

# **Indigenous Governance: Does it improve Indigenous employment outcomes? And if so, How?**

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### **Abstract:**

Participation in employment is one of the ways in which Indigenous people can become more embedded in Australian society. Despite well-intentioned efforts of successive governments and their contribution of a range of targeted employment programs to address Indigenous social and economic issues for the last three decades, employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians have not risen significantly.

This paper argues that the Australian governments' workforce participation model and employment programs have been based on an overly simplistic notion of supply and demand outcomes, and have had an Anglo-Saxon (whiteness) rather than Indigenous centric focus. This notion or belief is without adequate consideration of Indigenous governance and ignoring the importance of self-determination and governance as an emergent and contributing success factor of employment outcomes.

### **Introduction**

The word 'Indigenous' in this paper refers to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. Employment programs are publicly-funded measures to help disadvantaged Australians, including Indigenous people, improve their chances of finding work and becoming part of the labour market and sharing in the ongoing prosperity of the country.

The unemployment rate is one of the measures used for employment outcomes, which takes the ratio of those out of work and looking for a job, to the total labour force. For example, Indigenous men and women had a lower employment rate (employment to population ratio) than non-Indigenous men and women in each state and territory. However, Daly (1991) has argued that this measure may be less useful when considering the economic position of the Indigenous people than in the context of the mainstream economy because the standard definition of employment as 'working for pay or profit' is not applicable to the Indigenous people. Indeed, it could be argued that using unemployment rate as the standard measures of employment and unemployment may underestimate the true levels of the labour market conditions. For example, an Indigenous person who lives a hunter-gatherer lifestyle may be perceived as gainfully employed although not in activities formally recognised as employment. Even for those marginally attached to the formal labour market in the remote areas where there are few opportunities for employment, the distinction between unemployment and not being in the labour force has little validity (Daly 1991).

Despite well-intentioned ongoing efforts by successive governments and a considerable amount of public money invested and spent on Indigenous employment programs and initiatives, Indigenous Australians continue to suffer from multiple and interlinked disadvantage. Although government-initiated employment programs do contribute positively

to Indigenous social and economic issues, the practical effectiveness of these employment programs and policies has been perceived as flawed by a 'whiteness' view. 'Whiteness is constitutive of the epistemology of the West; it is an invisible regime of power that secures hegemony through discourse and has material effects in everyday life' (Moreton-Robinson 2005, 75). In the whiteness theory, the knowledge developed by Indigenous people is often dismissed as being implausible, subjective and lacking in epistemological integrity. This is despite the fact that colonial experiences have meant Indigenous people have been among the nation's most conscientious students of whiteness and racialisation (Moreton-Robinson 2005).

Furthermore, for the last three decades, the Indigenous labour force participation rate is still very low compared to mainstream non-Indigenous Australians. Although employment opportunities have improved in recent years due to skill shortages nationwide, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2006 census shows that there is no improvement in the overall position of Indigenous people in the labour market. Despite ongoing efforts by successive governments in addressing Indigenous employment issues across Australia, the number of Indigenous people in meaningful and sustainable employment has not risen significantly. Moreover, new estimates indicate that the future job growth of a growing Indigenous working-age population could result in a lowering of employment rates and rising unemployment over the remainder of this decade (Hunter, Kinfu and Taylor 2003).

The importance of employment or paid work is universal and for many people their job is central to their life for reasons additional to social and economic ones. In most culture, paid employment is a major source of financial fulfilment and a vehicle to advancement to other life fulfilment and necessities; however, it may not be a high priority for others of a unique culture such as the Indigenous people. Evidently, Indigenous employment issues are clearly not just issues that relate to individuals, but concern the wider context within which individual and collective values are produced. From this perspective, Indigenous governance is postulated as the way forward to employment and social embeddedness.

Before specifically discussing governance and Indigenous governance, this paper commences with a brief overview of Indigenous employment programs and policies, followed by literature review on the barriers of employment, and a set of theoretical frameworks to guide the understanding of Indigenous governance in intervention programs. Finally, consistent with governance focus, the paper outlines a proposed research approach designed to elicit rich, grounded insights into the experience Indigenous people have of such interventions and their perceptions of the 'way forward' through Indigenous centric models.

## **Indigenous Employment Programs and Policies**

The following employment programs and policies are among a number of initiatives developed by the Commonwealth and Queensland governments, to address Indigenous employment issues.

The *Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP)* was first introduced by the Fraser Coalition government in May 1977, in a small number of remote Aboriginal communities (Altman and Sanders 1991). Under the CDEP scheme, individuals forego their welfare entitlements and work part-time on community-based projects for similar income. The scheme proved immediately popular and was expanded to other Aboriginal communities in regional and urban areas, although the majority (73 per cent) of participants are in remote areas (Altman and Gray 2005). However, the Miller Report of 1985 identified major failings in the approaches to Indigenous labour market assistance, such as lacking to identify the barriers to employment that resulted in the provision of inappropriate responses (Dockery

2007). In October 1987, as a response to the Miller Report, the Hawke's government introduced the *Aboriginal Employment Development Policy* (AEDP); and shortly after (1998), the Job Network was introduced. The AEDP includes specific programs that focus on increasing the levels of Indigenous employment by job-matching, and others which aim to increase employment by focusing on job-creation (Daly 1991; Dockery 2007). However, since the inception of Job Network, concerns have been raised about the effectiveness of its service delivery to Indigenous clients, and the Coalition government appears to have acknowledged these concerns. As a result, the AEDP was replaced by the *Indigenous Employment Policy* (IEP), launched in 1999 (Champion 2003).

After thirty years, as part of the Federal Government's incentive for people to get off the CDEP by offering a combination of training support and job opportunities, the CDEP schemes were phased out. In some cities and major towns such as Cairns in Queensland, the CDEP is replaced with the *Structured Training and Employment Projects* (STEP). The CDEP only remains in remote areas where there is no economy, and areas that have an unemployment rate of 7 per cent or less were targeted with the new STEP program. As a result, the network of forty-one Indigenous Employment Centres, which were set up across the country to help find long-term jobs for CDEP participants, were closed by July 2007 (Karvelas 2007). These organisations and participants were instead offered opportunities to participate in general employment programs developed by the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), including the Indigenous-specific STEP brokerage services (Sanders 2007).

Similarly in Queensland, various employment programs and initiatives have been developed by the Beattie government, such as the *Breaking the Unemployment Cycles* (BUC) initiative, which was Beattie's number one priority when elected to office in June 1998. The election promise was to break the unemployment cycle and setting a target to lower the Queensland unemployment rate to 5%. Subsequently, the BUC initiative was announced in the Beattie government's first budget and started operating on 1 October 1998, with \$283 million invested over four years (QLD-DEIR 2007). In May 2001, the *Indigenous Employment Policy for Queensland Government Building and Civil Construction Projects* or IEP (20% Policy) was introduced to maximise potential employment opportunities on Queensland Government building and civil construction projects. The IEP (20% Policy) has required all Queensland Government agencies that provide capital infrastructure funding for projects conducted in designated Indigenous communities to assign 20 per cent of the deemed labour hours for the employment and training of local Indigenous people. The policy applies to all civil construction contracts with no minimum threshold, and building construction projects with a total value of \$100,000 (GST inclusive) and over, with half of the 20 percent labour hours required to be in accredited training (QLD-DET 2004). Considerable resources have also been devoted to the implementation of the IEP (20% Policy), such as the creation of Indigenous Employment and Training Support Officers' (IETSOs) positions, and the appointment of Indigenous Employment and Training Managers (IETMs). The IEP (20% Policy) was reviewed in December 2005 by Powers and Associates (Aust.) Pty Ltd. As measured by the data in compliance reports from May 2001 to December 2003, 347 Indigenous community members benefited from the IEP (20% Policy) and received employment and training in various types and durations.

Overall, the BUC initiative is perceived (by politicians and bureaucrats) as very successful. As at 30 June 2007, under the BUC initiative, more than 170,000 Queenslanders had been assisted including more than 120,000 into jobs. In December 2006, the unemployment rate in Queensland dropped to 3.7%, the lowest rate in more than 30 years and well below the

national rate of 4.5% (QLD-DEIR 2007). From 1 July 2007, the BUC initiative was phased out to make way for the *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* (SQW) initiative.

The SQW initiative draws on the success elements of the BUC initiative and was developed as part of the broader reforms of the *Queensland Skills Plan* (QLD-DEIR 2007). In addition, an *Indigenous Partnership Agreement* was established under the *Partnerships Queensland Future Directions Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy*. The Policy was developed based on partnerships, community and industry engagement, accountability, and shared responsibility, which signifies a partnership between the Queensland Government and nineteen nominated Indigenous communities. To implement the SQW initiative, the Queensland Government is investing around \$81 million each year to assist 17,000 disengaged, unemployed, and under-engaged working age people to compete for sustainable jobs or jobs at higher skills levels (QLD-Government 2007).

Nonetheless, although unemployment rates in Queensland is currently at its 30-year low, unemployment rates for Indigenous Australians is still unacceptably high. In order to fill the gaps, literature review is undertaken to identify Indigenous issues and their implications on employment outcomes. Preliminary literature review revealed the gaps in literatures on the role of Indigenous governance for effective employment outcomes, which is discussed in later sections.

## **Literature Review**

Governance within the Indigenous communities across Australia is the focus of this literature review. The term ‘community’ was popularised in the mid 1970s after the Whitlam government established the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and was used to help describe the way in which government distributed funds for welfare programs and delivered services to Indigenous people. Since then, the word ‘community’ was automatically accepted as culturally appropriate, democratic, and at the same time politically and socially acceptable to the majority of Australians. Moreover, the Indigenous people across Australia became so good at playing the ‘community game’ that many have begun to believe in it (Smith 1989; cited in (Peters-Little 2000)).

*How much of who and what the community is, has in fact been shaped by ‘white’ government policies?* Before answering the question, this paper will first explore the barriers to Indigenous employment that may impact on Indigenous governance. If not addressed effectively, it is likely that Indigenous people will continue to occupy poorer standards and living conditions compared to non-Indigenous Australians.

Although individually discussed, the following barriers to Indigenous employment are interrelated and may directly or indirectly impact on Indigenous governance. For example, the quality and relative crowding of Indigenous households is negatively associated with school attendance, learning outcomes, and health. Improvements in housing and health, taking into account the geographical location, could positively affect education and training outcomes, resulting in employable skills, which positively will lead to community capacity building (governance).

### ***Geographical Location***

Geographical location of residence has been identified in literatures as one of the determinant of employment outcomes for Indigenous people. Statistically, according to the ABS 2006 census (ABS 2007a), Queensland has the second largest Indigenous population (112,772) second only to New South Wales (119,865); out of which, 87,322 are Aboriginal people and

16,415 are Torres Strait Islander, with some 9,035 people identified as being both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Moreover, the size of Queensland and the wide dispersion of the Indigenous population across urban, regional, rural and remote areas means there is no single state labour market. 30 per cent of Indigenous Queenslanders live in major cities; 48 per cent in regional areas; and 22 per cent in remote or very remote areas. In major cities and regional centres, a higher proportion reside in areas where general labour force participation rates are lower than average and unemployment is higher than average.

Hunter (1996) uses two measures of geography in his analysis: the part-of-State variable used by ABS, which divides Australia into capital city, urban, and rural areas, according to settlement size and type; and whether the respondent lives in a household which is more than 100 kilometres away from a TAFE institution, in an attempt to capture the extent to which opportunities for paid employment are limited in very remote areas (Hunter 1996). Moreover, for family reasons or the desire to live a life closely based on traditional values, many Indigenous people choose to live in traditional remote areas where there are no jobs and thereby choose not to move to locations where there are employment opportunities (Gregory 2006). This is evident from the ABS statistics (ABS 2007b) that shows a higher proportion of Indigenous Queenslanders reside in areas of low or no economy structure, such as in remote or very remote areas of Queensland.

### ***Housing***

A majority of the Indigenous people (64 per cent) are living in accommodation provided by Indigenous Housing organisations or in other community housing (ABS 2002, 2007b). Nevertheless, Indigenous people are significantly over-represented in conditions of homelessness, marginal housing, housing affordability, tenancy access, sustainability problems, overcrowding, and sub-standard accommodation (Flatau, Cooper, Edwards, McGrath and Marinova 2005). Although Australian governments have made a commitment to improve housing outcomes for Indigenous people with *Building a Better Future: Indigenous Housing to 2010* agreement, due to the complexity of Indigenous housing issues, the success in achieving better housing-related outcomes for Indigenous Australians are yet to be delivered over the remaining two years of the agreement.

Flatau et al. (2005) identified major potential barriers to mainstream public and community housing access, and to the sustainability of tenancies, such as discrimination, cultural and historical forces. For example, indirect discrimination or perceptions of discrimination by Indigenous clients may occur in longer waiting times, higher rates of eviction, and/or higher rates of application rejection for Indigenous people than for non-Indigenous people. As a result of not being able to gain access to secure public housing options, they often seek accommodation with other Indigenous families, which exacerbates existing overcrowding problems. This issue is evident from statistics that indicate overcrowding and lack of adequate facilities such as a clean water supply and sewerage disposal are particularly problematic in remote areas (ABS 2002, 2007b).

Cultural and historical forces, in terms of Indigenous housing issues, may also be potential barriers. Traditionally, Indigenous people are more mobile than the non-Indigenous population, which could place pressures on the personal management of tenancies, the payment of rent and may also lead to severe overcrowding problems. Other risk factors include poverty, domestic and family violence, incarceration, drug and alcohol abuse, and mental illness (Flatau et al. 2005).

### ***Health and Disability***

Indigenous health outcomes are recognised to be very poor both relative to those for the non-Indigenous population and in absolute terms, and it is generally known that life expectancies for Indigenous Australians are some twenty years lower than for non-Indigenous Australians. Making it all the more unacceptable is the fact that this life expectancy appears not to have risen in recent times even though that for the non-Indigenous population has risen. Ross (2006) conducted an exploratory analysis on the link between employment and health status, and concluded that there is a significant link between health and employment, and that long-term disabilities have significant impact on a person's likelihood of being in employment. For remote communities, isolation and limited access to health services may exacerbate these problems. While the proportion of Indigenous people in remote and non-remote areas are reported to be in good health, those in remote areas were less likely to rate their health as fair or poor. In general, those with higher incomes had better self-reported health status. Overall, differences in health status between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations may be affected by differences in the age structure; and age is an important determinant of health, with consistently higher rates of disability and ill-health reported among older age groups (ABS 2002, 2007b).

### ***Education and Training***

In the National report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training 2004 (DEST 2006), four priority issues relating to improving outcomes for Indigenous students have been identified, that is, literacy and numeracy, enrolments, attendance and retention, and gaining of Year 12 Certificates. Other recommendations include early childhood education, school and community educational partnerships, school leadership, quality teaching, and pathways to training, employment and higher education (Albert 2006). These recommendations and strategies are language focused and culturally inclusive/responsive to the needs of Indigenous students and their communities, in order to achieve real influence in school decision-making. The success of these strategies was evident, for example, Sarra (2006), Cherbourg State School's first Aboriginal principal, presented a case study of the school in which she discussed the implications of genuinely valuing Aboriginal perspectives on Indigenous education, such as employing and engaging Indigenous staff and to ensure that the notions of assimilation and/or absorption are not implied during teaching (Sarra 2006). It was further proven from a study by the Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) that Indigenous teachers have extensive impact on the development of an Indigenous child's self-identity (DETYA; cited in Sarra (2006). Furthermore, Hunter (1996) argued that the primacy of education is an underlying determinant of Indigenous employment status; and that education should be accounted for in even the most elementary analysis of Indigenous employment or labour force status in general (Ross and Whiteford 1990).

In addition, the role of vocational education and training (VET) and its impact on Indigenous employment outcomes are also widely discussed in literatures. These reports draw on VET's strategies in addressing Indigenous students' vocational aspirations, and key factors that may lead to positive and improved outcomes for Indigenous Australians (Flamsted and Golding 2005; Helme and Hill 2005). These reports are, however, not conclusive on the effectiveness of the VET systems for Indigenous students.

Equally important, basic numeracy and literacy skills enable labour participation and prevent social exclusion. Evidently, the levels of literacy among Indigenous populations particularly those in rural and remote areas are of particular concern to the Australian governments (ABS 2007a); and limited literacy and numeracy skills are the most frequently cited barrier to

positive training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people. It has also been argued that without adequate literacy and numeracy skills make it extremely unlikely that Indigenous people will be able to move into professional or semi-professional positions for many years (Altman 2007). This is evident in the workplace where a majority of tasks are underpinned by oral communication, reading, writing and basic mathematical tasks, including a good grasp of the English language. The development of these skills will positively impact upon an individual's life choices and social growth, and also provide pathways for positive engagement in employment and/or access to further education and training opportunities.

### ***Employable Skills***

Lack of relevant employable skills is a key barrier to sustainable employment across Australia but is more prevalent in Indigenous communities where educational attainment and outcomes are poorer compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. On the other hand, even if an Indigenous person secures employment but is not work-ready and without basic skills, it will statistically result in an over-representation in low skilled jobs and an under-representation in higher level or skilled jobs. For example, when applying for jobs, an unskilled Indigenous person are placed too low on the candidate ranking list and rarely get the chance to be offered a job (Gregory 2006). This vicious cycle will continue, consequently leading to low self-esteem and lower income security, which may eventually lead to criminal activities and an over-representation in the criminal justice system.

### ***Criminal Justice System***

Indigenous people tend to have relatively high rates of contact with the criminal justice system and are over-represented in the prison system. These high rates may be both a contributing factor to, and an outcome of, the disadvantage that Indigenous people experiences across a range of social dimensions, including employment. Indigenous people who had ever been charged by police were around twice as likely to be unemployed as the rest of the Indigenous population (ABS 2002). For example, being unable to obtain employment may lead to drinking, which increases the probability of being arrested for offences relating to drunkenness, and a person who has been arrested and/or convicted of an offence may be stigmatised by employers and may be less likely to obtain employment (Borland and Hunter 2000). Similarly, those ever charged were more likely to have ceased formal schooling before Year 10, although the difference primarily occurred among males. Of those Indigenous people who had ever been charged by police, those first charged before the age of 17 years were more like to have been arrested and/or incarcerated in the last five years than those first charged when they were older.

### ***Aboriginality and Discrimination***

Also equally important, the effect of Aboriginality was found to be associated with high unemployment rate (Miller 1989, 1991). Also argued by Daly (1991), the introduction of Aboriginality reduced the probability of employment by about a quarter for men and by about a half for women. This may be the result of discrimination or poor skill levels, which will result in the *discouraged worker* effect, which may operate in urban areas if the Aboriginal people feel they are discriminated against in the labour market and are discouraged from searching for work.

Although not publicised as much as the other variables mentioned above, discrimination is an important issue, as evident and mandated in government policies and legislation. For example, in 1966, South Australia introduced the *Prohibition of Discrimination Act*, the first

Act of its kind in Australia, which banned all types of race and colour discrimination in employment, accommodation, legal contracts and public facilities. Similarly, the *Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act* came into force in 1975 during Whitlam's government (Fraser and Atkinson 1997). To this day, Commonwealth, States and Territories have implemented the Discrimination Act to protect all Australians, including Indigenous people and other disadvantaged groups. However, it can be argued that although theoretically implemented and legislated, in reality racial discrimination still prevail in the private and public sectors, albeit discreet or not officially reported.

In summary, building governance is essentially a developmental issue; not just getting the structure right. By addressing Indigenous core issues at the community level may legitimise Indigenous governance as the way forward.

## **Indigenous Governance as the Way Forward**

It is widely acknowledged that Indigenous communities in Australia are in crisis, and it is increasingly debated among researchers and academics that this is a crisis of governance. Moreover, the current emphasis in the literature is on governance as extending government, to bring a wider set of actors to better inform the development of policy and delivery of services (Keast, Mandell and Brown 2006). Indigenous governance sits within this framework; more specifically, Indigenous governance is community specific and links to self-determination. However, there is also a negative side to this community-specific governance that has been identified when ATSIC and its recent demise is discussed in later sections. Furthermore, it is difficult to raise any community's capacity to be self-governing unless it has a clear idea of what it is governing for (Sullivan 2007).

Basically, governance is how society is ordered – state, market and community - and in practice, they are mixed (Keast et al. 2006). Fundamentally, governance is about power, jurisdiction, control and choice (Plumptre and Graham 1999), encompassing both formal and informal structures and processes through which a group, organisation, community or society, conducts and orders its internal affairs as well as its relation with others. Indigenous governance raises the questions on accountability, sustainability and responsiveness. It also raises the question on how Indigenous governance impacts on employment outcomes, taking into account Indigenous history on assimilation, self-determination and self-management.

The meaning of Indigenous governance is more appropriately stated by Jackie Huggins AM, during her speech at the 2004 Australian Council of Social Service Congress, Alice Springs:

For Indigenous Australians, community development and, more particularly, governance, provides the link between all the other issues, all the other priorities and concerns that can affect our citizenship and our experience of human rights. Governance, or the lack of it, affects everything that happens to Indigenous Australians. It is an absolute pre-requisite to community development for Indigenous Australians... Stronger Indigenous governance gives stronger identity, self esteem, and a sense of belonging which gives Indigenous citizens the tools and the incentive to be part of the wider community (Huggins 2004, 45-46).

The beginnings of self-determination go back well before the time of Prime Minister Whitlam, and a major step towards achieving this goal was the granting of citizenship and voting rights to Aborigines. By December 1965, all States and Territories had awarded Aborigines the right to vote as part of the assimilation's endeavour, which subsequently enabled Aborigines to take firmer control of their own affairs (Palmer 1990). The Federal

Referendum of 1967 allowed Aborigines to be counted in the census, however, it was not until the Whitlam Government was elected to office in 1972 that self-determination was introduced as official government policy, ‘...away from the paternalism and implicit racism of the assimilations policies that preceded them.’ (Tonkinson and Howard 1990, 68). When the Whitlam Government was removed from office in November 1975 and replaced by the Liberal-National Country Party Coalition, self-determination became self-management.

There also appeared to be a conceptual confusion within government about the basis of ‘governance’ as it applies to Indigenous communities. For example, the roles of the Shire Council, the Community Justice Groups, community-based government agencies and non-government Boards were not clearly described in the *Meeting Challenges, Making Choices* (MCMC) documentation (QLD-Government 2005). The main concept of the MCMC is governance, capacity and community functioning, aimed at fostering community capacity and locally-based solutions, with a focus on improving the health and wellbeing of those living in the communities. The MCMC report also identified welfare as promoting economic dependency, and that policy initiatives of successive governments have failed to address the systemic and generational dependence on welfare in Indigenous communities (Abbott 2002; cited in (QLD-Government 2007).

A welfare state will increasingly be presented as an impediment to economic growth, particularly to the Indigenous communities. The Indigenous people’s experience of the welfare state has been negative, completely destructive and tragic. Ironically, the welfare state was a great and civilising achievement for mainstream Australian society. The welfare state has meant security and an opportunity for development, and has been *enabling*, for many non-Indigenous Australians; whereas for the Indigenous people in Cape York Peninsula, for example, income support or *passive welfare* is payable only to the permanently unemployed and marginalised. ‘What is the exception among white fellas – almost complete dependence on cash handouts from the government – is the rule for us’ (Pearson 2007, 6). After three decades and two generations, life in the safety net has produced a social disaster for the Indigenous communities. Pearson (2007) argues that these social problems do not emanate from an innate incapacity on the part of the Indigenous people, but on the overwhelming reliance upon passive welfare support without reciprocation. ‘Our social problems are not *endemic* – they have not always been with us. We are not a hopeless or imbecile people’ (Pearson 2007, 7).

Pearson (2007) also believes that there are structural barriers to Indigenous progress, and the principal structural problem concerns Indigenous power relationship with the rest of Australian society through its structure of government: judicial, legislative and executive. He expressed his doubt that the existing mechanisms of Australian democracy would work for the Indigenous people whose socioeconomic circumstances are so egregiously out of step with the rest of Australia. In so far as the needs of Indigenous people are concerned, when it comes to the judicial institutions of government or representation in legislatures, there is no level playing field and the power imbalance would distort even the best intentions. Moreover, Indigenous people are too small a minority to make Indigenous dealings with the executive of government because there will never be a sufficient number of Indigenous people working for the governments; and there are too few Indigenous leaders and community people with the necessary expertise and knowledge to deal with all the programs, policies, procedures and mechanisms of government that affect Indigenous people. In addition, Indigenous people do not have the leverage to exercise electoral power to force political leaders to ensure government delivers, and the existence of an institutional bias against Indigenous people, referred to as institutional racism, also makes it hard for Indigenous people to get government to work for them (Pearson 2007).

In order to address this lack of structural power on the part of a small Indigenous minority within an otherwise functioning democracy that serves its mainstream well, separate institutions of governance for the Indigenous community has been established. For example, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and other national, regional and local institutions were created to delegate certain space for governance of their own affairs. However, ATSIC's jurisdictions did not cover the whole of Indigenous affairs; the Commonwealth continued to be responsible for important components of Indigenous affairs such as education, health and income support. Pearson (2007) considers this accountability relationship as not mutual because it did not impose return obligations on the Federal government and no attempts was made to establish equality between ATSIC and government. On the other hand, ATSIC has created accountability issues such as conflict of interests in its management of government funds, which is one of the reasons why ATSIC was abolished. The implication of ATSIC on Indigenous governance is in itself a topic for in-depth research in the final thesis.

Partnerships between Indigenous people and governments, state and federal, are also suggested as the mechanism of Indigenous governance. One of the MCMC's recommendations in terms of economic development is for governments to establish partnerships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and organisations, in order to facilitate effective delivery of economic development services (Daly 2000; cited in (QLD-Government 2007). On the contrary, as the Indigenous people are too small a minority, Pearson (2007) argues that partnerships between grossly unequal partners are not real partnerships; rather, they are master-servant, boss-client relationships. Furthermore, if consultation and not negotiation is the principal official means of transaction between the parties, then it is not a true partnership; rather, there is one party with the power to act unilaterally and one that is subject to that power. Nonetheless, the success of partnership strategies is evident in the Lockhart River Community Development project in which the partners use negotiation tables to acknowledge that both sides are learning together and taking action to improve outcomes (Hagan 2005; cited in (QLD-Government 2005).

Although there is no single model of good governance applicable to Indigenous communities, the issue of cultural match has been identified as a critical component of good Indigenous governance. For example, in the United States context, in terms of the Harvard Project on Indian Economic Development, governance requires not only a measure of self-determination and good-governance structures, but also that these good-governance structures match with the culture of a community that is the development target (Sullivan 2007). However, in the Australian context, cultural match can lead both to bad governance and an inherently oppressive reductive codification of a complex culture. It is both oppressive to impose non-Indigenous constitutions on Indigenous collectivises, and unnecessary, because Aboriginal culture is not constituted in such a way that it can be reflected in effective modern organisations in any deep sense (Sullivan 2007; Smith 1999).

It could also be argued that the foundation to a progression towards Indigenous governance is the community at grass-roots level. It is crucial that Indigenous people themselves identify and define their community, its distinctive features and history, and to acknowledge the input they have had in the shaping of their community and identity. This relates to Maslow's basic physiological needs, which will be discussed in later sections. It is also important for the Indigenous people to raise questions about the impact that white governments and their policies have played in the development of their 'community'. The use of the term 'community' without the Indigenous people's consultation, self analysis and definition, has in fact acted as a barrier to self-determination and setting communities up for administrative failure (Peters-Little 2000).

Nonetheless, despite the emphasis and arguments in literatures, the practicality of the Indigenous employment programs and initiatives remains largely unknown.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

In order to understand and predict research issues and limitations discussed above, this paper will look at some core theories in terms of their relevancy to Indigenous employment and outcomes, and to draw an understanding and insights from a variety of disciplines.

### ***Network Governance Theory***

Governance is an issue which concerns all levels of government and citizen participation, from international level to highly devolved localised urban partnerships. Although its roots are firmly within political science, governance has become a significant and relevant concept within social policy, notably on how to innovatively address the so-called ‘wicked problems’ of social exclusion and public service improvement (Durose and Rummery 2006). As such, governments are increasingly looking to capitalise on networks and associated network governance arrangements as a new way forward within a complex climate, and as a way of enhancing a wide array of responsibilities including policy development and implementation, in order to achieve integrated service outcomes (Keast et al. 2006). The authors hypothesise the potential for mixing and remixing the state, market and network governance modes but warned that if unmanaged, the expansion of modes and mechanisms can produce a ‘crowded’ policy domain, which prevent coherent and effective policy and decision-making to occur (Keast et al. 2006). Nevertheless, despite the almost bewildering array of reforms and initiatives to introduce the process of governance across the public and private sectors, it can be argued that anecdotally the role of the government and the public sector are still perceived (by community-based organisations, for example) as strong in retaining control, particularly where the government is a key facilitator and provider of funds. For example, regardless of the good intention to allow autonomy within an Indigenous community, governments or provider of funding are still in control. Moreton-Robinson (2005) viewed this as the invisibility of ‘whiteness’ in Indigenous network governance, which is less to do with skin colour than it is to further powerful interests.

### ***Needs Hierarchy Theory***

This theory regards people as unique, self-determined and worthy of respect, and guided by a variety of basic human needs such as self-actualisation or the need to achieve one’s full potential. One may argue that to be in a position of governance, a person needs to achieve self-actualisation. Evidently, according to a humanistic theorist, Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) cited in (Berger and Thompson 1994), unless the basic physiological needs are satisfied, people are unable to fulfil their full potential or self-actualisation. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs include the most basic of physiological needs, security and stability needs, belonging needs, esteem needs, and the highest needs for self-actualisation. As basic needs are met, higher needs are triggered, and the balance between negative and positive forces changes as the needs are met. As they progress, individuals become more prepared to participate in, for example, mainstream employment.

While the needs hierarchy theory is optimistic and encouraging, one may argue that this theory is overly idealistic for not taking into account the variables and present realities such as social inequalities, governmental policies, and injustices (Berger and Thompson 1994) that Indigenous people have endured for decades. Moreover, Maslow’s needs hierarchy theory

treats all individuals in a deterministic way, that is, 'there is a need; here is the response; the response will satisfy the need; the individual moves on to a higher need' (Andrew, Breckwoldt, Crombie, Aslin, Kelly and Holmes 2005); which seems to ignore those aspects of what makes an individual unique.

On this perspective, it can be argued that the government employment programs and policies are classically based on 'one size fits all', which is evident in the uneven employment outcomes across Queensland. In their attempts to streamline programs, policies and guidelines, for example, bureaucrats ignored the diversity of Indigenous communities and their local economic structure.

### ***Economic and Human Capital Theory***

For this paper, the economic and human capital perspective provides a framework to help decide whether or not to participate in capital investments such as mainstream employment. This approach assumes that individuals decide what they will participate in by weighing up the costs and benefits of involvement or participation in the workforce. It has also been argued that public employees are catalysts for building human capital at the individual level. For example, in addition to their formal job roles in pursuing the common good and furthering the public interest, public servants also perform a variety of civic duties, which are crucial in forming and sustaining social capital in society at large (Brewer 2003). Again, it can be argued that regardless of the appointments of Indigenous public servants to negotiate economic and human capital, the 'whiteness' of public policies and role statements can impact on the effectiveness of their roles, which will consequently impact on Indigenous governance.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The majority of the research design or methodology will be qualitative, using ethnographic and case-study approaches to capture the social reality of the Indigenous communities. It will follow the empowered research outcomes approach of Smith (1999) and other Indigenous research methods, such that it will provide benefit to the Indigenous community being researched. In addition, to fully understand the Indigenous culture and beliefs that may impact on Indigenous governance and employment prospects, historical research will also be undertaken, using primary and secondary sources. The aim is to determine the interplay of culture and Indigenous decision making (governance); about creating an environment within which Indigenous people can make better choice for themselves; and about motivation and the mechanisms that can create communities with more productive outcomes, as articulated by Gregory (2006).

### ***Data Gathering Mechanism***

The data gathering techniques or methods will be by literature reviews, interviews, and artefacts or written records of strategic plans and practices within the Indigenous employment programs and policies. The qualitative research report will be logical, descriptive and analytic presentation of evidence that has been systematically collected and interpreted during on-site visits at Indigenous communities across Queensland. A quantitative research may also be used to determine the effectiveness of data collection of Indigenous employment outcomes.

The participants will be Indigenous people involved in or associated with employment programs in a sample of communities in Queensland plus key non-Indigenous participants in those programs. The visits across Queensland will be accompanied/introduced by Indigenous project

managers and/or officers who will facilitate access into relevant Indigenous communities and participants.

### ***Ethical Consideration and Indigenous Research Sensitivity***

The research is subject to intense ethical scrutiny, including the completion and endorsement of a National Ethics Application Form (NEAF). Further, and most particularly, the project will be informed by a Research Reference group comprising of personnel with considerable experience in undertaking research within Indigenous Communities.

Permission from local Indigenous Councils will be sought, prior to setting up interviews with Indigenous participants in respective communities. The researcher will also develop a letter of introduction and a one-page specific Code of Conducts relevant to Indigenous research, which will be shown to participants before conducting the interviews. The interviews will be conducted in a naturalistic and relaxed manner, planned and ad-hoc, taking up opportunities as they arose rather than conforming to rigid process of set questions. Participants will be interviewed individually, however, where participants preferred to be interviewed in a company of one or more other participants, this will be appropriately allowed.

### **Conclusion**

Employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians have been one of the core concerns for the Commonwealth, States, and Territories governments. Barriers to access employment have been identified and acknowledged; resulting in considerable amount of public money and resources invested and spent on specific Indigenous employment programs. Moreover, participation in employment is one of the ways in which Indigenous people can become more embedded in Australian society. Unfortunately, despite well-intentioned initiatives of successive governments in funding employment programs for all Australians, employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians have not risen significantly although unemployment rates for non-Indigenous Australians are at its lowest in more than thirty years. While progress has been made to improve the economic well-being of Indigenous Australians, the reality is that a large gap remains before the Indigenous communities fully share the nation's prosperity. This brought out the 'whiteness' theory that have been debated among Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers who implied that the imperceptible whiteness policies and processes are responsible for the unacceptable gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It is evident that Indigenous employment issues are clearly not just issues that relate to Indigenous individuals, but concern the wider context within which individual and collective values are produced. In this context, Indigenous governance and relevant theories provide an appropriate and useful tool in the analysis of Indigenous issues that potentially impact on Indigenous employment outcomes.

Indeed, where to from here? With all the rhetoric and sceptic surrounding the Indigenous issues, one may still be optimistic with the latest development when Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, on 13 February 2008, said *sorry* to the stolen generation of the Indigenous people. One may perceive this as fulfilling the *belonging* and *acceptance* needs (Maslow's middle hierarchy of needs) for the Indigenous Australians, and an acknowledgement and affiliation by all other Australians, which will hopefully enable the possibilities of fulfilling other basic needs of the Indigenous people. Only then will higher needs of self-esteem and self-actualisation or governance, be achieved by Indigenous Australians in order to fully function as other mainstream Australians.

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