What makes vocational education and training outcomes effective in tropical savanna communities?

With special reference to tourism and hospitality

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the meaning of effectiveness as it relates to vocational education and training outcomes. The findings presented are based on research being conducted into the ways that education and training can be applied to tropical savanna communities for better regional planning and management. The paper explores some of the issues related to definitions of effective training delivery before presenting findings from the research, with a particular focus on the tourism/hospitality industry. It is suggested that three foundational building blocks should be understood before aspects of training delivery are considered in order to make education and training effective: the identification of a need for training; the presence of a motivator for training; and the presence of enablers to resource training. It is argued that skills shortages in themselves are not sufficient to ensure that training programs will be effective.

Key words: education, training, effectiveness, outcomes, tourism, hospitality,

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the meaning of effectiveness as it relates to vocational education and training outcomes and to identify a model of foundational building blocks that can be applied to training contexts within communities across many regional and remote areas of Australia. The basis of the findings presented here is research currently being conducted towards a PhD by the author, which focuses particularly on Australian tropical savanna communities. The model presented will suggest that for training outcomes to be effective a number of factors contribute foundationally to that effectiveness, even before the method of delivery and subsequent outcomes are considered. Special consideration will be given to the tourism and hospitality industries, with findings presented drawn specifically from interviews conducted with training and hospitality stakeholders.

1.1 The savanna context

'Savanna', by definition, refers broadly to grasslands with scattered trees. The Australian tropical savanna region covers approximately one quarter of Australia's mainland land area (see Figure 1). The region is characterised by low population density, with a population just over 550,000 in 2001 (Guenther 2003). While nationally, the proportion of Indigenous people in the population is 2.2 per cent (ABS 2002a), in the tropical savanna region Indigenous people comprise approximately one sixth of the population and in very remote areas, they comprise more than one third of the population.

Figure 1. **Extent of the area covered by Australia's tropical savannas (Source: http://www.savanna.cdu.edu.au)**

According to ABS (2002a) census data analysed by Guenther (2003), employment across the savanna region in the retail trade is higher than all other industry categories (with 12.4 per cent of all employment), followed by government administration and defence (12.3 per cent). In terms of the industry profile of the region, compared with Australia as a whole, proportionally almost double the population are employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing, approximately six times as many people are employed in the mining industry and almost three times as many people are employed in government administration and defence, compared to Australia as a whole.

Figure 2, below shows changes in employment in the intercensal period from 1996 to 2001 for the savanna region. The chart demonstrates that while a small number of industries have contracted (most notably mining) several industry groups have grown substantially. The growth in employment in the electricity, gas and water supply category should be treated with a degree of caution because of the relatively low number of people employed in that industry group. The figure shows that industries associated with tourism/hospitality appear to have achieved modest employment growth.
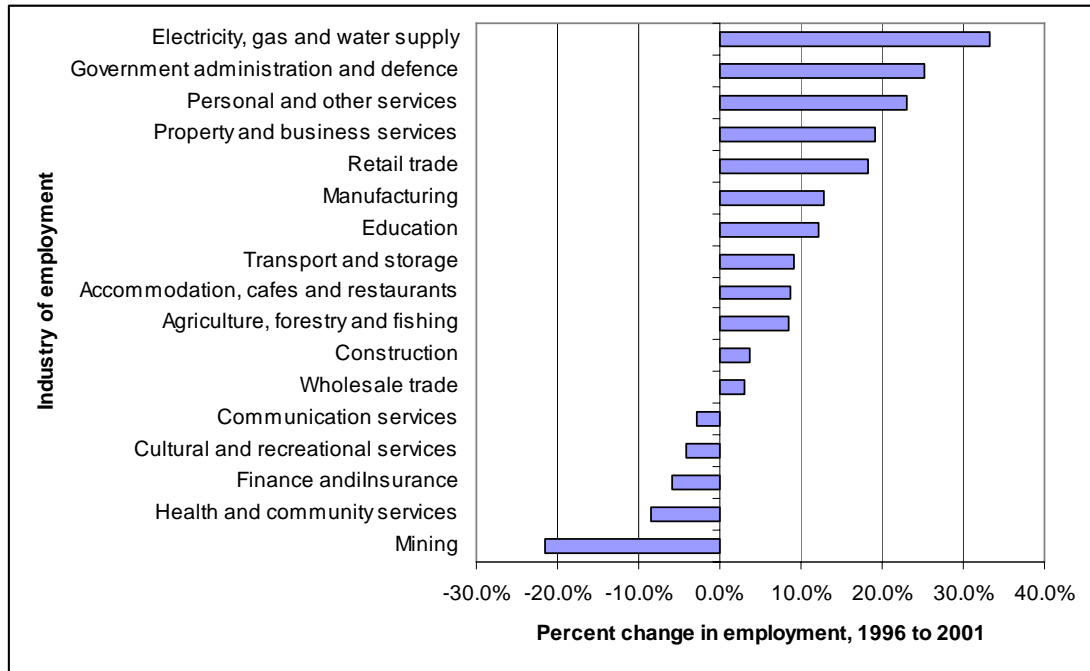

Figure 2. **Growth industries of employment, 1996 to 2001, tropical savanna region (adapted from ABS 2003; Guenther 2003)**

1.2   Types of communities

It is recognised that the term 'community' means different things to different people. Communities can be geographical places where people live (e.g. the Bendigo community), groups of people with a common interest (e.g. a religious community), people from a similar cultural or ethnic background (e.g. the Polish community) or a more general description of people in society (e.g. the community as opposed to the corporate world). In the Northern Territory, community is often used to describe westernised localities where Indigenous people live. In this paper, 'community' simply refers to a place where people live. The paper describes several types of communities such as: urban communities, rural communities and lifestyle communities. There is justification in literature to categorise communities or regions in this way. For example, Stimson *et al* (1999) describes regions according to the predominant characteristics of the area, as does National Economics (NEIR/ALGA 2001).

1.3   Tourism and hospitality in the savanna region

Tourism and hospitality play an increasingly significant role in the economies of the savanna region. In the Northern Territory alone, in the period 1997 to 2003, expenditure by visitors increased by 27% (NTTC 2004). The significance of World Heritage listed national parks such as Kakadu, the Indigenous cultural heritage of the region and the tropical climate provide the tourism industry with opportunities to market a unique tourism experience both to the more populated southern states of Australia and internationally.

1.4   Aims of the research project

The project on which this paper's findings is based, aims to determine how vocational education and training (VET) can be used most effectively as a tool for regional and remote savanna communities and stakeholders to enhance regional planning as it relates to the sustainable management of natural resources in conjunction with the economic, social and cultural needs of the region. With these ends in mind, objectives of the project included reviewing the capacity of communities in the region and the identification of models of effective VET delivery.

2   Methods

The research on which this paper is based triangulates a review of literature, available statistics and qualitative interviews conducted by the author. The methodology shown in this section describes the process used to produce the findings presented.

Phase one of the project considered a range of social indicators identified in literature and using existing sources such as census and other Australian Bureau of Statistics data (ABS 1997, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2003; BRS 1999) and other VET related data (NCVER 2002, 2003). Evaluation of key variables such as remoteness (DHAC 2001), population change, income, Indigenous status, gender, employment, education and other appropriate socio-economic variables (Burgess 1986) were used to determine relative levels of capacity within 118 urban centres and localities across the savanna region. The analysis resulted in the identification of high capacity communities as shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3.   **High capacity urban centres and localities of the savanna region**

Three types of communities emerged from a consideration of the variables associated with those communities identified on the map:

- Urban growth communities such as Darwin and Palmerston

- Peri-urban lifestyle communities, such as Howard Springs and the centres surrounding Townsville

- Mining communities, such as those remote centres of the Northern Territory and the Bowen Basin of Queensland.

The focus of the second phase was to use these types of communities in a series of case studies. In each case study site, the key education and training stakeholders were identified

and a selection of key respondents were identified, partly through consultation with peak bodies associated with the industries of the region and partly through a referral process (commonly known as a modified snowball technique), where respondents were identified from repeated referrals from interviewees. The perception of various stakeholders was assessed through a series of semi-structured interviews and focus groups using ethnographic techniques (Babbie 1998; Creswell 1998). Each respondent was asked a set of four open ended questions aimed at identifying:

1. benefits and beneficiaries of education and learning in their community;

2. drivers of education and learning in their community;

3. examples of effective education, training and learning programs; and

4. barriers to education and learning.

At the time of writing, a total of 95 interviews with 123 respondents had been conducted across the four sites, which included examples of the above three community types and a fourth site that focused loosely on Indigenous interests in the West Arnhem region. The four sites and places where interviews were conducted are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. **Case study sites used for this research**

Site	Type	Interviews for this site conducted in...
1	Urban growth	Darwin, Palmerston
2	Peri-urban lifestyle	Darwin, Howard Springs, McMinns Lagoon, Humpty Doo, Howard Springs, Berry Springs
3	Mining	Rockhampton, Dysart, Emerald, Middlemount, Blackwater, Brisbane
4	Indigenous	Darwin, Oenpelli, Jabiru, Bachelor

3 Literature review

3.1 What defines vocational education and training?

Vocational education and training (VET) is typically defined as training that 'provides people with occupational or work-related knowledge and skills' (ANTA 2004). VET can be divided into formal and informal training. Much of formalised VET in Australia fits within the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and forms part of certificate qualifications from recognised Training Packages. For the purpose of this paper however, VET is taken to mean any training, which may be either formal or informal and that leads to or contributes to skills required for a vocational context. VET, in this broad definition, includes training that may be undertaken for personal development reasons or which may be used in a voluntary context. 'Vocational', in this definition therefore refers to meaningful work, which could be community/voluntary based, enterprise or employment based.

3.2 Effective VET outcomes

'Effective' in vocational education and training is often measured in terms of job outcomes or in terms of the pathway that individual takes to move to further or higher education. These assumptions are built in to the measures of outcomes determined in NCVER's Student Outcomes Survey (NCVER 2003), which describe outcomes primarily in terms of short term employment and training pathways. That is, effectiveness is defined in terms of an ensuing job or a pathway to further education or employment. Some consideration in the Survey is given to achievement of personal aims for training, but the personal outcomes achieved by 'bridgers' and 'self-developers' is not explored in detail. There is a case to be made for inclusion of a broader range of indicators that measure the or 'effectiveness' of a training program to include not just vocational and education outcomes, but community and personal outcomes, an

argument which is becoming enshrined in the national agenda for VET (ANTA 2003). 'Effectiveness' therefore is here defined in terms of the quality of vocational, personal and community outcomes.

3.2.1 Outcomes for individuals

Student outcomes surveys (NCVER 2003) suggest that main outcomes for individuals are determined by whether at the end of a course of study, they are either continuing in education or have achieved some kind of work related outcome, such as gaining a job or gaining a promotion. However, a range of other outcomes for individuals have been identified in research. These include increased 'self-efficacy' (Balatti & Falk 2000) through improved self confidence (Kilpatrick, Bell & Kilpatrick 2001) and self-esteem sometimes included under the banner of 'generic skills' (Gibb 2004). The significance of enhanced social networks that result from engagement in formal and informal training cannot be underestimated either, with a number of research findings supporting a view that participation in training builds networks as an important precursor to employment outcomes (CRLRA 2000, 2001a; Guenther & Millar 2004).

3.2.2 Outcomes for communities

There is a growing body of literature that suggests that community outcomes are a significant indicator of the effectiveness of VET training. A number of researchers have identified the value of VET in building community capacity (CRLRA 2001a; Falk 2001; Kearns 2004). The evidence of numerous case studies suggests that learning, which includes VET, contributes significantly to the well-being of a community, whether that is a rural, Indigenous or urban community. Learning improves an individual's skills and knowledge, but it also contributes to their self-image and allows them to better participate in the community as a whole. Learning contributes to individuals' sense of belonging and better places them in a position to add to the combined resources of the community.

3.2.3 Outcomes for industry

The connection between VET and industry skills needs is long established. VET statistics are frequently reported in terms of industry outcomes. Until recent years the term 'VET' was almost exclusively associated with trades qualifications and apprenticeships. The development of training packages has been built around industry groups, with the focus being on the skill needs of industries (DET 2003):

> Training Packages are developed by industry through national industry advisory bodies or recognised bodies.

3.3 Determinants of effectiveness in a community context

Given the breadth of outcomes described above it would be reasonable to expect that effectiveness is determined to a large extent by the context and purpose of the training. Effectiveness is a subjective quality and will be defined differently according to the position of the stakeholder. An effective outcome for an individual may well be described in terms of a job or personal development. For an employer it may be described in terms of customer satisfaction or productivity. For a community it may be described in terms of the shared resources that are built up because of the increased skill set that is developed by training participants. In many cases the interests of all three stakeholder groups will overlap.

3.4 Effective outcomes for tourism and hospitality stakeholders

While in southern states of Australia, many of the popular tourism destinations are in highly urbanised settings, in the savanna region, tourist attractions are frequently in more isolated and regional contexts. The remoteness of these locations means that local communities benefit from tourism through visitors staying and using services. In isolated or regional places

the ability of a community to capitalise on its locational strengths is to a large extent determined by the level of social capital in the community, such that better planning, greater sharing of resources and higher levels of collaboration between stakeholders will produce more effective results for all stakeholders. Kilpatrick and Guenther (2003), in a review of Australian VET partnerships showed that the outcomes of partnerships will be more likely to be successful in regional communities where a range of community, industry and education stakeholders collaborate together. Because of the interface between communities, industry, clients and employees, effective outcomes of VET in the tourism and hospitality industries ought to include a measure of the satisfaction of clients. Freeland (2000) comments on the importance of client satisfaction as it relates to hospitality skills:

> It is in the interest of all enterprises to ensure that the level of service provided to clients promotes and enhances people's perception of both the enterprise and the industry.

4 Research Results

The findings of the research presented in this section draws on analysis of interview data from the 95 respondents. However, illustrations presented here will focus on the data attributable to ten interviews/focus groups conducted with tourism/hospitality representatives. Other data is drawn on as it is relevant to the findings presented. The results presented here are divided into two sections:

1. Definitions of effective outcomes and

2. Foundations of effective outcomes.

The presentation of findings here is designed only to identify the underpinning principles of a wider framework for effective training outcomes. The other building blocks of training effectiveness will be discussed briefly in the 'Discussions and implications' section.

4.1 Effective outcomes defined

The research data showed that effective outcomes could be defined in a number of ways. Apart from employment and enterprise outcomes, effectiveness was defined by respondents in terms of course completions, personal development, life skills and social development.

4.1.1 Employment and enterprise

As might be expected there were a number of examples of effective training programs provided that described the outcomes in terms of employment or enterprise development. One industry representative, for example, commenting on a training program in an Indigenous community described the enterprise outcomes that followed from the community's involvement in training in terms of job outcomes. The overlapping definitions of effectiveness are demonstrated by the fact that the respondent also noted that one of the reasons for wanting to see success, was a feeling among community leaders that youth retention was an issue.

> They had absolutely no job outcomes in [Community A]. They wanted to keep, the owners wanted to keep the people in [Community A] because it keeps them out of trouble. They wanted to keep the young people there. … So the young people were involved with this whole process too… so they have created an enterprise and an opportunity that would never have existed in [Community A].

Many trainees go into training with an employment goal in mind and the additional benefits that accrue from involvement in training are not immediately apparent to them. In some cases the qualification is seen as a kind of passport to a job. At one focus group of Indigenous hospitality trainees, several respondents gave similar responses, largely unable to recognise the personal development and life skills but were able to clearly articulate their employment aspirations:

I: I'd like you to tell me then is what the training course means for you?

R1: I'm doing this hospitality the course and it's open up a lot of doors to me to get into job opportunities…

R2: I come to do this course because I want to work out in the mines…

R3: [I'm] doing a hospitality training course, I would like to get a job in a restaurant, into a restaurant and work as a qualified chef.

R4: …a job… we're all here to get a job.

4.1.2   Course completions

For some respondents, getting an employment outcome from training was not considered a realistic goal, partly because of the nature of the community and partly because of the nature of the course. In many Indigenous contexts, simply getting trainees to the end of a course was considered to be an effective outcome. Many respondents spoke of high drop out rates associated with course failure. By contrast others, like this employer were clearly impressed by the result of 21 out of 24 completions:

> We'll be graduating hopefully 21 this week. We had three pull out. Which is good. One had to pull out and we had to sack one. So I'm really happy and they are the best bunch of kids; they are absolutely fantastic.

4.1.3   Personal development and life skills

Personal development outcomes identified by respondents included self confidence and self esteem as direct results of training programs or as precursors to further training. Respondents spoke of people who had been out of the work-force for long periods of time regaining confidence as they discovered through training that they did have the ability to achieve positive personal growth outcomes. A comment from an employer typifies the responses:

> They are out there doing a great job… It gives them the feeling of pride and self worth.

Closely associated with these outcomes are life-skills outcomes. By this, respondents referred to a range of skills used in every-day life, from functional literacy and numeracy to personal organisation to time management. These were sometimes contrasted against academic skills that were learnt at school.

4.1.4   Social development

A number of social issues impact on regional and remote communities in the savanna region. These include loss of youth and creating meaningful employment. In Indigenous communities the issues also often relate to boredom, substance abuse and crime. While training in many communities was not thought able to provide adequate pathways to employment, in many cases it was seen to facilitate meaningful opportunities for people to re-engage with their community, especially young people. Sport, music, cultural activities and caring for country were activities where training was often identified as a key vehicle for improving social outcomes, especially for younger people. An industry representative spoke of some of the social outcomes related to a sports related program:

> As far as employment outcomes go these guys at the end of the one year course, two of them actually went into an apprenticeship, so they did get some work and one of them actually got a job as an apprentice with the AFL over here… So no, employment outcomes aren't high but if you take it as reengaging people it's very high. And that's another thing that links in with this program. They are actually looking at life skills and literacy and numeracy as outcomes that are involved with sports.

Another social development aspect of training identified by respondents was that of providing a way of expressing and building the cultural life of the community. In Indigenous

communities, training was seen to be a catalyst for combining cultural and land use activities with appropriate employment or enterprise development.

4.2   Foundations for effective outcomes

The research data pointed to several foundations for effective training outcomes. In terms of a framework for building effective VET training outcomes in communities, these could be described in terms of:

1. Needs;

2. Motivators; and

3. Enablers.

It will be argued later that these needs, motivators and enablers form the basis of effective training delivery. It will also be argued that without recognition of the need, without a motivator and without appropriate enablers, the likelihood of effective training delivery occurring is significantly diminished.

4.2.1   Needs identified

The data suggests that the first step along the way to effective training outcomes is the identification of a training need. The need could be recognised by the individual, an enterprise, an industry group, a provider, a family or a community. The identification of a need establishes the *reason* for training.

A key ingredient to many Indigenous community training programs cited by respondents was seen to be community ownership. In other words, the community saw the need and the training providers facilitated that need and helped promote the appropriate networks required to make it happen. In the example cited below by an industry representative, the training program culminated in a major sporting event, which engaged youth in a year long process.

> So they looked at giving people really practical experience which culminated in the [special event]… This group of young people were basically mentored through the course of the year, which was perhaps a lot longer than other training providers would've done to take to do the same sort of thing... It was really intensive, it was really community owned, they linked it to the school and its footy clinics. …really hands on practical teaching involvement.

The combination of significant cultural or country activity with related enterprise development was cited by another tourism industry respondent as being a significant foundational aspect of a tourism related program on a remote community:

> As I said its broader community benefits. They've got a tourism business that is injecting income. They are sharing their culture and the teaching others who are coming up through the ranks. So it gives them a sense of belonging on the country and earning money while they are doing it.

As a foundation for effective VET, community ownership is an indicator of the likelihood that the community has identified a *need* and has correctly matched a training program to meet that need.

Needs can also be foundational for effectiveness at a personal level. For example the hospitality trainees cited earlier recognised their need for training as a means of getting into employment. Other respondents gave examples of individuals who recognised their need for self-improvement and entered into training for that reason.

4.2.2 Motivators

If the identification of need provides the reason for training, motivators provide the *impetus* for training. The impetus for training can come from a number of sources. It can come from the individual, from a family member, from a community or industry leader or it may come from a financial incentive or reward that creates the impetus.

A number of respondents identified individual motivational factors as foundational for the effectiveness of a program. Among these motivational factors was self-motivation—the desire of the individual to engage in training. An employer in the hospitality industry spoke of the self-motivation of her trainees in terms of them 'wanting to do something with their lives'.

> But bear in mind… they're all kids that want to do something with their lives and are sick of sitting in Darwin and doing nothing.

Several programs were identified where an individual's leadership or an organisation's mission drove effective training outcomes. In most instances the drive for success involved long-term commitment. In many cases it meant putting aside short-term financial gains to effect a deliberate long-term strategy that involved up skilling of staff. The leadership and direction provided to make this happen came from individuals, from enterprises, from training providers and community leaders. Community leaders with a vision for training were frequently not those who were either elected or mandated with authority, but rather individuals whose focus was clearly directed on either community capacity building or enterprise development. While government agencies were often recognised as drivers of training, they are not seen to be 'visionary' and hence are not motivators in that sense.

Another major motivator identified by respondents could be described as financial. These incentives generally applied to individuals in the form of increased income and to enterprises in the form of subsidies and increased profitability through improved productivity. While government were not seen to be leaders in terms of generating impetus through leadership, they were seen as motivators in the sense that they provided funding, which was considered to be a significant incentive, particularly for providers.

4.2.3 Enablers

Enablers act to facilitate or smooth the way for training delivery. Enablers here can be considered in terms of resources. These resources can be thought of in terms of economic, social, political, physical and human enablers. While needs identified establish the reason for training and motivators provide the impetus for training, enablers provide the *resources* for training.

One of the key foundations for effective outcomes was found to be funding. One industry representative commented that it was not only funding, but long term commitment to a project together with adequate support structures that was significant.

> I: So why did it work? Was it the partnership?
>
> R: Partnership, long-term commitment and funding. And even though it didn't necessarily always fit into funding models and found it pretty hard to get ongoing support. In the end they did. Perhaps not as much as they would've liked. But there was that infrastructure there. The partnership and the infrastructure and the money to be out there and the committed people behind the whole process.

A key to effectiveness of many VET programs cited in the research was considered to be basic school education. Respondents referred to the importance of basic, functional literacy and numeracy skills and education, which prepared people for the world of work.

The role of the training provider was often mentioned by respondents as a key component and factor for success of a training program. This was considered not only in terms of the delivery of the program, but their level of commitment to the people and the relationships

built between the provider and the community and individuals. One industry provider described the importance of the long term commitment necessary for ongoing benefits:

> The real crux of what made that so special and so effective was the training providers that were involved with most of the training over five years…It was a long-term commitment especially. With Indigenous training you can't just rock into a community teach for two weeks and rock out and expect to have a long-term benefit.

The findings presented in this section are not necessarily absolute and it may be true that there is some blurring of the foundations for effectiveness that make it difficult to clearly delineate between the three foundational 'building blocks' identified. However, the respondents in this research in answer to questions about what makes programs effective, have clearly articulated that *effective* training will be based on an identified need, will be given impetus by motivators and further, will be facilitated through enabling resources.

5 Discussion and implications

5.1 What makes training effective?

The first set of findings presented demonstrates the breadth of understanding that stakeholders have about what 'effective' means with reference to vocational education and training. In the minds of the stakeholders interviewed, effectiveness is measured in terms of a range of personal, employment, enterprise, social and educational outcomes consistent with other research (CRLRA 2001a) and emerging policy direction (ANTA 2004). The findings support a view that in terms of a basis for funding, it could be argued that job outcome criteria, while important, should not be exclusive to more targeted capacity building criteria based on personal and community outcomes.
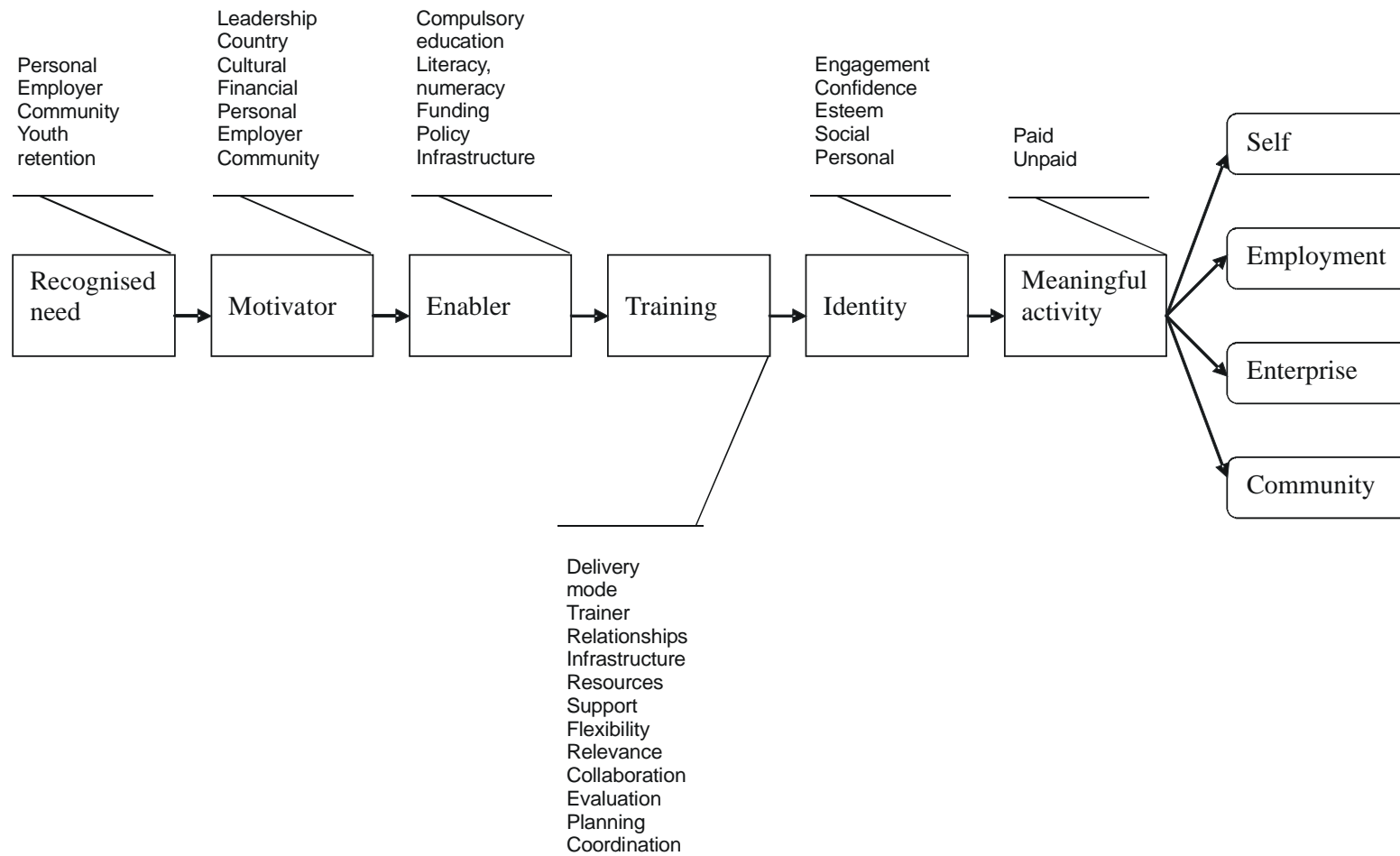
Personal
Employer
Community
Youth
retention

Leadership
Country
Cultural
Financial
Personal
Employer
Community

Compulsory
education
Literacy,
numeracy
Funding
Policy
Infrastructure

Engagement
Confidence
Esteem
Social
Personal

Paid
Unpaid

Recognised need	Motivator	Enabler	Training	Identity	Meaningful activity

Self

Employment

Enterprise

Community

Delivery
mode
Trainer
Relationships
Infrastructure
Resources
Support
Flexibility
Relevance
Collaboration
Evaluation
Planning
Coordination

Figure 4.   A model for effective delivery of training leading to capacity outcomes

5.2 A model for effective delivery

The preceding section on findings has shown that in a range of contexts, there are a number of foundational building blocks that form the basis of effective training. This is not to say that training will not happen should one or more of the building blocks not be present, but the absence of one or more blocks will mean that the effectiveness of the training, particularly in terms of capacity building at a range of levels, will be restricted. In an attempt to better conceptualise these foundations, Figure 4 shows these blocks as a sequence that begin with a recognised need, and are followed by motivators and enablers, which in turn contribute to the context of training delivery.

A further two blocks have been added to the diagram following on from training, which are posited here as formative concepts. The two additional steps suggest that following on from training, effectiveness depends to some extent, first on the formative process of identity building and secondly on the application of the training, whether it be in paid or unpaid work. The idea that training feeds into the identity resources is consistent with recent research by Falk and Balatti (2003), which they suggest are both used as sources and resources to be built on and drawn on. The idea of identity resources being an integral component of a social capital/community capacity building model is not new either, with a growing body of work supporting this view (Falk & Balatti 2000; Falk &Kilpatrick 2000). How these ideas integrate into the model proposed in Figure 4 will be explored further as this research project continues.

5.3 Implication for tourism and hospitality in the savanna region

Setting aside for a moment the outcomes of training required for tourism and hospitality industries of the savanna region, the research presented here suggests that demand for labour and demand for skills, for which there are recognised shortages in the Northern Territory (Northern Territory Government 2003) in themselves are not sufficient to provide the industry with effective training outcomes. If, as the model suggests, identified needs, motivators and enablers are required as precursors to effective training delivery, the industry as a whole needs to give as much consideration to these factors as it does to the mode of delivery and the required outcomes.

6 Conclusions

The findings of research presented here show that the effectiveness of VET, according to a variety of stakeholders in several locations across the savanna region, can be defined in terms of a number of outcomes. These include employment, enterprise, social, personal and course completion outcomes. These measures of effectiveness are dependent on the context of the training and the position of the stakeholder.

The findings of the research suggest the need for consideration to be given to three foundational building blocks, which contribute to VET's effectiveness, even before training is delivered. Firstly, the training need must be identified to from a basis or *reason* for the training. Second, there must be a motivator to provide *impetus* for the training and third, there must be an enabler to ensure the provision of appropriate *resources* for the training. The absence of one or al of these blocks does not necessarily mean that training will not happen, but it is suggested that its effectiveness will be limited. While the scope of this paper has not been to consider the factors associated with training delivery or elements that might ensue from training, it is clear that for training to be effective, consideration needs to be given to these foundations as much as is given to attributes associated with the training itself, or the demands for labour and skills in key savanna industries, which include tourism and hospitality.

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