile technique, a method that focuses on the incremental design and building of activities, will keep the work focused and maximise value for Bungree in the years to come.