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Indigenous entrepreneurship in timber furniture manufacturing: The Gumatj venture in Northern Australia

*Cecil A. L. Pearson[1], Klaus Helms[2]
[1]School of Management, Curtin University, Perth, Western Australia
[2]Northern Territory Emergency Response, Nhulunbuy, Northern Territory, Australia
*Cecil.Pearson@cbs.curtin.edu.au

Abstract: Despite commitment by the Australian Government to improve the economic independence of Indigenous people Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders they are the most socio economic disadvantaged group relative to other Australians. This commitment manifests in the four main strands of; 1) welfare, 2) installation of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme, 3) legislation enabling Traditional Land Owners and miners to negotiate agreements for training and employment of Indigenous people, and 4) programmes to encourage Indigenous entrepreneurship. This paper reports an Australian Indigenous entrepreneurial business (furniture making) initiated by the Gumatj clan of the Yolngu people in East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory (NT) of Australia. These Indigenous people are employed in timber milling and transporting the milled timber to Gunyangara on the Gove Peninsula where it is dried and used to make furniture. Overcoming the literature documented barriers to Australian Indigenous entrepreneurship compelled the Gumatj to develop a business model with potential to foster pathways for other Indigenous small business endeavours.

Keywords - *Australia; Aboriginal; Indigenous; Entrepreneurship; Furniture manufacturing*

1. Introduction

There is considerable socio economic disparity between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians. In addition to continuing significantly lower labour market participation (Dillion & Westbury, 2008; Gray & Hunter, 2002), with resultant lower incomes, and poorer employment prospects (Borooah & Mangan, 2002; Maddison, 2008) Indigenous Australians are likely to experience a raft of contingent social problems. For example, the inability to secure employment is often linked with lower levels of English literacy and numeracy competencies (Altman, 2009; Bradley, et al. 2007; Hughes, 2008). These features leave Indigenous people vulnerable to poverty (Hunter, 2009; Jonas, 2003), unsanitary living conditions (McDonald, et al., 2008; Tripcony, 2000), lower life expectancy and a higher risk of cardio vascular disease (Pholi, Black & Richards, 2009; Rowley, et al., 2008), greater incarceration rates (Krieg, 2006), and an array of other negative social indicators (Altman, Biddle & Hunter, 2005; Lee, et al., 2009). The manifestation of these states compels Australian governments to generate policies and strategies to improve the well being of Indigenous people.

To overcome disadvantages experienced by Indigenous people the Australian government has implemented four main strands of economic work reforms. One arrangement is income support for people who are unemployed because they cannot work, when they are in locations where jobs are hard to find, or there is a lack of work (Brown, 2009; Gray & Hunter, 2002). A second prominent initiative commenced during 1977 when the Australian government created the CDEP scheme, which monetary subsidises work for Indigenous people (Altman & Jordan, 2009; Arthur, 2002). In remote regions of the country a third strand is demonstrated as a concerted drive by the Australian government to encourage mining companies to more vigorously engage Indigenous communities, and in particular to substantially increase Aboriginal employment levels (Harvey & Brereton, 2005; Barker, 2006). Commitment to the importance of Indigenous economic independence underpins the fourth pervasive employment strategy of the Australian government, which has fostered the notion of Aboriginal people developing and operating their own businesses (Australian Government, 2008). In spite of the thrust of the relevant literature suggesting none of these four work related initiatives have been overly helpful in improving the socio economic status of Australian Indigenous people this manuscript presents a counterpoint.

In remote regions of Australia Indigenous aspirations are embedded in traditional cultural and economic circumstances. These arrangements are wedded to living on ancestral lands where the Indigenous people can maintain “strong spiritual and religious connections” (Altman, 2003: 68), and where the communities

can engage in hybrid social economies based on sustainable wildlife harvesting (Trudgen, 2000). Prominent productive features of the social networks of the remote communities are kin based relations and gift giving. These contexts are very different to the dominant Australian capitalistic society. Consequently, government handouts and welfare dependency, that Pearson (2007) and earlier Gilbert (1973) claimed led to "the collapse of social norms and the rise of ills such as violence, suicide, alcoholism and child abuse" (Maddison, 2008: 50), have not provided intended pathways for greater Indigenous community autonomy and self determination. Furthermore, the CDEP scheme, which was introduced as a work alternative to unemployment benefits, is to become a training programme (Participant Fact Sheet, 2009). Moreover, few Indigenous people are employed in the Australian mining sector (Brereton & Parmenter, 2008; Daff & Pearson, 2009; Tiplady & Barclay, 2008), while Australian Indigenous entrepreneurship, modelled on Western principles and lacking cultural attitudes is precarious (Furneaux & Brown, 2008; Russell – Mundine, 2007). The central theme of this paper is Australian Indigenous small business is likely to be facilitated by contexts of strong cultural continuities that generate economic, ecological and social benefits.

The purpose of this paper is to describe in six main parts an emerging Australian Indigenous entrepreneurial timber furniture building venture. Following the Introduction (the first part) is outlined the four main income opportunity pathways for Australian Indigenous people. Within this section is succinctly expressed the identified barriers and obstacles for Australian Indigenous socio economic advancement, and in particular those that confront entrepreneurial endeavours. In the third section is provided an outline of the entrepreneurial stakeholders, the sites of their activities as well as the resources they use; and the next section shows their achievements as illustrations. A fifth section discusses current achievements in terms of the relevant entrepreneurial literature to lead to implications for the paper content in terms of Australian Indigenous entrepreneurship. A sixth concluding section advances notions for robust Australian Indigenous entrepreneurial community businesses.

2. Australian Indigenous Income Opportunities

Endeavour by Australian governments to transform the low socio economic status of Indigenous people has been characterised by two broad approaches; 1) maintenance, and 2) reliance. Compelling arguments for the social and economic maintenance of individuals, families and communities are embraced within the Federal government policy of mutual obligation. A central core of the policy for providing financial assistance for the unemployed is all people should have an opportunity to participate in community economic and social lifestyles (Brown, 2009). But linked to this notion of social inclusion is the caveat citizens receiving unemployment benefits are expected to 1) seek work, 2) undertake relevant job training, or 3) accept temporary employment (Jonas, 2003). Despite these normative arguments of mutual obligation for a plethora of reasons (e.g., low education, worse health, jobless households, lack of local jobs) a great deal of Australian Indigenous people are welfare recipients (Altman & Gray, 2005; Lee, et al., 2008).

A dependence on social security payments or handouts (without undertaking work) has attracted considerable debate. Brown (2009) reports the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (conducted in 2003 and 2005) found extensive support (70 per cent of respondents) for the notion people receiving welfare payments have an obligation to find work. This finding reflects a proportion of the Australian public can hold a belief some people are unlikely to benefit from training programmes, and because of personal attributes are destined to remain on welfare. However, within the Australian Indigenous community arguments have been advanced for reducing income support (without working). For instance, prominent Australian Indigenous leaders such as Pearson (2000), Perkins (1982), and Yunupingu (2009) have consistently argued for welfare reform. Pearson and his colleagues contend welfare dependency leads to the destruction of traditional Indigenous models of social organisations, and argue the symptoms of 'passive welfare' emerge as violence, alcoholism, abuse of children and suicide. Those phenomena abound across the remote Australian Aboriginal communities. Three decades ago Gilbert (1973) noted how welfare had sapped the initiative and self discipline of Australian Indigenous people. Notably, about that time the Australian government introduced the CDEP scheme, which was a strategy of reliance.

Strategies providing avenues for strengthening the reliance of Australian Indigenous people for their economic independence has three main streams; 1) CDEP scheme, 2) mining sector participation, and 3) Indigenous small business. The CDEP scheme, the most long standing Indigenous employment initiative (Jonas, 2003) (based on the mutual obligation principle), was introduced as a pilot programme in 1977

(Altman, Gray & Levitus, 2005; Arthur, 2002). By 2004 the scheme had expanded rapidly to peak at about 40,000 participants, and despite a number of assessments that have provided equivocal findings, with the greatest criticism seldom do participants transition into unsubsidised work (Altman & Jordan, 2009; Arthur, 2002), the Australian Federal government announced the scheme was to be repackaged as a work readiness initiative (Karvelas & Murphy, 2008; Participant Fact Sheet, 2009).

During the past decades mining companies have expressed considerable interest in engaging Australian Indigenous communities. Underpinning this radical proactive approach to promote greater sharing of mineral resources, which is expected to generate personal wealth and social benefits by delivering greater job opportunities for Indigenous people, have been legal developments and recognition for a need to address the persistent poor socio economic conditions in Aboriginal communities (Barker, 2006; Crawley & Sinclair, 2003; Harvey & Brereton, 2005). Legal impetus was demonstrated in 1992 by the formal recognition of traditional Indigenous land owners, which culminated in the Native Title Act being passed by the Keating Government in 1993. International industry charters (e.g., International Council on Mining and Metals, International Labour Organisation Convention 169), and national regulatory entities (i.e., Minerals Council of Australia, Aboriginal Councils, Australian Governments) have advanced agreements between mining companies and Indigenous groups for delivering business developments, training, education and meaningful job opportunities (Arbeláez-Ruiz, 2010; Brereton & Parmenter, 2008). Despite these profound transformations the level of Indigenous participation in mainstream mining work remains relatively low (Barker, 2006; Brereton & Parmenter, 2008; Tiplady & Barclay, 2007).

Recognising the importance of Indigenous economic independence, in 1999, the Australian government reinvigorated business and employment programmes for Aboriginal people. Subsequent to the 1967 Commonwealth referendum Federal and State governments provided finance to encourage the development of Aboriginal enterprises. Although significant public funding did lead to the establishment of some Indigenous commercial activities these enterprises tended to become embroiled in Indigenous organisations (Smith, 2006). Consequently, during the 1990s calls were being made to focus on economic development and employment. The Indigenous Small Business Fund (a component of the 1999 Indigenous Employment Policy) was designed to foster the creation of entrepreneurial enterprises owned, operated and managed by Australian Aboriginals (Australian Government, 2008). In spite of the concept of entrepreneurship being a promising avenue for promoting Indigenous economic independence, and in particular tourism activity (Russell – Mundine, 2007), few instances of substantial success have been recorded (Furneaux & Brown, 2008), although a number of barriers for Indigenous entry have been identified (Foley, 2003; 2006).

Barriers to Indigenous entrepreneurship culminate at the intersect of cultural exigencies. This intersection is exercised by the clash between Indigenous traditional cultural priorities and the contemporary business theory and practical paradigms of the dominant culture, which in Australia translates as Western management commercial practices. Although identification of the specific circumstances of Indigenous entrepreneurs may vary across environments from a rich background of conventions (e.g., World Bank, International Labour Organisation) Peredo and colleagues (2004: 5) nominated three core features when they wrote "Attachment to ancestral lands and their resources, modern subsistence economic arrangements, and distinctive languages …" are features that define Indigenous people in general. Particularly, these three attributes have been identified by Russell-Mundine (2007) within an array of conditions, which include financial, human, technical and social capital (Foley, 2006; Furneaux & Brown, 2008), business acumen and market accessibility (Foley, 2006) formal education (Daly, 2000), interested personnel and infrastructure (Foley, 2003; Missens, Dana & Anderson, 2007), as primary obstacles for Australian Indigenous business ventures. And in spite of the pragmatic commitment of the Australian government to implement Indigenous business programmes by encouraging educational and vocational training as well as business skills advice and support the severe and restrictive demands (e.g., a business plan, numeracy and literacy competencies, industry experience) discourage Aboriginal business participation and their engagement remains low.

A concern for the sustainability of Australian Indigenous small business obliges the undertaking of relevant enquiry. Despite the recognition Indigenous entrepreneurship is one of the primary avenues for fostering socio economic advancement in remote regions of Australia government endeavours have been perfunctory and the research has generally been sparse. Nevertheless, there is recognition relatively few rigorously designed Australian Indigenous endeavours have been profitable, most of the Australian Indigenous entrepreneurial businesses fail to survive beyond the life of the government seeding funding,

and there is a set of factors that are associated with hindering or stimulating Australian Indigenous entrepreneurial initiatives (Buultjens et al., 2010; Fuller, Buultjens & Cummings, 2005; Open for Business, 2008; Submission, 2001). While informative the knowledge will profit by extension to better appreciate how new Australian Indigenous enterprises are embedded in the existing social structure of the community in the pursuit of sustainable economic and social objectives. Alignment with this notion is the focus of the paper, which explores and describes the prominent elements of a fledgling timber furniture manufacturing business by the Gumatj clan of the Yolngu Indigenous people of East Arnhem Land of the NT of Australia.

3. Methodology

This section provides an overview of the people and the facilities available to them for their inaugural venturing into timber furniture construction.

Participants and Sites

There are three main sets of participants described in this paper. Two of them are Indigenous Yolngu people while the third is a non Indigenous person. There is a small group of six Indigenous males who live at Yirrkala and then travel to Dhanaya at the beginning of the week to live in accommodation at that outstation. From Dhanaya they travel in a four wheel drive vehicle along a bush track some 10 km to the milling site. Another separate group of seven men, who are also of the Gumatj clan of the Yolngu people, live at Gunyangara where the furniture factory operates. The final participant is a non Indigenous male cabinet maker who resides in Melbourne, but when supervising the Indigenous people at Gunyangara lives in the community. The nominated places are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Region of the Gumatj Timber Construction Enterprise

Apparatus

The entrepreneurial timber furniture construction business has a variety of low investment infrastructure. At the log milling site near Dhanaya is a Lucas mill, which for over two years (Pearson & Helms, 2010) has consistently demonstrated the machine is suitable for milling logs of NT stringy bark (*Eucalyptus Tetradonta*) for house construction timber. A Lucas mill, normally operated by a team of three Indigenous Yolngu, can be readily dismantled, transported on a flat tray truck to another site, and reassembled at the new site in about half an hour. The machine is produced in Australia for less than $20K. In anticipation of venturing into furniture construction, while milling logs for house construction, timber planks were cut and transported to a large shed at Gunyangara for air drying for about four months. This shed at Gunyangara, which has a floor space of 60ft × 40ft, is modestly equipped for joinery working. The main wood working equipment is three industrial electrical powered planning, sawing and dressing machines. For finer finishing tasks there are a small number of hand power tools and a lesser number of non powered hand tools. Within the shed are a number of work benches. An indication of the shed size and the used equipment can be appreciated by inspecting Figure 2 and Figure 3.



Figure 2: Two Gumatj Machinists at Gunyangara



Figure 3: The Table Construction Team

Procedure

Evolution of the Indigenous entrepreneurial timber furniture business is rooted in sagacious foresight. Initially, the vision was conceived by Galarrwuy Yunipingu AM, the leader of the Gumatj clan, and the second author. Jointly, they arranged for the progressive assembly of infrastructure (e.g., timber logging mill, motor truck, shed and internal facilities), as well as the milling and drying of the timber under guidance of representatives from the forestry sector. During this time a non Indigenous cabinet maker, who could design timber furniture, and was prepared to come to Gunyangara and give instruction to a team of unskilled Indigenous Yolngu people, was engaged. On completion of a large high quality table the cabinet maker has returned to Melbourne with a contract to design a range of different types of timber furniture (e.g., garden furniture to high quality items). A prominent aspect of this contract will be the designing of jigs so furniture products can be confidently made by Indigenous Yolngu people as they develop their wood working proficiencies through pragmatic application of on the job training. The Marngarr Community Government Resource Centre at Gunyangara, with Federal government financial assistance, will be instrumental in providing the necessary technical training (e.g., use and care of tools). Later in 2010 the cabinet maker is to return to Gunyangara, with his family, to live in the community for at least six months to give supervision in the manufacture of furniture products.

Arrangements are in place to improve efficiency levels in the production processes. Although a Lucas mill is a suitable machine for milling timber logs into building construction members greater precision of milling sizes is desirable for finer cabinet work. Consequently, the Gumatj Corporation will soon take delivery of an automated Mohae timber logging mill. This equipment will give higher accuracy of sawn planks. Greater consistency of sawn products and closer adherence to the required dimensions will require less machining of material used in the final furniture product. This outcome will lead to financial savings.

There will be a training facility for the Yolngu people who operate the Mohae mill. The living facilities for trainers/instructors have already been erected on site at Gunyangara. Timber planks, and flooring boards for sale to residents and builders in the Nhulunbuy region, will be cut from logs with the Mohae mill in a large shed on the outskirt of Gunyangara. Planks that will be chosen for timber furniture construction will be air dried in this shed.

4. Results

The primary objective at this stage of the project was to show the feasibility of the community based entrepreneurial venture. A major intention of the business protagonists was to subtly convince the local Indigenous Yolngu, who had never previously undertaken such work, they could in a short time develop their skills and confidence to produce timber furniture at the high end of quality. Their table, which is 3 metres × 1 metre, would embellish any corporate boardroom. A feature of the table, that has an estimate value of $3.5K, is it can be easily dismantled and flat packed for ease of transportation. Notably, the solid timber top has timber inserted cleats to provide for shrinkage/expansion. Figure 3 shows the participants in their workplace prior to the completion of the table, and Figure 4 reveals the final product.



Figure 4: The Completed Table

5. Discussion

The Yolngu people are resource rich, but financially poor. And while they are highly regarded for their artistic contributions, few have financial independence. Indeed, the priceless bark paintings that adorn the Yirrkala Art Centre are internationally acclaimed, but they do not give monetary wealth to the clan. There are some local artists who paint or produce quality musical items (e.g., Yidarki/didjeridu) as well as the internationally renowned Yothu Yindi, but few of the clan receive monetary gain from these endeavours. Knowledgeable of the reputation of the local artists may have prompted Mr Djwar Yunupingu, brother of Galarrwuy, to remark, "Of course we [the Yolngu people] could inlay into the top of the table a contrasting timber mosaic to express important features of our cultural heritage".

This paper has five significant outputs. First, is the revelation a few Indigenous Yolngu people (with external contributions) found a pathway through the socio economic and cultural elements, that have been earlier identified (Furneaux & Brown, 2008; Russell - Mundine, 2007) as barriers to Australian Indigenous entrepreneurial endeavours. Admittedly, at times the participants struggled to fulfil their visionary ambition to operate a new sustainable enterprise in the pursuit of economic and social goals for their community. Their endeavours sit nicely with notions presented by Peredo and Chrisman (2006), who earlier articulated important dimensions of community based enterprises. The remarkable inaugural achievement of the manufacture of a valuable, useful piece of furniture is not only significant in its own right, but the facial expressions of the participants, shown in Figure 3, evidences expressions of self esteem, self worth and job satisfaction. Often these are overlooked indicators of fruitful entrepreneurial achievements.

The second output of this paper is the identification of attributes that are embedded in a community social based enterprise administered by the Gumatj clan of the Indigenous Yolngu people. Probably more important is that these features can be retained as the venture develops to embrace a variety of endeavours (e.g., fishing, cryovaced beef products). A notable central plank of the philosophy of the Gumatj is the importance of family, and ultimately, the Gumtj clan, which is over 500 people, who would operate the business. However, while this goal is being pursued external resources (e.g., the cabinet maker) are temporarily engaged for their particular skill or competency, but when the clan members have acquired the necessary role skills (e.g., operating a Lucas mill) the attached non family member is disengaged.

A third salient observation is the entrepreneurial model being embraced by the Gumatj clan is closely aligned with cultural responsibilities. Acknowledging they are custodians of their ancestral lands, a legacy inherited for over 50,000 years, the Yolngu people in general, and the Gumatj clan members specifically, maintain their business profile will declare the central pillars of sustainability. Hence, joint venturing is unlikely as Western business priorities are profit oriented, whereas monetary profit is not the prime objective of the Indigenous Yolngu people, but rather environmental preservation, the sustenance of cultural values and collective effort with the community as a vital asset (Trudgen, 2000). Aspiring to these ideals enables the Gumatj clan, not to employ 'business efficient' clear felling of the savannah forest, but instead the selective removal of only mature trees with resultant minimal disturbance to the forest in East Arnhem Land.

The fourth observation to emerge was the entrepreneurial timber furniture construction business of the Gumatj clan experienced few of any of the reported hindering factors. As the traditional owners of bountiful expanses of savannah forest these Yolngu people have extensive land holdings on which are an array of buildings and facilities (i.e., sheds, houses, cattle, water). Thus, land was not an inhibiting obstacle. Although a large number of the clan members are on welfare or short term CDEP many showed enthusiasm to work in the new furniture making business. Hence, social capital was not a constraint. Because the Gumatj clan enjoys mining royalties, likely to continue for a further 25 to 30 years, the available financial capital is a stimulating feature of their entrepreneurial timber furniture making business. And as Mr Galarrwuy Yunipungu AM (head of the Gumatj Corporation) held the position of the chairman of the prestigious Northern Land Council for over two decades the business holds political associations and industrial links, two attributes often lacking in reported failures of Australian Indigenous entrepreneurial business.

Access to markets, often a fifth factor hindering Australian Indigenous small business, is a stimulating element of the Gumatj timber furniture enterprise. Although the number of sales of Corporate Boardroom

timber tables is limited (or other high quality timber furniture) on resumption of the furniture production in later 2010 there will be a focus on making robust timber tables, chairs, cupboards, beds and benches for Yolngu households, where there is an extensive market. Australian Indigenous homes are regularly characterised by intergenerational large families of over 15 occupants. A continuous and extensive 'wear and tear' on these dwellings and their contents warrants stronger and more robust furniture sets than the plastic, flimsy plywood and chipboard household products that are available in the domestic retail market. In addition to the Indigenous houses at Gunyangara, Galupa, Yirrkala and Wallaby Beach a further avenue for sales is within the 900 plus households of Nhulunbuy. Early indications are there is an emerging market for sawn construction timber, floor boards and garden furniture. Clearly, the destiny of the Gumatj entrepreneurial business to supply base timber products and a range of universal timber furniture items has a secure immediate future.

Implications

Successive Australian governments have struggled to effectively improve the well being of Indigenous people. A considerable literature (Altman et al, 2005; Hughes & Warin, 2005; Kaplan-Myrth, 2005; Maddison, 2008) contends Indigenous specific work/welfare programmes have been overly optimistic and reforms are urgently needed. Following the 1967 Commonwealth referendum the policy of self determination was introduced to affirm "… the right of Indigenous Australians to participate in making decisions on issues that related to their communities." (Anderson, 2007: 138), and subsequently, the Commonwealth Capital Fund for Aboriginal Business Enterprises was established in 1968 (Smith, 2006). The principal objective of this initiative was to alleviate Indigenous rural unemployment and poverty by providing finance to encourage Australian Aboriginal people in remote communities to establish small businesses. Despite the extensive identified challenges for the sustainability of Indigenous small enterprises (Russell – Mundine, 2007) the Australian Federal government continues to show commitment for Indigenous people to have economic independence. Indeed, a raft of initiatives (e.g., Indigenous self employment programme, Indigenous small business fund, Indigenous capital assistance scheme) has been implemented to stimulate economic activity. Foreboding is a most recent action by the Australian government (Indigenous Economic Development Strategy, 2010) inviting public submissions to identify pathways for facilitating the economic independence of Indigenous people to enhance their well being and quality of life.

The Australian government conviction for social reform and mutual obligation places emphasis on behavioural compliance. But requiring Indigenous people in remote communities to comply with an approved programme (e.g., attending training, recipient of welfare) does not necessarily address the issue of economic reciprocity (Anderson, 2007). Indeed, remote Australian Indigenous communities enjoy cultural and economic circumstances very different to the dominant Australian culture (Altman, 2002). In these rural centres individuals are able to maintain strong spiritual and religious connections with their ancestral lands (Hunter, 2007) where they can reinvigorate their customary economy in wildlife harvesting, while exercising kin based relations of production, and upholding gift giving activities (Altman, 2003). Yet much of this interaction is not acknowledged in Indigenous policy formulation, despite the generation of local and regional benefits. Clearly, in geographically remote areas opportunity exists for Indigenous Australians to operate non market hybrid economies if provided with skilled and dedicated support (Foley, 2006; Giddy, Lopez & Redman, 2009). Unlike traditional business, which operates for profit, the enterprise described in this paper features the blending of economic and social values and brings solutions to problems that have not been resolved by Australian governments. The presented evidence suggests a government social policy of universalism designed to deliver equality of outcomes to Indigenous people holding cultural continuities and living in remote regions of Australia is worthy of re-examination.

6. Conclusion

Presented in this manuscript is the specific form of enterprise development that is being undertaken by the Gumatj clan. The described entrepreneurial strategy employed by this Australian Indigenous group, which enables them to move off welfare or spasmodic CDEP work and become engaged in timber production and usage enterprises, is a vibrant avenue for incorporating national, social and cultural attributes. While the pursuit of economic independence may lead to greater personal wealth, relief from poverty, acquisition of knowledge and alleviation of health problems a central plank of the small businesses fosters community development. Pursing the common good through economic and social

goals in pathways that are meant to yield sustainable benefits to the individual as well as the community fits nicely with the notion of a community based enterprise. Capturing and documenting these generalisations regarding the incentives and activities of these Australian Indigenous people to reveal an integration of individual and collective efforts for rebuilding of community, traditional and cultural exigencies is worthy of further scholarly attention.

A major challenge for the Gumatj clan is how to integrate Western business development practices with existing community culture and values. The timber furniture production business has a simple entrepreneurial structure, embedded in the local culture and community based arrangements. This venture sits separately from the other two entrepreneurial businesses of forest timber milling and the house construction venture. Yet these separately managed Indigenous entrepreneurial units are interrelated as the supply of the forest milled products are to be balanced against the client needs of the other two timber consuming enterprises. The need for meshing these interdependencies stimulates attention to the inappropriateness of a loose diverse community social arrangement, and the urgency for a conventional economic market place network so the business can become a progressive business organisation. Arguably, there is opportunity for installing a managerial role to programme and coordinate the inputs and outputs across the entrepreneurial units. The new set of skills is not the typical competencies of an Australian Indigenous community based on collective ancestral knowledge.

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