



FINAL REPORT FOR A 1997 NATIONAL TEACHING DEVELOPMENT GRANT

Developing and teaching Indigenous perspectives in management

Project Leader

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Project Title

Developing and teaching Indigenous perspectives in management

10 Key words or phrases that describe the teaching innovation

management, developing Indigenous perspectives, Indigenous students undergraduate postgraduate, video-cassettes

Executive summary

Indigenous Perspectives in Management (2 videos and booklet) is a resource which utilises Indigenous viewpoints on management as it relates to contemporary practice. A number of Indigenous managers from a range of organisations in urban, rural and remote settings, were interviewed and videotaped in groups and one to one situations to generate insights from the field. The resource addresses a need in teaching Indigenous management ie the need for Indigenous perspectives in management.

The institutions which have sponsored this project, the University of South Australia and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education both have over the years developed courses which address a need for management education in Indigenous contexts. There is a relatively small group of students which this project targets. At the University of South Australia this number is currently 58 students in undergraduate and postgraduate management courses. At the Batchelor Institute there is 64 students studying management. Across Australia there are several hundred Indigenous students studying management, some of whom will have access to these materials.

The materials usually available in such courses have up until often reflected perspectives which may not always be applicable to the experiences of Indigenous students or Indigenous management contexts. This resource improved the teaching of management for Indigenous students studying in management courses by focussing on Indigenous perspectives of management, notably the topics: working in the community; working with boards of management; accountability demands; issues of self-determination; managing staff; communication; recruitment; training and development; confidentiality; managing stress. The Indigenous managers who were interviewed as part of this project committed their time and their ideas on the basis that these materials would be of help to Indigenous students studying management.

Ultimately the project recognised the paucity of available material in the area and sought to a situation where Indigenous students, through further research and development, contributed to a developing corpus of material - material which has the potential to interrupt mainstream management theory as it is applied uncritically to Indigenous experiences.

Generally the innovation has worked well in the limited way it has been used. There were a number of difficulties which had to be overcome in the project's development. This was a very time consuming project. Quite a number of people were part of the development of the materials and this involved a great deal of liaison and attention to the maintaining sound communication and consultation processes. This innovation is in the process of being embedded in the relevant subjects courses offered by the sponsoring institutions. Although there has not been an overall evaluation of the whole project there have been assessments made of aspects of the project as it developed. A formative evaluation undertaken during various stages of production to allowed for adaptation of content and presentation so as to best meet the goals of the project. In addition the comments and advice of key stakeholder groups and individuals were incorporated where possible or appropriate in the final editing and completed version of materials.

Justification and Educational Rationale

Indigenous Perspectives in Management (2 videos and booklet) is a resource which utilises Indigenous viewpoints on management as it relates to contemporary practice and so addresses a need in the field of teaching Indigenous management. A number of Indigenous managers from a range of organisations in urban, rural and remote settings, were interviewed and videotaped in groups and one to one to generate these insights.

The background to this project is that there are a relatively large number of Indigenous organisations, associations and companies providing a wide range of services including: land councils; schools; health and community services, legal services, media centres, and employment services. Within this context many Indigenous managers or prospective managers are deciding to develop their skills and understandings in management and administration.

The institutions which have sponsored this project, the University of South Australia (UniSA) and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education both have over the years developed courses which address a need for management education in Indigenous contexts. The materials usually available to students of management often reflected perspectives not always applicable to the experiences of Indigenous students or Indigenous management contexts. This resource was therefore developed to allow Indigenous students a chance to begin to work with Indigenous perspectives in management. These sorts of materials were up until now not available in any way to Indigenous students studying management.

As well, this project was developed because of a changing political climate which has seen increasing challenges to Indigenous decisionmaking and self-determination. Consequently Indigenous managers face many unique, complex and challenging issues and today, more than ever they are expected to demonstrate high levels of leadership, management and organisational development working in an organisational climate in which there is:

- high client/consumer demand for services and outcomes within a funding context of diminishing resources
- increased accountability pressures from funding bodies and the wider community
- increased responsibilities to both external forces and to communities and family
- a shift in public policy towards competitive tendering and market principles
- changes to workplace conditions of employment.

This resource therefore is precisely aimed at the teaching of management for Indigenous students studying in management courses. The Indigenous managers who were interviewed as part of this project committed their time and their ideas on this basis. Although it is recognised that other students may be part of classes which discuss Indigenous management, the target group for the videos and the accompanying booklet are Indigenous students who are studying management and it is for this purpose that these materials were developed.

This learning resource presents a range of responses by experienced Indigenous

managers to a set of key issue areas within common management themes. The framework for utilising this knowledge is based on several key beliefs which are that Indigenous students of management:

- will need to be familiar with the experiences of Indigenous organisations
- will need to know mainstream management theory and practice
- will need to be able to analyse the theoretical constructs with reference to Indigenous contexts
- will be able to critically engage with the material and develop their own responses to management and administration based on the needs of the organisations and communities for which they work.

Implicit also was the understanding that students study, through the various courses offered at the two institutions involved, at different levels and want to develop appropriate skills and understandings from their study. The learning experiences therefore have been developed to operate on a number of levels ie a descriptive level, an analytical level and a critical level. Students should be in a position to utilise understandings by 'reframing' (Cope and Kalantzis 1999) knowledge to truly own their own knowledge within a wider cultural and political framework.

Ultimately the project recognised the paucity of material that could be used in this area and sought to trigger a situation where the insights and understandings developed by Indigenous practitioners/students, through further research and development, contribute to a developing corpus of material - material which has the potential to interrupt mainstream management theory as it is applied uncritically to Indigenous experiences.

Target Student Group

There is a relatively small group of students which this project targets. At the University of South Australia this number is currently 58 students. At the Batchelor Institute there is 64 students studying management course. Across Australia there are several hundred Indigenous students studying management some of whom will have access to these materials.

Technical Soundness

Generally the innovation has worked well in the limited way it has been used. There were a number of difficulties which had to be overcome in the project's development. This was a very time consuming project. Quite a number of people were part of the development of the materials and this involved a great deal of liaison and attention to opening up and maintaining sound communication. The process of actually getting the groups of managers together to discuss relevant issues and be interviewed was extremely time consuming. Because there was some disclosure of sensitive material an extensive on-going consultation process was incorporated into the project whereby participants were able to vet the material and check whether it represented what they wanted to say on tape. Because some of the videoing was done in non-studio situations and some of the participants spoke a language other than English as their first language a painstaking editing process was involved.

The resource is becoming more central to the teaching and general approach to learning and thinking about content in both the University of South Australia and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education. However as the entire resource has only just been completed there will be some time yet before the materials and the implicit understandings grounded in them will become part of the teaching of Indigenous management related subjects. The ultimate goal of this project being a trigger to increase the development of Indigenous understandings of management through research in higher degrees is still a way off. However this again is because the resource developed has only just been finished. Several years of use will determine the ultimate success of the project.

Administrative Convenience

Administratively this innovation has had minimal impact on the organisational infrastructure.

Political Acceptability

This innovation is in the process of being embedded in the subjects offered by the University of South Australia in Indigenous graduate and post graduate courses and similarly at Batchelor Institute. It is used in a number of subjects in the current This is a prime resource in the teaching and learning of these subjects and has offered an opportunity for students to develop new insights. Teaching staff are very keen on using the resource in their teaching. Several managers who have been interviewed as part of this project have been or now contribute to the teaching of several of the subjects. The innovation has had at least the effect in giving status to a small but developing aspect of management theory and teaching. There has been a great deal of interest in the innovation from a range of other institutions and it will be only a matter of time until other institutions that teach Indigenous-oriented management subjects and courses will be using this as a resource.

Evaluation

Although there has not been an overall evaluation of the whole project there have been assessments made of aspects of the project as it developed. Initially the steering committee gave feedback on the general direction of the project. A formative evaluation was undertaken during various stages of production to see how the content and presentation of the resource best met the goals of the project. In addition the comments and advice of key stakeholder groups and individuals was sought - both during the production of the video and subsequent to its completion through poster presentation and conference exposure. These comments were noted and incorporated where possible or appropriate in the final editing and completed version of materials.

- The main evaluation process was a focus group session of students who discussed aspects of the video for learning purposes. Feedback was gained from students during these sessions and in follow up after the pilot screening to ascertain the impact of the video. The reflections and comments were discussed by the project team and where appropriate adjustments were made to the video text or presentation and most particularly the booklet to accompany the video package.

A sample of comments from students included:

- *Hearing the comments from these people working directly in day to day roles as managers is a real eye opener*
- *At last we can see some of our own people telling it as it is...- this is all very accurate and different from what you get in the usual texts for management*

Students found the sections of the video tapes that they saw to be engaging and challenging. It was particularly noticeable that Indigenous students spoke at length about the issues and challenges presented in the video and had much to say and contribute to the discussion.

Another focus group commented:

- *The video underlines the importance of having Aboriginal contexts to draw from in curriculum material because other wise what we learn isn't grounded - this certainly provides useful insights direct from the field*
- *If all managers had access to this video they might start to have an appreciation of just how hard it can be to work in Aboriginal organisations and also to have some idea of the talent that is out there! I am so glad to see our managers speaking for themselves and feel excited by the issues that the video raises without someone giving the standard answers for a change!*
- *It would be best to focus on one of the questions raised and explore that than to answer each as they tackle different aspects*
- *It is good to see young and old, females and males and rural and urban faces and to understand the diversity of work settings - I was especially pleased to see a young Aboriginal woman up there for a change....*

The points raised in the sessions were affirming and reflected a great deal of interest in the videos and its application. There was a very strong support amongst those in this session for the videos providing an aid to learning for undergraduate years and a strong support for it being very positive for students in their final year/s of study. The students indicated that they felt the video should be introduced early in Years 1 and 2, so that students could carry through an awareness of Indigenous contexts as their study progresses. It was viewed as being more of a resource for developing research themes or illustrating more complex issues in later years of study.

A follow up monitoring and evaluation after two years of use is to be conducted in house with Unaipon School staff and students.

Dissemination and publications.

The project has been able to publicise the project through conference presentations, a website and by submitting a paper to several publications.

Conferences

The Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) National Conference in conjunction with Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM): Looking Forward, Looking Out. This was held in Darwin from 8th - 10th September 1999 (poster presentation and demonstration). Theme of Conference "Globalisation & Public Sector Reform; Indigenous People; Public Policy and Good Governance in the 21st Century". Audience included public administrators,

managers, educators, academics and practitioners from around Australia and Commonwealth nations including South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, New Guinea.

Canadian Indigenous/Native Studies Association (CINSA) conference. CINSA is national Canadian association of academics and other practitioners in the discipline of Native Studies. The School of Native Studies of the University of Alberta, Canada, hosted the CINSA Annual meeting and Conference, May 28-30, 2000. Congress 2000 is the annual conference of the Social Sciences and Humanities in Canada. The CINSA Conference attended by some 300 or so Native Studies academics and practitioners from the communities, business and Aboriginal organisations. The CINSA Conference was part of the International Congress 2000 of the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada (HSSFC) attended by some 7000 academics from over 100 disciplines and many provinces and nations held at University of Alberta from May 25th - May 31st, 2000. A conference paper specifically on video project for the stream "Aboriginal Policy, Management and Government" as part of the CINSA Conference. Abstract available on web at:

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~nativest/CINSA/sched.html>

Website

The dedicated website publicising this project is on

<http://www.unisa.edu.au/unaipon/links.htm>.

Submitted for publication

Organization: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Organization, Theory and Society

Sage, London

The Australian Journal of Public Administration

Appendix 2 - Acknowledgments

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Appendix 3 - Contact details

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Appendix - 4 - List of resources

The resource kit is entitled:

Indigenous perspectives in management. It contains two videos: *Video 1 The big picture*; *Video 2 day to day issues*, and a resource booklet Indigenous perspectives in management.