

DOES BUSINESS SUCCESS MAKE YOU ANY LESS INDIGENOUS?

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous business participation is significantly less when compared to mainstream Anglo-European participation in Australia. Yet those who are in business, are they any less Indigenous by being successful entrepreneurs than what they were before they went into business? Do you lose your Indigenous values? These questions are not uncommon within Indigenous community circles where the unknown often produces negativity. When an Indigenous person strives for economic independence they often face a gauntlet of criticism as they are often misunderstood in their endeavors. Indigenous business and social aspirations may be a dichotomy within the contemporary world.

To be successful in business the Indigenous entrepreneur operates within the dominant culture, their clientele and in many cases their suppliers are all non-indigenous and/or from other minority groups than their own. They are often isolated, alienated within an economy that is so different to their Indigenous communal or urban environments. To be successful in business they must survive in the consumer driven capitalistic environment of mainstream business society. This often results in them becoming isolated from their own families and support networks. Do the entrepreneurs take on multiple identities to interact within the two worlds of Indigenous and Anglo Australian and where are they, are these entrepreneurs all in the rural remote, or are they in urban settings?

INTRODUCTION

There is limited literature available on Indigenous Australian Entrepreneurs, especially the urban Indigenous entrepreneur (Daly 1995; Foley 2000a; Fuller, Dansie, Jones and Holmes 1999; Jones 1998; Martin and Liddle 1997; Schaper 1999; Taylor 1997). The questions that this research addresses are:

1. Are Indigenous businesses situated in the urban or rural remote?
2. With business success do Indigenous Australian entrepreneurs lose their indigeneity and their Indigenous values?

Within this questioning one must also ask is economic activity for the Indigenous participant a process that fosters a middle class society within Indigenous Australia that duplicates a Protestant work ethic (Dodd and Seaman 1998). If a Protestant work ethic is duplicated, is this a mirror of

Anglo-American or European capitalism? If this is correct then it could be argued that Indigenous participation within the mainstream business economy is the final phase of colonialism in the extirpation of Indigenous culture. There is a need to understand how entrepreneurial activity affects the cultural values of its Indigenous participants. In addition, before Indigenous peoples are possibly assimilated totally within the dominant culture of Australia there is a social responsibility to understand whether Indigenous values and cultural ties can be retained while the entrepreneur still develops economically within the dominant contemporary culture? This research project, explores change or loss of cultural values from the Indigenous entrepreneur's prolonged involvement in business. To enable a conclusion to be realized, fifty Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs were studied.

The format of the paper includes a brief explanation on the environment and history of the Indigenous Australia entrepreneurs, however before they are discussed it is important to discuss the stereotype or misconception held by many people that 'real Aborigines are in the outback or rural remote', this paper looks at the urban Indigenous Australian. An explanation of why this study looks at stand alone businesses and not community style ventures is discussed initially. This background information is then followed with an explanation of the methodology, the research parameters, historical information on the Indigenous Australian economic positions and history. The key findings are then discussed followed by a summary and conclusion.

WHY STUDY STAND-ALONE BUSINESS VENTURES VERSES THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY VENTURE?

70% of Indigenous Australians live in urban settings (Hunter 2004:86). The development of individual Indigenous urban entrepreneurs has debatably been overlooked both in reporting and funding programs. The former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commercial Development Corporation (CDC) has been criticised for forming partnerships with Indigenous communities rather than individuals (McDonnell 1999: 2). The Indigenous Business Review (IBR) reports that community based businesses often lack appropriate governance hence cultural demands determined the use of funds rather than prudent financial management (IBR 2003: 46–49). Research by McDonnell has shown that 'dealing with communities rather than ... individuals changes the incentive structure within a business and allows diffusion of responsibility over a business venture' (1999: 2). Essential ingredients of any successful business are profit orientation and sound commercial management skills. Deficiencies in both profit incentives and business education can result in business failure. The links can arguably be drawn between McDonnell's (1999) findings in relation to governance and incentives within community organisations, and commercial failure. This is a major distinguishing characteristic between community based businesses and stand alone ventures.

The dominating Indigenous business financier in Australia for over a decade was ATSIC who had difficulty in achieving their goals. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Commonwealth of Australia 1991) criticised the stringent commercial eligibility requirements which resulted in the establishment of the Indigenous Business Incentive Program (McDonnell 1999: 2). Yet the IBR report of 2003 has noted that poor due diligence by ATSIC staff in the monitoring of loans was unsatisfactory (IBR 2003: 28-9). The Miller Report (1985) identified important deficiencies in the administration of enterprise programs, yet almost two

decades later the IBR (2003) confirms that deficiencies in the management and administration of Indigenous business loan programs is still a matter of concern. ATSIC did not effectively implement economic development programs which resulted in ad hoc and often unsuccessful business creation (IBR 2003: 30).

Bureaucratic misjudgements have played a part in the failure of some Indigenous community based businesses. This is of concern because these failures inevitably reinforce negative stereotypes of Indigenous Australians including the popular belief that Aboriginal people cannot manage their own financial affairs. Case study analysis of business failures, such as the Warai pastoral enterprise (Fuller and Parker 2002: 100, 120 & 121), highlight that there is a lack of financial literacy, business management expertise and basic office administration skills within some Indigenous communities. Without the provision of business infrastructure, and the necessary financial and management skills, community-based businesses are being set up for failure. This reflects negatively on both the communities and the organisations that are created to assist Indigenous Australians. The IBR highlights that 'business development should be separated from social and welfare issues' (2003: 41). In general Indigenous economic and entrepreneurial development has been hampered by funding practices that warranted more informed planning and coordination.

The frustration is compounded when many government publications regarding Indigenous economic reform generally make reference *only* to Aboriginal communities. There is little recognition of the socio-economic category of the individual Aboriginal entrepreneur. Even the Miller Report continually refers to community development when it is discussing the development of the urban individual (1985: 383-6). The Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP) makes some reference to the improvement of Indigenous socioeconomic participation through income equity, equality, economic empowerment, skills acquisition, labour mobility and employment diversification (Commonwealth of Australia 1994: xiv). However, the AEDP is primarily a labour market governed policy through its employment and training goals rather than self-employment (Findlayson 1995: 1).

There is a need to revise the way in which Indigenous program funding mechanisms operate and how researchers view Indigenous enterprises. The blanket application of policy towards Indigenous 'communities' is misinformed, outdated and non-representative of the 70 per cent of Indigenous Australians who live in urban settings (Hunter 2004: 86). It is not suggested that funding and research to Indigenous communities in rural areas be reduced, rather it is recommended that individual Indigenous entrepreneurial pursuits need recognition and encouragement in their own rights. This will ensure the business aspirations of Indigenous entrepreneurs living in urban settings are acknowledged and supported.

The recognition of individual Indigenous Australians is further hampered by the dearth of information on the urban Indigenous entrepreneur. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002 (NATSISS) has no qualitative or quantitative data regarding Indigenous self-employment. The 2001 census figures show there were only 200 self-employed Indigenous people who employ others in remote areas (Hunter 2004: 91-93). At the 2001 Census, there were 6089 Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over who identified as self-employed. Of these, 2058 identified as employing other people, 1845 were in urban areas.ⁱ As many as 4031

identified as in 'other' forms of self-employment (Hunter 2004: 90). The lack of detailed data on Indigenous self-employment raises the important question: how can government policy be informed if the basic building blocks of empirical data are not evident?

The problem of responsible reportage is further illustrated by the IBR's observation that there is no one central agency responsible for the collection and collation of data on Indigenous economic development (2003: 23).

It is important to recognise there are two distinct forms of Indigenous business ventures. They are stand-alone commercial businesses, be they sole traders, partnerships or proprietary limited companies incorporated under the *Australian Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* and 'community' based businesses incorporated under the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* (or one of the many state associations acts). They differ according to their process of incorporation, their business philosophies that assign priority to commercial and social interests, and their governance or reporting requirements. The commercial stand-alone, urban Indigenous entrepreneur operates in the capitalist or market economy. The community venture often has taxation concessions, is usually a not-for-profit organisation, and can be a registered charity (Stanley 2002: 2). A community-based Indigenous business enterprise arguably falls within a 'grey' area of business classification. This paper identifies an important need in Indigenous economic and social reform. It seeks recognition and support for an increasingly emergent sector of Indigenous business: stand-alone commercial enterprises that employ others within the Australian urban economy. This paper does not discuss community based enterprises in the 'exotic' outback.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on several prior research projects (Foley 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; 2004a; 2003b and 2000) and recent case-studies spanning a period of 9 years. It is based on fifty 'snowball selected'ⁱⁱ urban Indigenous entrepreneurs from geographical regions ranging from Hobart to Darwin. Indigenous standpoint theory, (within a grounded theory methodological application) was used to ensure the research had an Indigenous epistemological approach (Foley 2003a, pp. 44–52; 2002: 3–13). The names and pertinent demographic details of the business enterprises and participants are confidential. This is in keeping with the requirements of standard university research ethics agreements. A semi-structured interview format was chosen. Substantive coding (open coding and constant comparative coding) was used for the analysis of interview data (Glaser 1992). Attention was directed to recognition of data and the relevant underlying patterns of incidents. Attention was fixed on obvious patterns or common incidents in data (open coding). Once a category was established, the data were examined to discover any emergent properties by constantly coding and analysing the data (i.e., constant comparative coding, see Glaser 1992). An open question line was preferred in the probing of issues that pertained to individual participants. The participants covered a broad range of industries that were far removed from the art, craft and tourism ventures that are stereotypically associated with Indigenous business activity.

The research project initially reviewed 268 Australian Indigenous businesses of which only sixty were acceptable within the study parameters. Businesses that occupy the same market niche were randomly deleted to ensure the remaining fifty case-studies represented as broad a sample

as possible. This was done to ensure there were no industry concentrations. The research had several guiding parameters to ensure its relevance and academic rigour. These are discussed in the following section.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

The defining parameters of the study were: the case study participants must be self-employed business people that were:

- Indigenousⁱⁱⁱ
- Entrepreneurs^{iv}
- Successful^v
- Have at least 50% ownership and management control of the business,^{vi} and
- No Aboriginal Corporations incorporated under the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976 or state association Acts^{vii}

The demographic composition of active participants in the business was eighty four percent male, sixteen percent female. This included Indigenous spouse/partners who were active in the day-to-day operations of the business. Seventy two percent of the participants were married. Turnovers per annum varied between \$20,000 AUD to just under \$600,000 AUD. Average start up capital was approximately \$13,000 AUD. When five entrepreneurs who had start up capital of \$25,000 AUD or more were omitted, then the average start up capital was approximately \$6,350 AUD.

A brief background on the history/environment of Australia is now provided.

INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA

Indigenous Australian societies have been forced to make radical changes in their economic and social systems following two centuries of colonial policy. The results of colonial domination have been devastating. Economically Indigenous Australians have been kept on the fringe, and in poverty (Fisk 1985; Pollard 1988). A critical economic disadvantage is the continuing low level of Indigenous household income. Regardless of individual wages, household income is low when spread across the multi-generational and multi-family households (Smith and Daly 1996). Poverty is the result of the combined effects of past government policies, high unemployment, low levels of education, poor health, and low levels of home ownership. Poverty in Indigenous Australian society is the direct result of the lack of a formal structured path to a self-determination process, which involves the lack of self-reliance and economic development (Nagle and Summerrell 1998). There is little to no wealth accumulation in successive generations of Indigenous Australia. This was understood by the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) who recognised and recommended to successive governments the need for improving the economic and social status of Indigenous people in reducing poverty which would create benefits for all Australians (ATSIC 1998c).

In 1991, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody concluded that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people are: 'the most socially, economically and culturally disadvantaged

group in Australian society' (Commonwealth of Australia 1992: 1). Indigenous Australia has a high welfare dependency ratio with fewer marketable skills and less work experience than other sections of Australian society (ATSIC 1998c; Fisk 1985; Hunter 1999). The Indigenous population also experiences discrimination and prejudice by employers, together with high levels of unemployment, between 38% or 54% depending on the interpretation of government statistics (Fisk 1985; Spicer 1997: 5), 24% excluding the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) participants (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2001). The lack of marketable skills and resultant high levels of unemployment compound the poverty problems of Indigenous Australia in general.

A possible solution to this negative situation is the entry of Indigenous Australians into small business.

Self-employment and the environment of entrepreneurship that is synonymous with private enterprise development are considered not only as a means of achieving economic independence, they also are a contributing fundamental force behind social change (Holt 1997). The 1991 Royal Commission Report states that one of the most important single steps in the achievement of self-determination is to redress the negative effects of poverty (Nagle and Summerrell 1998). The development of Indigenous businesses has been advocated as a possible means of escaping from welfare dependency (Fuller, Dansie, Jones and Holmes 1999; Herron 1998) [and poverty]. This also has the potential to improve Indigenous Australia's economic and social circumstances (ATSIC 1998a; Herron 1998). Indigenous economic self-reliant entrepreneurial activity within mainstream society is a process that can result in a formal structured path to self-determination. The researcher's question that continually appears is; is there a cultural cost? To enable the reader to understand, the Australian and Hawaiian social background will briefly be discussed.

The Australian Indigenous economic situation which includes high unemployment, high welfare dependency, few marketable skills and low work experience, it is clear that the outlook for this sector of Australian society is bleak. The social positioning of Indigenous Australia is poor, placing them in a generalised category that is similar to the commonly held negative views that categorise as an example African-Americans in the United States (Waldinger 1996).

To some it easy to understand and accept the social plight of the African-American and the resultant social differences as this is portrayed openly in modern media in the genres of film and TV. Yet the social plight of the urban Indigenous Australian is still a relatively unknown or unpublished area in modern Australian media (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1994). What is possibly not understood is that Indigenous Australians have differing cultural and social values to that of mainstream Australia be they deeply urbanised with life styles similar to the non-indigenous Australian or the rural remote (Commonwealth of Australia 2000). These cultural differences remain despite the cultural deprivation following postcolonial contact and cultural diffusion of Indigenous society post 1788 as shown in the following conversation:

[Australian] Aboriginal people in general have differing cultural values to that of the dominant white European, and they [the white European] don't understand us. We have been studied, put under the microscope for two hundred years yet they, the whitefella still does not understand us (Budby personal conversation 7 October, 2002).

Culture as a way of life of an entire society includes codes of manners, dress, language, rituals, norms of behaviour and systems of belief (Jary and Jary 1995). It could be assumed that Indigenous Australia would display the effects of cultural diffusion following the colonial subjugation of Indigenous practices and the poor social economic position as outlined. However, postcolonial studies have seen a resistance in Indigenous culture to recolonisation in modern times (Fuery and Mansfield 2000). The 'Anglo' and Indigenous Australian society have remained: 'incalculably various, constantly mutable, and [a] labyrinthine in their elaborateness' (Carrithers 1992: 2). An underlying question of the researcher is to consider whether Indigenous Australia can survive as a culture and improve its social economic position? Whilst we acknowledge the differences between Anglo-European and Indigenous Australian culture, there are some similarities and we must accept that the cultures are continually mutating, change is inevitable (Carrithers 1992). The answer to the researcher's question may lay in a commonality between the two cultures that is arguably evident is the activity that is entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial activity has existed in a different cultural format within Indigenous Australian trading groups for in excess of 40,000 years (Flood 1995; Willey 1979). This historical cultural common thread may possibly be a part of the economic and social solution that is required to cast off the encumbrances of a welfare dependency that subjugates contemporary Indigenous Australia (Fuller, Dansie, Jones and Holmes 1999).

The explanation on Indigenous Australians has been discussed to illustrate their social and economic position within the dominant European heritage of their ruling administration.

THE RESEARCH CONCEPTS

Entrepreneurial activity within Indigenous Australian families and networks can provide an economic base that is not government dependent. However, we need to understand the cultural ramifications of entrepreneurial activity. The development of the Indigenous Australian businessperson or the Indigenous Australian entrepreneur is economically a prudent policy as the economic returns from gainful employment outweigh the cost of welfare dependency (Fuller, Dansie, Jones and Holmes 1999). Yet this study asks, at what cost to the Indigenous participant? What is the social, cultural and spiritual cost to the Indigenous entrepreneur of engaging in economic activity in mainstream Australia (Martin and Liddle 1997)? Moreover we must ask how such entrepreneurs can succeed given the low economic and social position of Indigenous people.

Historical precedents have shown that numerous groups, the target of prejudice and discrimination, have successfully used business as a means of upward mobility in their economic development (Salinger 1993). Research has shown that ethnic entrepreneurial success is found in the ability to compensate for the typical background deficits of their groups and the discrimination that they encounter through the use of their distinctive socio-cultural resources (Lincoln and Denzin 1994; Waldinger 1993). Literature suggests that the cultural differences between nascent Indigenous and ethnic entrepreneurs within the dominant culture are negligible which places the Indigenous and ethnic entrepreneur on an even playing field (Lincoln and Denzin 1994; Reynolds and White 1997). The culture of the minority group does not determine their economic success. Rather their success is based in the ability to use their social position in a process to achieve economic action (Waldinger 1993). How the Indigenous entrepreneur then

uses their social position, what values are adopted and what Indigenous values are retained is the basis of this paper.

The Indigenous entrepreneur has personal needs which include the need for economic empowerment, such as the need to provide basic food, accommodation, clothing (Maslow 1970). It also includes the need for self determination, to be in control of their life becoming a part of society rather than being subjected to the controls of the state in a welfare existence. The basic delivery and access to the satisfaction of needs however suffers from a socio-economic barrier which includes (and is not limited to) poverty, unemployment, poor health, and poor education.

Few studies have examined the social barriers to Indigenous Australian entrepreneurial activity w therefore values and 'views on Indigenous business enterprises is basically, unknown' (Mapunda 2002: 56). The urban area was chosen as the majority of the Indigenous population live in towns or cities (Hunter 2004: 86).

KEY FINDINGS

This study looked at the way in which individual entrepreneurs understood and applied their Aboriginal cultural values to their business dealings. The findings provide important insights into the character of the Indigenous Australian entrepreneur. Without this understanding, future and existing Indigenous Australian business people will continue to suffer at the hands of financiers, bureaucrats and policy makers who are often ill-informed, uneducated and unappreciative of Indigenous culture. The statistics speak for themselves in this area of comment. Within the study it was difficult for most of the participants to remember constructive relationships with financiers or government departments, including those which were established to support them. The basis for these unsatisfactory relationships may be due to a misunderstanding of minority values, which makes this area of research of extreme importance to stakeholders in Indigenous business development.

In general it was agreed that traditional values such as ethics and protocols still exist. The study revealed that entrepreneurs who worked and had unbroken connections to their traditional lands over successive generations exhibited a strong cultural link to that land. They practised cultural procedures related to that country including ceremony, formal kinship obligations as well as contemporary kinship practices. Participant A3 asserted: 'Aboriginal people have values which change continually. If we did not have white domination, we would still have the dramatic changes in our values as we progress and get more and more in touch with the modern world' (A3, interview). This participant strongly believed that cultural values are always in a state of change and Anglo-European domination has slowed this down to some extent. The imposition of one set of values over another has not allowed for Indigenous values to evolve in a systematic, internally driven way. Rather, it has been the external pressure that has forced change.

The majority of the participants did not have an unbroken link to traditional lands. Many had no knowledge of where their spiritual connections lay due to past policies and practices of assimilation and child removal. These entrepreneurs did however possess strong Indigenous cultural values. They were referred to as contemporary Indigenous Australian values that were

further defined as contemporary kinship values. They are an extension of Indigenous beliefs within modernity.

Indigenous culture is not static. The participants agreed that culture evolves with technological advancement, other external factors as well as internal dynamism. Several participants pointed out that entrepreneurial activity was not a custom practised solely by people of European descent. Entrepreneurial activity was a firmly established component of Indigenous society through trade and commercial undertakings long before the arrival of Europeans in Australia. These comments are supported by wider literature (Foley 2001; Trudgen 2000). The Indigenous entrepreneur adheres to and practices ethical protocols within the operation of their daily routines. From this they take responsibility for their future as Indigenous people. This is illustrated in the following participant comments. *A15*: 'contemporary values are an evolution of traditional values [we live in a contemporary world]. We are Aboriginal! We will always hold some things close to us that the white will never understand ... being black and being in business does not go against cultural beliefs' (*A15*, interview). *A15* supports the concept that Aboriginality is not reduced by being in business.

A16 also endorses this: '... as a Koori, I hold my head up high, and I live a good honest life. I work hard and value relationships. I think these are very important; perhaps traditional values are being redefined; now they are traditional contemporary urban' (*A16*, interview). In this instance *A16* asserts the belief that traditional values are now traditional urban values. *A20* added firmly: '... you don't have to become a white man ... in business if you can maintain your culture ... if you don't have the heart already there of being a black man, if you go into business ... you're going to become a white ... Culture can be maintained and you can still be in business' (*A20*, interview). *A20* believes that if traditional/cultural values do not already exist in the individual, then the outcome will be a transition into the dominant culture of the non-Indigenous business world.

A20 was referring to the tourism and cultural heritage industries whereby some urban people of Indigenous descent overnight become experts in Aboriginal culture. Obviously, the Indigenous person must have pre-existing knowledge and understanding of Indigenous culture prior to business, they cannot 'invent culture' otherwise you will be as *A20* refers, 'white'.^{viii}

The concept of values, traditional and modern appears to be interpreted by Indigenous entrepreneurs in the contemporary sense as the evolutionary outcome from traditional values. Yet traditional values exist in the value base that comprises ethics, protocol, respect and responsibility from which the Indigenous entrepreneur earns their right of place within the Indigenous community. To the management theorist the concept of Indigenous values may seem an arbitrary topic. To the Indigenous Australian entrepreneur however (as well as those studying them, policy makers, bureaucrats and other business people interacting with Indigenous entrepreneurs) values are often both external and internal control mechanisms that warrant explanation and understanding.

Fuller and Cummings (2003) strongly support the need for adequate business research and planning for Indigenous business ventures. Understanding Indigenous Australian values would appear to be an obvious component of Fuller and Cummings' (2003) recommendations. The lack

of understanding of Indigenous Australians is an important issue. As an example, within basic financial lending, a financier always looks at the character of a potential borrower in addition to the standard loan criteria of credit-worthiness, capital, and capacity to repay. The character of the Indigenous Australian is determined by the Banker in the application and adherence to western values, not complex Indigenous values. Adequate research into the Indigenous Australian entrepreneur's business undertakings is required and within that research, the character of the entrepreneur needs to be better understood as what is deemed as acceptable by the Banker may not be the norm within Indigenous society.

The Indigenous Australian value system is seen as contemporary within the urban environment. The contemporary kinship values (which are the core of the contemporary values constructed around reciprocation) are the result of an ongoing modification of traditional protocols and ethics that occurred during the decades of the formal assimilation of Indigenous Australians into Anglo-European Australian society (Neill 2002).

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

This research advances the author's investigation into identity and social values surrounding Indigenous entrepreneurs. Indigenous economic development in business and self-employment is currently under the spotlight in Australia. It is important that provider agencies promoting Indigenous business economic revival understand the cultural difficulties that Indigenous entrepreneurs experience, then and only then can they provide mechanisms to support the aspiring Indigenous business person that will result in sound outcomes.

This paper makes a contribution to literature in terms of better understanding Indigenous Australian urban entrepreneurs. This is an important addition to the sparse literature on contemporary business activity in this area of study.

The paper forms the basis for both future research and policy development. Its strengths lie in its adoption of an Indigenous epistemological standpoint, and its qualitative, empirical orientation. In short it has approached research on Indigenous entrepreneurs from a life experience perspective. Qualitative research into matters concerning First Nations peoples by an Indigenous researcher is very rare. The majority of Australian researchers to date have relied on statistical reviews of ABS data. The qualitative Indigenous approach ensures that it is a valuable addition to literature. It has also demonstrated there are successful independent Indigenous entrepreneurs who have found a way to operate within the dominant society and still maintain their Indigenous cultural values. This study has provided an overview of the major characteristics and attitudes needs and influences of and on contemporary Indigenous entrepreneurs.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The backbone of this research revolved around two research questions. They are:

- 1) Are Indigenous businesses situated in the urban or the rural remote?
- 2) With business success do Indigenous Australian entrepreneurs lose their indigeneity and their Indigenous values?

These questions are summarised as follows.

1. Are Indigenous businesses situated in the urban or the rural remote?

As previously stated 70% of Indigenous Australians live in urban settings (Hunter 2004:86) yet the development of individual Indigenous urban entrepreneurs has been somewhat overlooked in reporting and funding programs to date. Whilst bureaucratic misjudgements have played a part in the failure of some Indigenous community based remote businesses such as the Warai pastoral enterprise (Fuller and Parker 2002: 100), there is limited funding opportunities for the aspiring Indigenous urban entrepreneur, yet we know that the majority of the Indigenous population live in the urban area. The frustration is compounded when many government publications regarding Indigenous economic reform generally make reference only to Aboriginal communities illustrating the 'exotic' image of the rural remote Aboriginal. At the 2001 Census, there were 2058 Indigenous Australians identified as self-employed and employing other people. 1845 were in urban areas; this is almost 90% that are identified as being in urban areas. The blanket application of government policy towards Indigenous 'communities' is misinformed, outdated and non-representative of the 70 per cent of Indigenous Australians who live in urban settings (Hunter 2004: 86) and the ABS identified 90% of Indigenous businesses that are urban.

It seems the urban Koori is somewhat of a phantom within literature. From the writers own observations, perhaps many academics opt for the opportunity of idyllic locations to do their research on Indigenous Australians. This is illustrated in the exodus from Universities such as the Australian National University by social anthropologists and their peers to warmer climates in the Northern Territory, northern Queensland and Central Australia when the first heavy frosts chill the Canberra landscape. The extensive travel to remote locations by Canberra based academics indicates that the 'exotic outback Aboriginal' seems to be the preferred. Perhaps the remote subject matter is far more readable when publishing than possible research on the urban majority of Indigenous Australian's. The 'outback' sells books and is a substantial business in itself. Look at any Indigenous section within University based publications.

Indigenous businesses cannot be generalised within popular images and policy as being rural remote. Researchers and policy makers need to review their stereotypical views on whom, what and where Indigenous entrepreneurs are. Only a small number exist in our remote locations.

2. With business success do Indigenous Australian entrepreneurs loose their indigeneity and their Indigenous values?

The answer is inconclusive to some degree as no precise form of measurement can be placed on the outcomes. The Indigenous Australian value system is practised within a modern urban environment. It is however, based within a modified set of Indigenous protocols and ethics. This follows decades of formal government policies which were designed to breakdown Aboriginal culture and society, and assimilate Indigenous people into the dominant Anglo-Australian social system.

In reality, each Indigenous entrepreneur responds differently to the business environment within which they operate according to their personal background and individual situation. The Indigenous entrepreneur however in general maintains and practices modern urban Indigenous Australian values. Indigenous business people work hard and value relationships. Many do not

hold a grudge against Anglo-European Australia; they work with them and mutually prosper even though they suffer from overt and covert racism in the workplace and marketplace. They believe they have adapted traditional values to suit their particular modern urban environment and call them traditional contemporary urban values. They see this adaptation as cultural and economic survival. Survival is perhaps the key word in this conclusion, if that means adopting and/or adapting to mainstream business methods, then this is what the Indigenous entrepreneur must do to survive and operate a successful business. They do not however, consider themselves any less Indigenous. It has also been shown that Indigenous entrepreneurship can adapt to western economic systems and cultural values in rural remote regions (Barnes 2006). Whilst this is not the basis of this paper it is important to understand that there are some similarities between the two groups, urban and remote.

Many participants stated they are often regarded and treated as the 'exotic-other' by Anglo-European Australians when they identify. Many do not identify and leave their ethnicity unknown in the marketplace. They also highlighted that they are obliged to live and work in the dominant society, but non-indigenous people will never live according to Indigenous culture values. The Indigenous Australian is basically forced to live according to the rules of the dominant non-indigenous socio-economic system. The overall findings of the research indicate that the Indigenous entrepreneur can remain true to their Indigenous beliefs in a modern urban environment and still be successful in business. They are not less Indigenous, just because they are a successful businessperson. Their community roles that they may have been involved in prior to business participation may change which is primarily due to time constraints, however it is shown in numerous examples that business success provides the capital to support a wider family network in areas that include improved housing, education, health, employment participation and job skill training, and role model/mentoring. Success in business has a holistic application of a positive domino effect of improvement to the businessperson's immediate and wider family.

The outcomes of the research indicate that the urban Aboriginal Australian business person is continuously changing, improving themselves and their skills in an attempt to maintain social acceptance and business interaction within the dominant society. The major impediment which is not discussed in detail in this paper is racism. This is the subject of a much wider work which indicates the inability of the dominant society to maintain change in a similar light to the Indigenous businesspeople. The dominant society may have an advantage in technological improvement and skills transfer, however how much of this is subject to financial capability? What is indicated is that the dominant society cannot undertake societal value change at the same intensity as it forces change on the Indigenous urban businessperson. In other words, the dominant society appears static in accepting change in social values; it is the Indigenous minority that appear flexible in value adaptation.

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NOTES

- i Note that there was a discrepancy of 13 businesses when the statistics were disaggregated by geography due to statistical rounding.
- ii Snowballing is a technique whereby introductions are gained from initial sources and continually built upon (Jary & Jary 1995). Introductions to participants were sought initially from government agencies, chartered accounting firms, various Chambers of Commerce and other small business contacts.
- iii The accepted 'common law' definition of Australian Aboriginality was applied. This defines an Aboriginal person as being of Aboriginal descent, self-identifying as Aboriginal, and a person who is accepted as such by the community in which they live (ATSIC 1998: 60). This three-part definition has been accepted and upheld by the *High Court in Commonwealth v Tasmania* (1983), and confirmed in *Gibbs v Capewell* (1995).
- iv Scholarly literature revealed a few alternatives when it came to a definition of an Indigenous entrepreneur. After much deliberation, the following definition was refined and applied:

The Indigenous ... entrepreneur alters traditional patterns of behaviour, by utilising resources in the pursuit of self-determination and economic sustainability via entry into self-employment, forcing social change in the pursuit of opportunity beyond the cultural norms of initial economic resources (Foley 2000: 11).

The business people included in this study were entrepreneurial in their approach to market development and utilisation of resources. They were independent and created new business in the face of risk and uncertainty for the purpose of profit and growth. Above all they identified opportunities and assembled resources (resources previously not seen within their cultural circles), and capitalised on these opportunities and resources (Zimmerer & Scarborough 1998: 3).
- v The third defining parameter of this study is that the entrepreneurs must be successful. Success for Indigenous entrepreneurs is not restricted to just objective quantitative measures that are associated with financial statements. The characteristics of a successful Indigenous entrepreneur goes further than just money, it also includes their attitude or values as an entrepreneur (Ward 1983: 155–8). A much simpler definition in the marketplace was determined after talking with several bankers, financial lenders and business development managers in government agencies which support small business (both in Australia and the USA). Their collective comment was that if the entrepreneurs survived in business for one year, they were successful and if they survived for five years they were very successful. Survival in small business is often limited to the financial viability of the business. The average time in business for the participants of this study was ten years which illustrates their ability to maximise opportunities and in some cases diversity with market trends.
- vi For an Indigenous business to be an Indigenous business it must be owned and controlled by an Indigenous person. In business studies, 51 per cent is accepted as being the benchmark for defining ownership. However, as several of the businesses studied involved mixed marriages, 50 per cent ownership was accepted as being an Indigenous business if the

children identified as Indigenous and/or the partner showed support for Indigenous issues they were accepted likewise for partnerships.

- vii As mentioned previously, businesses incorporated under the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* were not reviewed due to their divergent business philosophy and reporting requirements. Businesses incorporated under the Associations Act or relevant state associations Acts were invariably community based and arguably not-for-profit. This approach is distinctively different to that adopted by entrepreneurs who operate a commercial business within a competitive marketplace. Several of the entrepreneurs researched were incorporated under the *Australia Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* as proprietary limited companies.
- viii This is a derogatory negative term when used to describe a person of Indigenous descent.