The pathway into employment for Anangu is not straight forward – how can VET facilitate?

Abstract

This presentation explores the complexity of the interface between the workplace and Anangu\(^1\) from the remote Indigenous communities of the APY Lands\(^2\), north-west of SA. Transitioning through education and training into the workforce is a pathway few Anangu have followed. Understanding the complexity in that pathway has the potential to inform the role for and operation of Vocational Education and Training (VET).

The story of work is one of change and the implications of differing world views. An employment context dominated by government policies and remoteness is challenging for the job seeker, employee, employer and trainer. The APY Lands labour market is dominated by the tyranny of distance with a low population in small communities spread across a vast area. Increasing regulation and specialisation is a reality that currently results in a workforce reliant on outsiders.

VET outcomes are mixed. The Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, recently acknowledged how the employment gap for Aboriginal job seekers remains, and the intent of government is to provide pathways to real employment with further reforms. Aboriginal communities are critical of VET, as the political adage of “training for employment” is not seen in practice. Often there is reference made to training for training’s sake, and at the same time the need for more training is expressed.

My presentation will highlight the differing world views that effect being a part of the market economy, and relook at the role of VET in the APY Lands. The intelligence on how to improve the transition into and within the workforce is essential for reviewing VET and for changing current workforce demographics.

Consideration of the cultural interface between Anangu, the workplace, and the characteristics of the local labour market in the APY Lands, will inform the role of VET.

Introduction

In reflecting on the past the memories of the ‘good old days’ are often recalled by the Elders on the APY Lands. These memories highlight the changes to lifestyle and work in a relatively short period of time. Rupert Langkatjukur Peter, traditional healer or ngangkari, whose life spanned a period of significant change in central Australia, 1941 to 2012, in talking about how he became a ngangkari is recorded as saying:

\(^1\)Anangu is a Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara word meaning being Pitjantjatjara or Yankunytjatjara.

\(^2\)The APY Lands were declared in 1981 by the passing of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Rights Act, 1981\(^2\) by the Parliament of South Australia. The APY Lands are located in the far north-west corner of South Australia.
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In those early days I was growing up still, I was still young and I followed in my father’s, grandfather’s footsteps as a ngangkari. I am talking about the days before hospitals. We were looking after our people in the bush and that was the role of the ngangkari. And obviously in those days we weren’t getting paid for our work, it was something we did – not for money; it was part of looking after our people. Pg. 259. (Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council 2013)

For an Anangu young man or woman today, following in one’s father’s footsteps is a concept not linked to paid work but rather to one’s cultural heritage. The pathway for Rupert in the 1950s is in a very different context for those considering their employment options now. Instead, on the APY Lands the pathway into ‘one’s’ career may be a bewildering concept, with the transition having many possible trajectories. Or it may be a concept understood within the local community with as having no need to consider employment and/or training off the APY Lands.

The pathway into employment captures the transition from school into employment, and the pathway often involves training and or higher education. There is a view promulgated that moving from school into post-school training and/or education will lead to employment. Government policy and funding programs reflect this established belief with, for example, apprenticeship and traineeship programs and other programs supporting job seekers with a strong training component, including the CDEP program. The notion of employment pathways, in addition to the transition from school into the workforce, incorporates progression within one’s career. A career pathway may involve moving into higher level positions, moving from the para professional to the professional or ability to gain positions in other industry areas.

Assumptions concerning the notion of employment pathways are under question in remote central Australia. Gaining employment on the APY Lands is often a case of expressing interest in the position and demonstrating suitability (as determined by a police clearance). Once employed, training follows, with training delivered on the job. Elders on the APY Lands often make reference to education and training not leading to jobs and for them the notion of a pathway from school to employment is non-existent. The question ‘training what for?’ at times does not have an answer. Anangu on the other hand do have an appreciation of the need for, and value of, training to assist with the carrying out of roles and responsibilities.

Given an increased emphasis by the Commonwealth Government on employment for addressing disadvantage, an understanding of the realities in remote areas is desirable. In the Prime Minister’s statement to the House of Representatives he commented on how the Australian Government would provide job seekers in Remote Australia with pathways to real employment and end sit-down money (Prime Minister Abbott: Statement to the House of Representatives - Closing the Gap 2015 2015). There are real jobs on the APY Lands and some pathways available; however, the pathways on the APY Lands are limited and few Anangu are contemplating the move away from home.

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In 2011, out of a population of approximately 2,500 in the APY Lands, there were approximately 460 job seekers (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). There are a significantly higher proportion of younger people than for the overall Australian population. The population is spread across an area 100,000km² with 6 main communities and a number of smaller communities and homelands. One paradoxical advantage of the highly dispersed population is that a number of workplaces - such as schools, clinics, stores, art centres - have established work places in each community, with the net result of more jobs being available than if the population was in the one centre. Increases in Aboriginal employment have been a national trend and the biggest increases in non-CDEP employment have been in remote areas and this is evident in the APY Lands (Gray, Boyd & Howlett 2013). In 2011, 89 Anangu were placed into CDEP conversion positions, created by the State and Commonwealth Governments to transition CDEP participants into fully-funded jobs (Jordan 2011). Employment on the APY Lands though is still reliant on government funding with very few local private enterprises.

There are a few possibilities for increasing the number of jobs on the APY Lands. One example that comes to mind is changes to procurement processes enabling employers on the APY Lands to gain more contracts for required work. There is potential for tourism or an extension of the pastoral industry. There are positions available for Anangu off the APY Lands at the Yulara resort (Voyages). The Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) took over the operations of Ayers Rock Resort and Longitude 131° in 2010. Voyages are actively promoting Aboriginal employment at the Resort and support work experience for secondary students and job seekers. In addition a few Anangu have taken up traineeships. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister’s statement to provide job seekers with real employment is ambitious.

In the next section I will consider research, from remote communities in the NT, where the views of Aboriginal people concerning work has been investigated. The research provides an insight into a different world view of those living in the communities of Ngukurr and Hermansburg. This research provides an alternative view from that of the western world and that of evaluators and researchers considering employment and training program outcomes in Aboriginal communities. A better understanding of the cross-cultural interface between the community and the workplace will assist in looking at workplace characteristics in remote communities on the APY Lands. I will then consider the potential for training to underpin pathways into and within employment on the APY Lands and This paper is based on my experience in delivering training for TAFE SA.

Cross Cultural interface between the Aboriginal community and the workplace

The story of work for those in the APY Lands is one of rapid change, often commencing with recent contact with the colonisers and affirmed by Elders telling stories of their early experiences and lifestyle walking the country. Since colonisation though, with the Anangu world dominated by the market economy, another set of expectations and influences have been imposed. Traditional responsibilities and roles remain, family and associated roles and
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responsibilities continue. Paid work and payment for producing works of art have become options since the 1960s. Currently there is very little information available on how Anangu view employment and training; an understanding of their perspective is over-due.

There is research literature exploring the cultural interface between employment and culture with Austin-Broos (Austin-Broos 2006) discussing the conflict between family and work in and around Ntaria (Hermansburg). McRae-Williams' research into ‘work’ at Ngukurr further expands on the cultural interface and differing world views on employment (McRae-Williams, Eva 2008). This research provides an insight into the differing ontologies, axiology and epistemologies of Aboriginal people and the cultural divide at the interface with the workplace.

Austin-Broos discusses the notion of ‘working for’ and ‘working’ and how at times these conflict with each other. The concept of ‘working for’ refers to the role of maintaining one’s position and participating in the social and cultural aspects of community life. Working for family and being able to sustain relatedness links to one’s well-being and identity. At Ngukurr, McRae Williams also discusses relatedness and the importance of engaging with others. Considerable time and effort was spent in establishing, maintaining and negotiating relationships. By contrast the official concept of ‘working’ is paid employment. Being a paid worker is not essential for identifying oneself, as one’s identify is linked to family, country and culture. The potential for a clash of world views and or values at the interface with “work” is likely.

Both researchers refer to the inter-relationship between country and family and the importance of maintaining connections through travel and participation in cultural activities. An implication of this priority is that engagement in paid work is for periods of time. Ceremonial life is a ‘fundamental component to Aboriginal existence’ and ‘the power of ceremony in the minds of Aboriginal people could not be underestimated and along-side the positive connotations was the potential for great danger and death’ (McRae-Williams, Eva 2008).

Workplaces with their inherent structures and resultant hierarchy present an incompatibility with the Aboriginal kinship system. McRae-Williams discusses how being a boss presents difficulties for an Aboriginal supervisor or manager as ‘working for’ is not always compatible with ‘working’. This is further complicated by the view that supervisors are regarded as ‘not working’ and ‘just giving orders’ unlike the workers doing the real work on the job. As well, for a non-Aboriginal in the workplace, there is an immediate reference to identification of that person having the ‘boss’ role even though they may not theoretically be in this position.

“Humbug” is often given as a reason for not working or for leaving work. There is an incompatibility between a western economy focussed on individual wealth accumulation and an Aboriginal economy founded on a detailed and pervasive system of sharing. The pressure of sharing one’s resources and effort involved is discussed in detail by McRae-Williams and, though at times this pressure is too much, on the other hand paid work provides an increased opportunity to distribute cash and look after others.
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Nakata in discussing the cultural interface between the two different cultures, the Aboriginal and Western, describes the intersection as a clash (Nakata 2007). The workplace in an Aboriginal community is such a cultural interface, with the coming together of differing ideologies of work, let alone the divergent world views of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers. The writing of Austin-Broos and McRae-Williams illustrates the differing but similar world views between the people at Ngukurr and Hermansburg to that of the colonisers. An understanding of the cultural divide leads to more questions than answers regarding the concept of an employment pathway.

Workplaces on the APY Lands

The intersection of the Western domain of work and the cultural domain for Anangu is a shifting field. Lifestyles have changed significantly since colonisation and the current interface captures a time in history (Nakata 2002). The notion of following in one’s father’s footsteps remains as the teaching and learning of traditional roles in the APY Lands continues. Toby Minyintiri Baker states how, “We still do that work and people still are learning to be ngangkari” (Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council 2013). On the other hand there is paid work. I recall a video compiled by a group of secondary students where they referred to jobs they would like. These jobs were: teachers, nurses, rangers and police officers. But all were located on the APY Lands.

In a quick overview of the job types held in communities a stark picture emerges, with non-Anangu in professional and supervisor positions and Anangu predominantly in worker positions. Anangu are often employed as casuals or part-time workers. This picture concurs with the research referred to earlier. The flow on effect is significant, with wide salary differences and skills gaps between Anangu and non-Anangu employees. Decision making within organisations and workplace expectations are dominated by non-Anangu employees. English is the language used for the exchange of information between Anangu and non-Anangu employees and or management (Gray, Hunter & Lohoar 2012). Though the workplaces are located on the APY Lands, the controlling influences are of the dominant culture. In considering pathways into and within employment, questions arise on whether the workplace culture, practices and or structures are barriers inhibiting the take up of work, retention and career progression.

There are some workplaces with a consistently higher percentage of Anangu employees and with seemingly higher retention than others. The clinic and school are examples where in most communities there are role models who have spent many years in the same workplace. For others there is a tendency to move from one place of employment to another with periods of time working. Retention, as one would expect relies on factors such as a congruence of value systems between employee and employer and the work being valued by family and the community. The impact of workplace culture and practices being respectful of the cultural domain for Anangu and enabling the ‘working for’ with ‘working with’ are contributing factors to retention. Research into Aboriginal employment at the Alice
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Springs Desert Park found relatively high retention levels and a key to this was the value attributed to ‘place’ by employees, their families and community, as well as the understanding by the employer of this attribute and how this was accommodated into workplace practices (Walsh & Davies 2010).

Most employers in the APY Lands are either government agencies or service providers contracted by government to deliver services. A couple of exceptions are the community stores and art centres located in each of the larger communities and the pastoral operations. In considering the range of positions available, a typical community has: a store, clinic, school, art centre, youth shed, adult learning centre, community office, and waste management. Roles supervised at a regional level are rangers, pastoral workers, interpreters and the beginnings of repair and maintenance teams. Social enterprises include the catching and selling of camels and the creation of art and crafts such as jewellery.

The intersection of employment and training sees retention of staff requiring significant investment. A brief look at recruitment of Anangu sees new workers employed based on their interest in the position and a satisfactory police check (where this applies). The age of those commencing employment is often mid to late 20s. Employers on the APY Lands are not keen on contracts of training as the time frames, paperwork, supervisor requirements add a complexity with few outcomes. Industrial compliance heightens the requirement for specific knowledge and skills required of employees such as a White Card for the Construction Industry and employment as a labourer or a Certificate III in Aged Care for example. Over time as these requirements are increasing, the gap between Anangu and non-Anangu in the workplace is widening (Gray, Hunter & Lohoar 2012).

Organisations are concerned with capacity building and a number have introduced more of a team approach to the carrying out of roles and responsibilities. A team approach accommodates employees who are casual and part time and for various reasons take leave. New employees have support and guidance for learning on the job.

There are jobs that are vacant for periods of time on the APY Lands, though the jobs available only go a small way to providing paid work for the number of job seekers. Work off the APY Lands is a possibility with few numbers pursuing it. A better understanding of the view of work and training by Anangu is needed. Limited research thus far has been undertaken to investigate why Aboriginal people work or not in remote Australia, the tension between cultural practice and paid employment, and the impact of workplace practices and policies (Dockery 2009; Gray, Hunter & Lohoar 2012).

**TAFE SA training on the APY Lands**

In managing the TAFE SA program in the APY Lands since 2007, I work closely with employers and service providers. Our mandate is to increase training and employment
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outcomes for Anangu. This involves implementing training programs with employers; VET programs contributing to SACE outcomes for secondary students, and the delivery of employability skills. Training outcomes reported on include: the qualifications and skill sets delivered, enrolments and completions by qualification. The dilemma of following through on funding obligations at times is blind to the potential to hear and take heed of an individual’s desires and aspirations for employment and training.

The statistical trends with training on the APY Lands parallel those at the national level. Thus, for example, there are high participation rates of Anangu involved in training, with the majority in lower level qualifications. Anangu are significantly under-represented in higher level qualifications. The figure below shows the nominal hours and the numbers of students by qualification as delivered via training on the APY Lands in semester 2, 2014. The percentage of students by qualification level are calculated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Description</th>
<th>Nominal Hours</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>% students/ qualification level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AC00024</td>
<td>Certificate I in Education and Skills Development</td>
<td>7,690</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>Units only = 36.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYE</td>
<td>Certificate I in Work Preparation (Community Services)</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP00604</td>
<td>Certificate I in Skills for Vocational Pathways</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP00488</td>
<td>Certificate I in Hospitality</td>
<td>5,028</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Certificate I = 29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HFN</td>
<td>Certificate II in Creative Industries (Media)</td>
<td>1,160</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP00334</td>
<td>Certificate II in Community Services</td>
<td>1,646</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>TP00513</td>
<td>Certificate II in Business</td>
<td>2,215</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTD</td>
<td>Certificate II in Business</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Certificate II = 16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPR</td>
<td>Certificate III in Learning an Endangered Aboriginal Language</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MWR</td>
<td>Certificate III in Disability</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP00362</td>
<td>Certificate III in Children's Services</td>
<td>2,096</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP00514</td>
<td>Certificate III in Business</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP00376</td>
<td>Certificate III in Aged Care</td>
<td>815</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP00379</td>
<td>Certificate III in Home and Community Care</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Certificate III = 12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYL</td>
<td>Certificate IV in Community Development</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPS</td>
<td>Certificate IV in Teaching an Endangered Aboriginal Language</td>
<td>1,320</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>AZB</td>
<td>Certificate IV in Training and Assessment</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Certificate IV = 5.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Overall total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>25,320</strong></td>
<td><strong>320</strong></td>
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</table>
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Skill sets and qualifications delivered at any one time reflect the demand by employers, schools, or service providers and also reflect both the employment options available and program initiatives. Though there are changes over time there are a core group of qualifications that continue year in and year out - for example, training for the Community Services and Health sector. This is an area of employment with a large number of employees with training for new and ongoing employees required. In a 5 year period there is evidence of increased enrolments in certificate levels 3 and 4. Literacy and numeracy training is ongoing; the majority enrolled are employees with attendance encouraged by the employer. In the table above a significant proportion of registrations in the Certificate I in Education and Skills Development are those enrolled in the theory for the learner drivers’ permit. The nominal hours depict a part time study plan and it is very rare for TAFE SA to deliver a full time study program. The advantage of knowing the detail behind the statistics is the picture it tells and the insight into the pathway dilemma for Anangu.

Requirements for carrying out job roles and responsibilities varies from workplace to workplace and it is increasingly likely to require, as a minimum, skill sets related to workplace health and safety. It may however require a certificate 3 level, with the Certificate III in Aged Care or Children’s Services being an example. In semester 2, 2014 there were 13 employees from the aged and home and community care area and 17 employed in the early childhood area registered. Of concern is the ongoing increase in requirements for those starting in a career and the investment required to achieve this. An example is the recent training package update where the Certificate III in Children’s Services with a total of 560 hours has been replaced by the Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care with a total training hours requirement of 818. The new qualification has the added complication of a placement or verification of practical skills (120 hours included in the total) to be demonstrated in a regulated service.

Demand for the Certificate I in Hospitality is through the schools, with employment possibilities with Voyages, Community Stores and in the Family Centres. It is too early for data on registrations into the Certificate II in Hospitality, employment or Year 12 outcomes utilising the hospitality training. Since 2013 there has been a concerted effort for VET options to be available for secondary students. How these contribute to the career directions identified by the students is not known.

Entry level training by TAFE SA involves some delivery of job seeking skills. Pre-employment programs for employment on the APY Lands have gained little traction with either job seeker or employers. This is in contrast to the program delivered in-conjunction with OZ Minerals in 2010, where the 8 graduates were guaranteed and commenced employment at the Prominent Hill mine site.

A Training Needs Analysis was undertaken by TAFE SA in November 2014. The employers and students consulted nominated ‘relevance to job’ as the most important aspect of training. This, plus literacy support, are the fundamental must-haves when undertaking a training program. The analysis confirmed the need to build on existing training programs.
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and learning support to ensure reduced skill gaps reduce and increased workforce capacity. In addition, the analysis confirmed the value of on-the-job training where the training is directly linked to workplace roles. Training is meeting the needs of employers and schools but is it meeting the needs of individuals and their aspirations? If the aspirations of the individual were known how this would change the program is unknown. One harsh reality is the tyranny of distance and the challenge to provide training for small numbers who are spread over a large distance.

The current focus in relation to employment pathways and the role of training is on increasing the capability and capacity of the organisation and the community. The focus of the skills sets and qualifications being delivered reflects the demand by employers and service providers. The investment is concerned with workforce development and in particular with both retaining employees and training for the employees to take on increased roles and responsibilities. Training which is directly linked to the employee’s workplace results in higher qualification completions and the transition into higher level qualifications. The role of the employer is in supporting employees and the methodologies for delivering the training, which influences training outcomes (Camm & Pattison 2014).

Conclusion

Training as we know it and have known it, is achieving outcomes for Anangu to pursue a career. However, it is not achieving the outcomes many of us want. Paid work is limited and increasing the education and training outcomes will not necessarily translate into more jobs for Anangu. Whilst some positions remain vacant for periods of time there are other factors impacting on the take up of work and it may be that these factors influence retention.

The human capital model underpinning government policy values engagement in the economy by the individual. Such engagement is viewed - as with the transition from education into employment – as the lynch pin for addressing disadvantage. There is no doubt employment is of the utmost importance and at meetings the Elders regularly raise the need for jobs.

In exploring the cultural interface with work there are many reasons why employment is not for everyone. Paid work has its rewards and difficulties. Earlier in the paper an insight into the cultural values and world view highlighted the importance of maintaining family and cultural relationships and how relatedness contributed to one’s identify and well-being. In thinking through the concept of employment pathways there is a link to one’s identify and well-being. McRae-Williams and Guenther discuss the significance of identity in the creation of pathways to economic participation (McRae-Williams, E & Guenther 2015). Linking one’s identity and well-being with an employment pathway changes the role of training considerably.
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Current training on the APY Lands includes personal development. This covers training for learner drivers’ permits, literacy, numeracy and job seeking skills. Other training has the focus on either groups of secondary students or workplace employees. In 2013 VET programs for secondary students, where VET is imbedded in SACE, commenced and now the collection of data on what has worked and what has not in enabling the pathway into employment will become possible to collect. Workforce development incorporating on the job training is achieving outcomes both in terms of qualifications completed and for supporting staff in carrying out their responsibilities. Again it is a little too early to collect data on how training is or not supporting career pathways.

In the APY Lands the ability to look at the delivery of training based on the individual rather than an employer or service provider has major implications for the individual, trainer and employer. There are currently more questions than answers when one considers the pathway into and within employment for Anangu. Education and training are key components to an employment pathway and the other key component is available employment and this is an equivalent challenge.

Acknowledgment:

Janet Skewes, Education Manager, TAFE SA and with responsibility for the TAFE SA program in the APY Lands.
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Walsh, F & Davies, J 2010, *Our work is about learning, colleagues, culture and place: Aboriginal employment at the Alice Springs Desert Park.*, Niniti One Limited, Alice Springs.