

## UNDERSTANDING WHITEFELLA SECRET CATTLE BUSINESS<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Over the last three decades Aborigines have, largely through government-funded purchase under the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission, the Aboriginal Development Commission, ATSIC, and now the Indigenous Land Corporation, acquired about 100 pastoral properties, primarily focusing on extensive cattle grazing in the rangelands. Both social reasons, such as traditional ownership of the land, and economic reasons, such as the viability of commercial pastoralism, were considered in funding agreements. But for most of these properties economic viability has been very marginal. Many were located in extremely remote areas near the 'pastoral frontiers', their land had suffered through years of overgrazing and they were deficient in infrastructure and capital investment.<sup>2</sup> And they have been plagued with financial problems, due both to mismanagement and lack of experience. Neither funding bodies nor Aboriginal cattle station directors have been happy with this situation. The case study presented in this chapter represents one of the attempts to improve the capacity of Aboriginal pastoralists to deal with the complexities that they now face in their participation in the market economy.

Non-Aboriginal people have, through the application of disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology and cross-cultural psychology, acquired substantial knowledge about Aboriginal culture and any diligent person who wishes to work with Aboriginal people can develop a solid background on cultural issues before commencing work in an Aboriginal context. It is not the same for the Aboriginal person, particularly in a non-English-speaking, remote community. They must grapple with the nature, the motivation and the knowledge of the non-Aboriginal person experimentally. They are forced to try to understand from their own personal observation and experiences and from media such as television. In the case of cattle stations Aboriginal people's views and their knowledge of pastoralism has frequently been based upon earlier experiences as station hands, drovers and stockmen. Aboriginal workers were rarely exposed to other crucial aspects of the pastoral industry, such as finances, herd management and marketing decisions. They also lacked knowledge and experience in all elements concerned with the requirements of running an incorporated enterprise: establishing a board of directors, legal accountability, holding regular formal meetings and keeping minutes.

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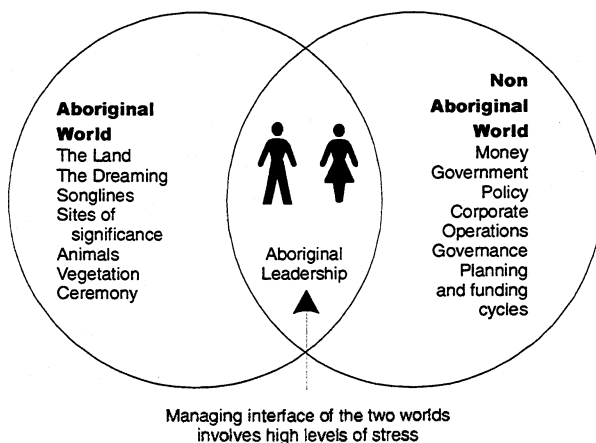
<sup>2</sup> Palmer, I. *Buying Back the Land: Organisational Struggle and the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1988; Young, E., *Third World in the First: Development and Indigenous Peoples*, Routledge, London/New York, 1995.

Such skills could realistically be called ‘whitefella secret cattle business’; mysterious attributes and procedures that they had been told were essential for the success of their venture. This chapter presents one approach to demystifying secret cattle business. It presents a case study of a training program offered in the 1990s to groups of Aboriginal cattle enterprise directors who asked for help in gaining some of these skills to make their businesses more successful. It shows how traditionally oriented Aboriginal leaders with limited literacy and numeracy can acquire real power and exercise it in this unfamiliar arena.

### **Aboriginal And Non-Aboriginal Worlds: A Comparison**

As Aboriginal leaders explained during the course of the delivery of the training programs described here, they live in a dual system—they are part of both the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal world. Not surprisingly their position, in the overlap of two cultures (figure 14.1), creates some psychological tension and leads to significant barriers to learning. For example, if an Aboriginal person seeks skills appropriate to non-Aboriginal ways of life, the acculturation inherent in the acquisition of such skills threatens the person’s traditional values and beliefs. When this occurs, it can reduce the motivation for acquiring these skills. A young Aboriginal person who is seeking to become a cattle station manager will always be aware that he or she risks conflict with his or her traditional elders, and the risk of this conflict may be a serious demotivating factor in acquiring the skills of cattle station management. In order to understand the full impact of living ‘between’ (as described by Aboriginal leaders), it is useful to compare and contrast the basic social characteristics of traditional Aboriginal society and non-Aboriginal society.

**Figure 14.1:**



## Living in two worlds

Life for contemporary non-Aboriginal people contrasts markedly with that of the culture of traditional Aboriginal people. Three bodies of knowledge—science, economics and technology—dominate the lifestyles and perspectives of the majority of non-Aboriginal people. In modern western society all aspects of life tend to be specialised. Family, work and leisure are seen as separate distinct activities. Aspects of one's personality are limited by the words used to describe oneself, such as father, brother or student. Collective names, such as the 'skin-names' used by Warlpiri people in central Australia (for example, *jungarai* or *nangala*), which for Warlpiri would immediately locate individuals in the correct relationship, define some behaviour patterns, and prescribe some spiritual responsibilities, are concepts unfamiliar to non-Aboriginal people. General social characteristics of traditional Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society are summarised in table 14.1.

**Table 14.1 Social Characteristics Of Non-Aboriginal And Traditional Aboriginal Society**

Non-Aboriginal	Traditional Aboriginal
Marriage is monogamous (at least at any point in time) and mates are chosen freely.	Marriage may be monogamous, but polygyny is allowable and partners are restricted to the appropriate moiety and marriages are often arranged.
There is no discrimination between paternal and maternal relations.	There are rigorous distinctions made between maternal and paternal relations.
The basic unit is the conjugal family, which is a productive unit rather than a consuming one.	The family unit is both a productive and a consuming unit.
There is a separation of manufacturers of culture and consumers.	The manufacturers of cultural activities are also its consumers.
Cultural activities tend to be non-participatory.	Cultural activities are totally participatory.
Cultural activities tend to be a distraction to everyday life, not fundamental to its existence.	Cultural activities are fundamental to life.
Mass production aims at the average consumer, although markets are becoming segmented.	Economic production is individually focused.
A high value is placed upon individuality and privacy, while accepting a high degree of intervention in individuals' lives	There is a high value placed upon group cohesion, while at the same time maintaining a low degree of direction and intervention in an individual's life.
Tradition has limited significance and is not emphasised.	Tradition is all-important.

What happens when non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal societies come in contact, with the former dominating the latter? While the contrasts indicated in table 14.1 are much simpler than the realities of either society, they are nevertheless distinct. Clearly, cultures so different remain inherently mysterious for individuals of each culture, but the stress that this induces is arguably more marked for Aboriginal people because their culture inhibits them from understanding non-Aboriginal culture. The relationship is unequal. Any adjustment to the dominant culture inevitably involves some degree of acculturation and the risk of losing one's culture. Consequently, there is a tendency to react or resist, rather than to adjust.

The effect of these different world-views upon communication processes is significant. As Shimp<sup>3</sup> highlighted in his assessment of communication barriers between the Northern Territory government and Aboriginal people, each group held certain assumptions about the other and about the role of government. Common assumptions held by Aboriginal people included the belief that non-Aboriginal people were not trustworthy, that non-Aboriginal priorities were unimportant and that government was essentially a resource centre, obliged to provide everything. Non-Aboriginal people, in contrast, commonly assumed that the views of Aboriginal individuals were representative of those of many other Aboriginal people, that Aboriginal people could not understand complex ideas, that they (non-Aboriginal people) knew what was best for Aboriginal people, and that institutions and facilities provided for them should function as they do in non-Aboriginal society. Clearly such generally unfounded assumptions will lead to communication blockages, thereby causing frustration, anxiety and conflict. This is highly likely to occur in the management of enterprises such as Aboriginal pastoral stations and both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people involved in supporting and developing this industry need to be aware of these problems.

It is probable that each culture will have a different agenda for the management of such enterprises. Equipping Aboriginal people with the skills to manage a pastoral property requires that advisers and extension officers have not only an historical appreciation of the community but also an awareness of the cultural context in which the enterprises must operate. Here Trudgeon's phrase 'social mystification' provides a relevant way of summarising the nature of the problem of cross-cultural confusion in Aboriginal adult education.<sup>4</sup> The approaches adopted in the Aboriginal Pastoral Company Directors' Training Program, developed in the early 1990s by Jim Downing and me, reflect our perceptions of this issue, combined with Trudgeon's ideas and policy considerations that were relevant to the problem.

The training program also reflects some issues raised in the Miller Report,<sup>5</sup> the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the Review

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<sup>3</sup> Shimp, M. 1985, *Communication between the Northern Territory Government and Aborigines*, NTGPS, Darwin.

<sup>4</sup> Trudgeon, R. 1994, *Social Mystification*, Occasional Paper, Uniting Church, Darwin.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, M. (Chair) 1985, *Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs*, AGPS, Canberra, pp 85-7.

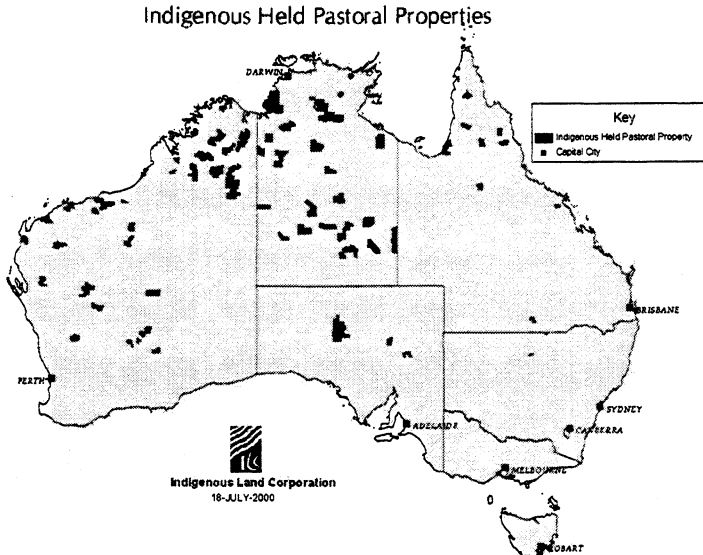
into the Aboriginal Employment Development Program<sup>6</sup> and the DEET commissioned report *Rural Development Skills on Aboriginal Land*.<sup>7</sup> All of these reports emphasised the need for Aboriginal people to develop skills in the management of land-based enterprises such as pastoralism and the need for government programs to focus on improving the managerial skills of local Aboriginal leadership groups.

## Pastoral Company Directors' Training Program

### Background

Pastoral stations acquired by Aboriginal groups are predominantly in the more remote arid and semi-arid parts of Australia's rangelands (figure 14.2). Following purchase, Aboriginal communities adopted a variety of land management strategies on these properties, ranging from downgrading of commercial pastoralism, perhaps with retention of a small 'killer' herd for local consumption, to maintenance of full commercial operation.<sup>8</sup> Clearly the needs of those individuals involved in these operations differed widely.

Figure 14.2:

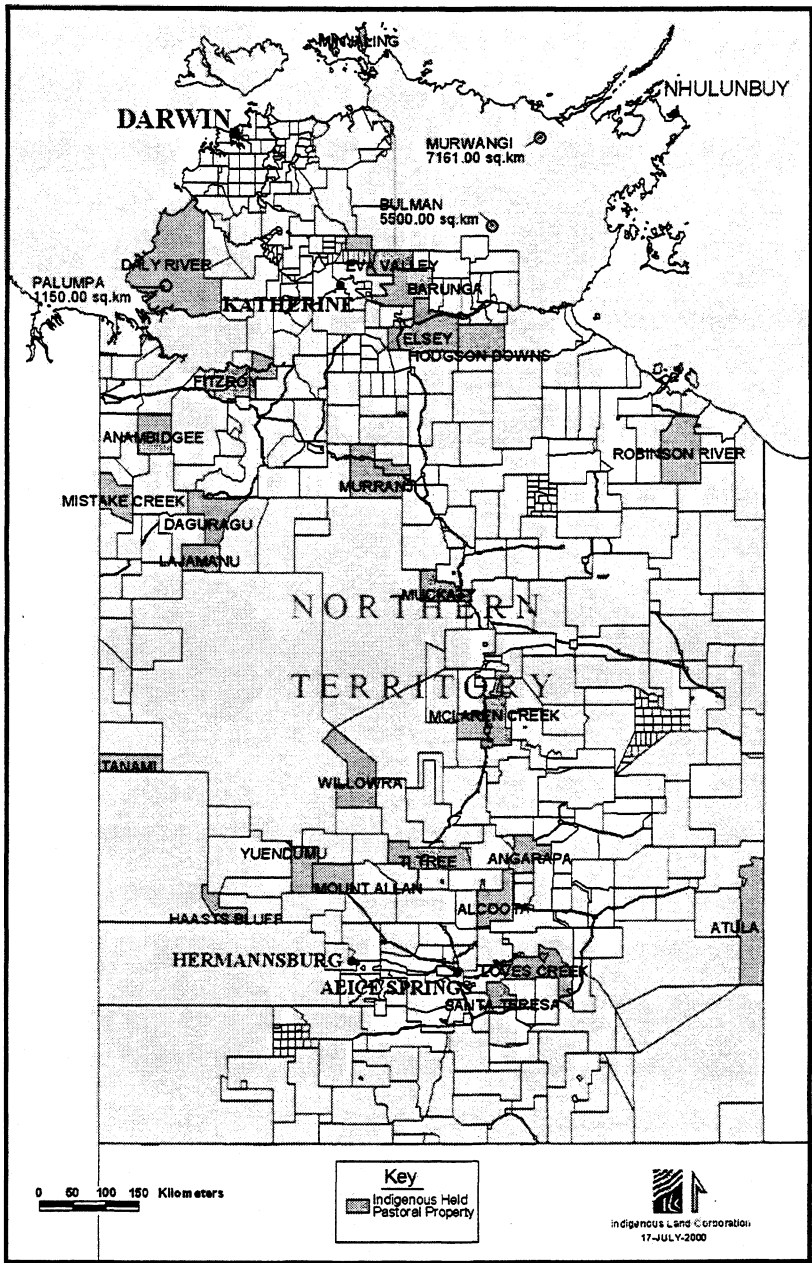


<sup>6</sup> Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) 1991, *Aboriginal Employment Development Program Review*, AGPS, Canberra.

<sup>7</sup> Hanlon, D. & Phillpot, S. 1993, *Rural Development Skills on Aboriginal Land*, DEET, Darwin.

<sup>8</sup> Young, 1995, op cit.

Figure 14.3:  
Indigenous Held Pastoral Properties  
Northern Territory



A high proportion of Aboriginal-owned pastoral properties are in the Northern Territory (figure 14.3). In 1993–94, following requests from four

Northern Territory cattle station communities committed to maintaining commercial cattle operations—Mistake Creek, Mount Allan (Yuelamu), Alcoota, and Loves Creek—the Central Land Council (CLC) established a Pastoral Company Directors' Training Program. These four communities had identified two major problems:

- Misinformation or poor information concerning the structure of non-Aboriginal companies, company law and the rights and responsibilities of pastoral company directors and owners; and
- Confusion over the non-Aboriginal economic system and the generation of wealth.

Jim Downing, a Uniting Church minister with many years of experience in Aboriginal community development in central Australia, and the author, with a background in rural development and Northern Territory field-based administration, were asked to design and deliver an appropriate program, funded by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, that would:

- Explore Aboriginal concepts of corporate activity and identify parallels in non-Aboriginal society;
- Inform directors of their rights and responsibilities under company law;
- Role-play directors' meetings in order to demonstrate a range of managerial issues, including conflict of interest;
- Use experiential techniques to assist Aboriginal directors to plan their properties and plan for contingencies; and
- Explore, in cross-cultural dialogue, equivalents between contracts in Aboriginal society and those in non-Aboriginal society, and the obligations in both.

The program we developed aimed to give Aboriginal cattle company directors sufficient knowledge of their role, functions and duties to enable them to direct their pastoral property operations effectively. It set out to identify the extent of Aboriginal understanding of pastoral activities in terms of an efficient operation; to assess how well Aboriginal directors understood their roles; to identify training needs required by the participants; to address gaps in the directors' skills and knowledge of their legal and ethical responsibilities; and, through the use of experiential techniques, to expose directors to the cause and effect relationships of management decisions. The program also aimed to assist directors to develop a property plan through the use of simulation techniques, and to understand the common elements of contracts in the non-Aboriginal world and of binding arrangements in the Aboriginal world.

## **Program Methodology**

The program used a combination of the following four approaches, depending upon the needs of the directors in each situation:

- **Experiential learning:** This technique utilises simulation to demonstrate financial and herd planning. It is also used to reinforce the concepts discussed in the other methodologies;
- **Demystifying cross-cultural dialogue:** This approach, derived from Trudgeon's work in Arnhem Land,<sup>9</sup> utilises dialogue and sharing of cultures to identify where common arrangements exist both in Aboriginal and in non-Aboriginal society;
- **Action learning:** Derived from Freire's work in South America,<sup>10</sup> this approach utilises the process of reflection, planning, action and reflection to stimulate the acquisition of skills and knowledge; and
- **Presentation, question and answer:** This follows the classic classroom instruction technique.

## **The Training Course Structure**

Each course followed a three-phase approach, with each phase lasting one week. The *first phase* of the program concentrated on the legal responsibilities of directors, introducing them to financial management and the legalities involved in meeting procedures. The *second phase* focused on various aspects of company operations: the structure and function of meetings; the roles of shareholders, directors, staff, and consultants; conflict of interest; legitimate and illegitimate company decisions; and remedies under the law for directors. The *third phase* concentrated on financial management, making extensive use of the *Cattle Boss* simulation game. This phase was also used to identify any future training needs of directors.

The three-week program was spread over three months, thus allowing time to provide literacy support and to take account of directors' other time commitments. Not only did most directors have to contend with the difficulties of English as a second or 'foreign' language, but also most were barely literate and numerate. It was also difficult to bring people together to concentrate on these issues for three-week periods. The time in between phases allowed participants to reflect on what they learned and experienced. Again this was in keeping with the application of action learning. All told, sixty-two people from the four participating communities attended the courses in 1994 and 1995. Over the eleven weeks that training was provided, a total of thirty-nine directors attended all sessions and fifty-five people attended some of the sessions. This latter group included traditional owners as well as some employees of the pastoral companies.

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<sup>9</sup> Trudgeon, 1994, op cit.

<sup>10</sup> Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum Publishing Co., New York, 1989.



## **Post-Course Evaluation**

Staff of the CLC Pastoral Enterprise Unit subsequently evaluated the results of the course according to the criteria outlined in the introduction to this chapter, including criteria such as understanding the need for establishing a board of directors for the company, legal accountability, accountability to members through holding regular formal meetings and keeping minutes, and the management of a collective enterprise. Evaluation results are discussed in greater detail below. Attendance at meetings, which could be interpreted as another indicator of course effectiveness, was variable. Attendance improved substantially with two groups—Loves Creek and Alcoota—but there was little difference at Yuelamu (Mount Allan) or Mistake Creek. Because of unpredictable variations in attendance at different times it would be unwise to draw firm conclusions on the effect of the program on this aspect.

## **Maintenance Of Minutes**

In all stations there was an increased understanding of meeting procedures. First, the directors drew up the agenda. Prior to the course, Aboriginal people rarely recorded the minutes of meetings and, given the general low level of literacy skills, it was unreasonable to expect that this would happen. Some individuals had the necessary skills but required further familiarity and confidence before they could undertake this role. After the training the directors did demand that the minutes be read at each meeting and on several occasions requested changes prior to signing of the minutes. People specifically asked that certain statements, decisions or discussions be recorded in the minutes.

## **Legal Requirements Of Meetings Fulfilled**

Even after the training program CLC Pastoral Unit staff had to ensure that the legal requirements were fulfilled and continued to explain these issues to directors. Nonetheless, there was a much greater understanding of meeting procedures among the directors. For example, on all stations, people automatically began to ask if there was a quorum present and, if there was not, they would ask the CLC adviser what they needed to do about decisions taken and made sure that this was recorded in the minutes.

## **Preparation Of Agendas**

People began to understand why the agenda was important and they would cross items off when finished and move on to the next item. Prior to training, meetings did not follow an agenda and people talked of issues in a disordered way, reaching limited consensus.

Due to the difficulty in contacting some directors it was not always possible for those responsible to send meeting notices out in advance. Therefore the agenda had to be prepared at the meeting. (On one occasion the

directors did fax an agenda to the CLC Pastoral Unit.) On all stations formulating the agenda was the first task undertaken by the directors. Following training there were two instances (Yuelamu and Alcoota) of chairpersons/directors telling other directors that what they were talking about came later in the meeting, pointing to and returning to the agenda.

When preparing the agenda in the meetings, directors of three stations (Mistake Creek, Loves Creek and Yuelamu) regularly listed the minutes, the financial information (the 'money story') and the manager's report, unprompted, before listing other items they wished to talk about. All aspects of this meeting organisation were introduced in response to the training program.

### **Property Planning**

The course was less successful in encouraging directors to participate in property management planning. Developing a planning process that takes account of differences in culture, education and background remained a priority. Subsequently the CLC has addressed this through introducing a participatory planning system<sup>11</sup> component into the training program.

### **Increased Interest In Training**

All station directors requested further training because they valued the course. Where there were new members of boards there was a clear request that they also be provided with the basics of directors' training. In addition, two stations (Yuelamu and Mistake Creek) asked for appropriate stock and station skills training, and two (Yuelamu and Alcoota) wanted operator/mechanical/bore maintenance training. The CLC subsequently responded positively to these requests.

### **Increased Involvement In Budget Decisions**

All four-director groups asked to do their budgets for the next financial year in meetings. Two stations (Yuelamu and Alcoota) completed their budgets and then checked at every meeting on budget performance and revised it if necessary, while one station (Loves Creek) had an initial attempt and finished the budget over several meetings. Prior to the training, there was no awareness of budgets. Following training, the difference in understanding of financial matters on all stations was profound. Improvement in understanding related both to grant funding budgets and company operational budgets with no grant operation.

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<sup>11</sup> Tilmouth, T. and Mitchell, P., 'From Head Stockman to Owner: supporting Aboriginal cattle stations in central Australia', *Indigenous Law Bulletin*, 4(14): 4-8, 1998.

## **Increased Involvement In Financial Decisions**

Prior to the training, alternatives for financial decision making were presented with little discussion or questions from the directors. After training, directors of all four stations asked questions and held long discussions about the need for capital, management alternatives, and future income projections. Such projections, described as 'forward money stories', helped them to see how the decision under discussion would affect future viability.

A major change was the level of questioning about financial accounts. Prior to the training few questions were asked on a regular basis. Afterwards, the number of questions and amount of discussion increased markedly and has continued to do so.

## **Role Of Directors: Separation Of Management And Ownership**

Before the training there was confusion over the role of directors. Most of them thought they were owners, or were not sure of the difference between owners and managers. This manifested itself in directors asking the cattle station manager/adviser for vehicles, cattle to kill for their own consumption (killers), tools and money, seeing these as their share in the station's earnings. Cattle station advisers then had to make directors aware of the impropriety and implications of taking 'their share'. They were then viewed as denying directors goods to which they as the 'owners' were entitled. This caused conflict, confusion and a lack of trust between the directors and the manager/advisers and was highly detrimental to the effectiveness of directors' meetings. The directors' training had a positive effect on this situation and directors increasingly came to see themselves as caretakers rather than owners, a role that has strong parallels in central Australian Aboriginal law.

Since training, issues such as the taking of killers have been self-policed to a much greater extent. Directors were willing to make rules and to inform the community on issues such as buying killers and using cars, in accordance with their role as caretaker, not owner. The real benefit has been that the directors also saw the role of manager and advisers more clearly, with a resultant increased level of trust. This resulted in an increased standard of management discussions at directors' meetings.

## **Awareness Of Regulations/Regulatory Bodies**

Prior to the training, there was a wall of blank confusion and, coupled with the mistrust discussed above and poor literacy, getting documents signed was a difficult task. Directors would sign but had little understanding of the implications of what they were signing. Following training, people knew what was being talked about when documents such as financial statements, auditor's reports or statements of compliance for the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations were introduced. They asked for the papers to be read through to them before signing.

## **Financial Advice**

Financial advisers to the stations have indicated that it was often very difficult to know what to tell people as there were few if no questions asked. Therefore the quality of the advice was doubtful. This does not mean that advisers did not understand their jobs but, rather, that they were unsure of what information was needed. After the directors' training there was been a marked increase in the questions discussed and understanding of money matters. This increase in understanding manifested itself in a reduced number of visits by outside accountants.

## **Some Issues Arising From The Training Program**

The pastoral company directors' training courses have raised a number of issues that the facilitators suggested should be addressed by the Central Land Council and other Aboriginal development agencies.

## **Mystification**

We found considerable evidence to support the argument that traditional people in particular are mystified about non-Aboriginal economic, authority and other systems.<sup>12</sup> This means that they see non-Aboriginal systems through a fog of confusion. Lack of clarity leads to suspicion and hostility towards non-Aboriginal society in general, and towards organisations serving the communities in particular. It also leads to perceptions that funds are misused. This is aggravated by the utterly different world-views of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and different concepts of authority and power. In the case of the pastoral station course described above, this was particularly evident in discussions about where money comes from and how it functions.

Station people knew something about taxes, but generally had no knowledge about how the federal government used money or accounted for it. There is a general belief that the government can print money as much and as often as it wants and use it how it likes. We believe that if such mystification is not understood and addressed by agencies, efforts to inform and educate will be almost sure to fail. Without language knowledge it is difficult to do, but it can be achieved if the understanding is there and is followed by sensitive and patient testing of people's answers. Knowledge and use of people's own language is, however, the real key to success in 'demystification'.

## **Traditional Beliefs, Mind-Sets And Behaviour**

The lack of appreciation of traditional values by non-Aboriginal people is a prime source of mystification and aggravates confusion. It is difficult for non-Aboriginal people to understand how utterly different is the Aboriginal world-view and its interpretation of outside events and information. There are

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<sup>12</sup> See Freire 1989; Trudgeon 1994, op cit.

some striking and helpful parallels between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures.<sup>13</sup> But the present situation results in Aboriginal people seeing any person who acts as chair to a board of directors as 'the boss', and investing them with considerable power and control. This person is then seen as 'boss' for the funds of the organisation. This, plus kinship pressures, sees funds being used in ways that run foul of non-Aboriginal law. At the same time, this mind-set also robs directors of any belief that they are in charge and have responsibility and power to run their particular operation. It has them looking to outside people or bodies to make the decisions.

We came to the conclusion that it was essential that staff of service organisations have a very thorough orientation and ongoing training in understanding Aboriginal traditional beliefs, mind-sets and behaviour, and in working with great sensitivity. People expressed their anxiety about this to us more than once, saying, 'People can lose their lives if the wrong thing is done'.

### **Preparation For Purchase Of A Property**

People who participated in the courses revealed a complete lack of knowledge of the laws governing the companies under which their stations were purchased, and which were set up at the time of purchase, and under which they are liable if things should go wrong. They had no understanding of where those laws came from, or what the authority was behind them. They also revealed almost total ignorance of their management agreements. Such documents are foreign in nature and difficult to understand. They need careful and long discussion and cross-cultural interpretation before people can understand them.

There is also a need to prepare people beforehand for meetings to enable them to participate fully and responsibly. People also asked for time both before and within meetings to think about and understand issues. If such issues are ignored, people remain confused about who has authority, and they are robbed of involvement, initiative, participation, and of their rights and powers as directors. Such scenarios create great strains on all involved and have the potential to cause the collapse of the project. The Pastoral Unit of the CLC is attempting, within its resources, to find a synthesis between non-Aboriginal legal methods and requirements and traditional ways of thinking and operating.

### **Management Agreements**

Because of a lack of proper consultation and assessment of people's skills at the time their stations were purchased, there was a lack of knowledge of the content of their management agreement and confusion about this. For example, when after clarifying their roles, rights and duties, people examined their agreements and they discovered that a quorum for meetings was two. One of these was a member of a support agency. In every case their reactions were

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<sup>13</sup> Trudgeon, 1989, op cit.

the same—‘that’s dangerous. It should be more than half’—and all changed the number for a quorum to reflect this. With the original quorum rule, Directors lacked any real power or involvement in the management of their stations. This illustrates the general confusion and lack of preparation that led in some cases to hostility and mistrust.

### **Education Of Directors**

As stated above, directors were almost completely unaware of their role as directors, or that of their managers. They also lacked understanding of the related laws and of their rights, powers and remedies under the law. They had little understanding of the ‘money story’—budgets, accounts, administration and bookkeeping costs—though they were able to spell out the operating costs of the station with a little help. Even when understanding comes, most directors expressed great difficulty in retaining that knowledge over a period. It points to the need for ongoing training and refresher sessions.

Despite the difficult nature of the cross-culture education process, language problems, poor or no literacy and numeracy skills, and the difficult concepts and subjects to be covered, people were highly motivated. They attended courses on time, were consistent in their attendance at every property, and reported that they were learning. In part the motivation to persist, despite the comments about it being ‘hard stuff’, was due both to the cross-cultural content, the linkage of information and events to Aboriginal culture and events, and the fact that the people felt that they were being told the full story at last. In discussion with the author outside the formal sessions, one Loves Creek man said, ‘You know, whitefellas always kept that stuff secret from us, but now you are showing us’.

### **Literacy And Numeracy**

Without effective English literacy, and numeracy, people are greatly handicapped in handling the information and processes we expect them to cope with at the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interface. Evaluations on each property showed clearly that, where there were a few literate and numerate people present, and the group learned far more quickly and effectively. The Loves Creek course was outstanding in this respect. The people came from Santa Teresa and had been educated effectively in literacy and numeracy in the old mission school. They were able to grasp issues clearly and to move quickly into the higher levels of the *Cattle Boss* game. We feel that there is a great need for relevant and cross-cultural training in literacy and numeracy for adults in many of these situations. We also need to guard against the potential for schools in Aboriginal communities to turn out students who are functionally illiterate in English, that is, they can read well, but have little or no understanding of the meaning of many of the words and concepts in what they read.

## **Preparation Of Managers/Advisers**

There is a need to help managers and advisers to understand the need for cross-cultural education and the problems of 'social mystification'. The poor preparation of both directors and managers has led to confusion about roles and to whom the manager is responsible. This has tended to inhibit teamwork between Directors and managers and has led to conflicts that, in our opinion, could have been avoided, saving a lot of frustration and hurt.

## **Training Plans**

Basic training in all aspects of pastoral station management was clearly needed. Each group talked about the need for training for their young men. At Mistake Creek the people were clear that they wanted the young men trained in management practices towards the day when they could take over the management role. None of the stations had training plans. To develop them a skills analysis is needed for each property, involving a process of consultation with the directors and manager. Following this, a plan should be drawn up to meet those needs, and discussions with a capable organisation that is prepared to deliver a tailored course to suit the needs. At the same time funding should be sought to put this into operation.

## **Property Plans**

No station seemed to have a property plan—essential for efficient management of the operation. Without such a plan sustainable management of these properties, taking into account present and future needs of the community, cannot occur. Both the directors and the manager/adviser would have to be involved in this planning process, and adequate support services and funding should be established to get this into operation.

## **People's Expressed Fears And Concerns**

Initially, the directors in each property expressed some anxiety about their liabilities as directors. This seemed to dissipate as they learned of their rights and remedies. Fear was also expressed about a possible influx of non-resident directors (establishing outstations, disrupting cattle work and causing conflicts which would disrupt and fragment existing peaceful communities). In addition, concern and some anger were also expressed about the role of the CLC and a perceived lack of support. Much of this stemmed from confusion about that role and from the lack of preparation mentioned earlier. We believe this issue needs to be clarified and addressed.

## **Conclusions**

The training of directors at Mistake Creek, Yuelamu, Alcoota and Loves Creek can be considered a success. There was a substantial transfer of skills and knowledge to the directors of the pastoral companies and this manifested itself in significant improvements in their involvement in company operations.

In terms of direct outputs there was an overall improvement in regularity of meetings, meeting attendance, and preparation of agendas and minutes. Most importantly there was an improvement in directors' understanding of the financial aspects of pastoral companies and their legal responsibilities. In general, courses such as these do appear to have great potential to improve the organisational capacity of Aboriginal cattle station groups, and to make it more likely that they can realise their aspirations towards land management.

This success is directly related to the following factors:

- The training was provided to specific cohorts of participants who, as company directors, were highly motivated;
- The training gave priority to issues that the participants themselves identified as important;
- The curriculum focused on demystifying the non-Aboriginal systems; and
- The curriculum provided experiential involvement through role-plays, simulations and reflection on case studies.

Pre- and post-course reinforcement was provided by the CLC's Pastoral Management Unit, which ensured that pastoral managers participated in some aspects of the training. And the financial and policy support from the Department of Employment, Education and Training provided an essential outcome focus to the program. It was this happy congruence of appropriate policy administrative support, together with appropriate training, that enabled the program to achieve its objectives.

### **Notes:**

This chapter could not have been written without the collaboration and insights of the Rev. Jim Downing AM.

### **Further Reading**

McGrath, A. 1987, *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in Cattle Country*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.