Vocational education and training as a tool for regional planning and management in savanna communities

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Research summary report, September 2004

Introduction

The primary focus of this paper is to summarise the key findings of research conducted as part of the author's PhD research project. In particular the paper will report on the findings of 102 semi-structured interviews conducted in the period from October 2003 to August 2004 across four case study sites in the savanna region. The interviews were conducted with stakeholders of vocational education and training. These stakeholders included representatives from public and private training providers, government agencies and members of parliament, industry representatives and community representatives.

The findings are here given preliminarily to inform participants and other stakeholders firstly of the results of the research, in terms of vocational education and training (VET) that leads to capacity building outcomes. Secondly an overview of results will be given to show the processes that are required in order to achieve those effective outcomes.

Brief description of the project

While there is a significant body of research that shows quite clearly that VET produces a number of outcomes for participants, industries and communities (e.g. Allen Consulting Group 2004, Blom & Clayton 2004, Kearns 2004, Kral & Falk 2004), there is not as much known about the *ways* that VET produces these outcomes. There has also been little research conducted into how VET processes work together to produce effective capacity building outcomes. An important distinctive feature of this research is that it considers in some detail the processes that occur to produce effective training outcomes for a range of stakeholders in different kinds of communities across the savanna region. The methodological approach used in the research was to conduct a series of case studies primarily using face to face interviews with a semi-structured interview schedule.

Figure 1 maps the case study sites used for this research. The sites were selected on the basis of previous analysis conducted by the author to identify indicators of community capacity. That analysis (Guenther 2003) showed three types of 'high capacity' sites: urban growth communities; peri-urban lifestyle communities and mining communities. The map shows locations of these sites at Palmerston, Northern Territory (Site 1); the rural area from Howard Springs to Berry Springs, Northern Territory (Site 2) and the Bowen Basin, Queensland (Site 3), respectively.

A fourth site was selected to take into account Indigenous issues relating to VET and community capacity, loosely based on communities in the Kakadu/West Arnhem region. Site visits and interviews were conduct at Oenpelli (Gunbalanya) and Jabiru. Other interviews were conducted with residents and those with a working knowledge of the wider West Arnhem region.

Figure 1. Case study sites used in this project

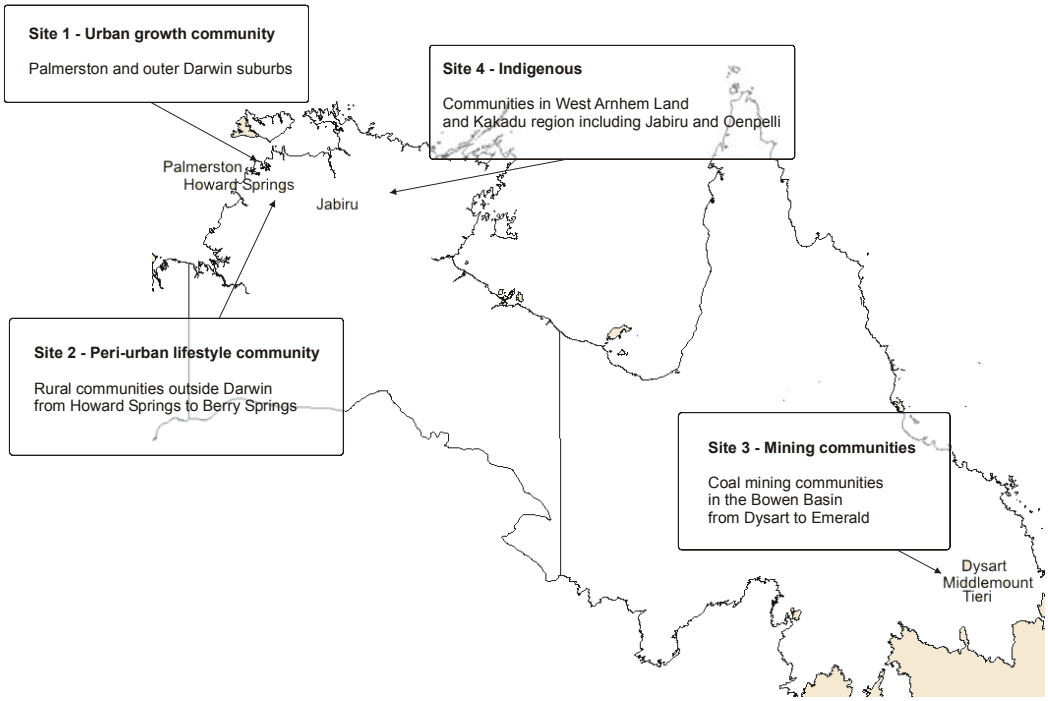


Table 1 summarises interviews and respondents among different stakeholder groups at each case study site. Interviews with trainees were not a priority—those that were conducted were thought to be useful to reflect insights given by specific providers. Respondents were generally chosen because of their experience with the VET system, not just their experience with training. Overall, 102 interviews were conducted with 132 respondents taking part. With the exception of two telephone interviews, all were conducted face to face. While the table notes the primary sites attributed to interviews and respondents, there were several interviews where there was an overlap in interests. For example, it was possible for a person to live in the Howard Springs area, work in Palmerston and have a strategic interest in Indigenous training issues.

Table 1. Summary of stakeholder groups interviewed

Site	Community stakeholders	Government stakeholders	Industry stakeholders	Providers	Trainees	Total interviews	Total respondents
Bowen Basin	3	3	4	8		18	23
Howard Springs	1	5	6	7		19	26
Indigenous	1	10	10	17	2	40	53
Palmerston	2	8	5	9	1	25	30
Total interviews	7	26	25	41	3	102	132
Total respondents	9	28	26	55	14	132	

Case study aims and objectives

The aim of the case studies was to identify ways that VET contributes to capacity building across the region. To this end stakeholders were asked to identify beneficiaries, drivers and barriers to education and learning as well as examples of effective training programs. The purpose of this paper will be to flag the preliminary findings from case studies for two key questions:

1. How does VET build capacity in savanna communities? and
2. What inputs and processes are required to produce effective VET outcomes?

It should be noted that the findings presented here are not exhaustive and should be treated as indicative only, pending the results of detailed analysis yet to be conducted. Further data—yet to be considered—relating to the barriers of education and learning, is available for analysis. This could be used to contrast VET that does not work with VET that does work in the context of capacity building in savanna communities.

How does VET build capacity in savanna communities?

Capacity building is used in this paper to describe the ability of stakeholders to adapt and develop to change and to build on existing strengths. VET builds the capacity of individuals, communities and industries. It also builds capacity through fostering the development of new enterprises. The findings presented here are taken from the case studies as a whole.

VET and individuals

The findings relating to VET and individuals confirm what, to a large extent is already understood about the way that VET builds capacity of individuals particularly in terms of career paths and employment (e.g. NCVER 2003). For this reason, this section will only briefly touch on these issues.

Employment skills and career paths

Many respondents spoke of VET in terms of providing employment outcomes in terms of getting a job or getting a promotion. Others spoke of the benefit of VET in terms of individuals being able to do their jobs better. For young people, VET was seen as a vehicle firstly to get into a job and second to develop a career path. Most respondents commenting on career paths were keen to point out that VET should not be seen as a poor second to higher or degree level education—that it was equally valuable as an alternative to university education.

Personal development

Personal development outcomes for individuals were identified by respondents as being just as significant as employment outcomes. Personal development and employment outcomes were often seen as going hand in hand. Some respondents saw personal development outcomes as being significant in their own right, independent of employment outcomes, particularly in places where employment opportunities were limited. The kinds of personal development outcomes described by respondents included:

- Increased self confidence and self-esteem;
- Improved decision making and problem solving skills;
- Leadership development;

- Personal responsibility;
- Life skills; and
- Self-empowerment.

While the goals of training were not described in terms of personal development—more often than not they were described in terms of employment—the outcomes were frequently described in terms of personal development. However, a critical component of training for effective outcomes was considered by many respondents to be a meaningful application of the skills and knowledge gained. For example, training that increased an individual's self-confidence but did not have an application was considered to be a waste of time—"training for training's sake". While the application was most frequently thought of in the context of a 'job', this was not always the case. Many respondents interviewed described training programs with non-employment outcomes, for which the areas of personal development listed above were highly significant.

Qualification

For many respondents the intrinsic value of the qualification achieved by individuals was also significant. There were several reasons for this. It represented a personal achievement, for which an individual can feel proud. One respondent summed this up as:

> But I'd say that having goals and achieving goals, which is what the bit of paper represents is fairly important…

It was also seen to be a kind of 'passport' to jobs that would have otherwise been out of reach to individuals. For some it represented an important stepping stone for further training, building a new sense of identity and increased perceptions of personal capacity. For example:

> She got her Cert II. And when she got to the end of that it. "I got a piece of paper". It was just amazing… she owned it, and now she's doing Certificate IV in HR.

VET and communities

For the purpose of this paper, 'Communities' are defined as places where people live and with which they identify place. While it is recognised that throughout much of savanna region, communities commonly mean 'places where Indigenous people live', the broader definition is taken here. A considerable and growing body of research shows that VET is an integral part of the capacity building process in communities across Australia (e.g. Balatti & Falk 2000; Kilpatrick 2003; Kilpatrick & Guenther 2003; Millar 2003). Respondents discussed the outcomes of VET for communities as being either direct or indirect.

Indirect benefits to communities

Respondents who spoke of VET being primarily about providing a pathway to employment for individuals were often also able to identify benefits to communities as either by-products or spin-offs. Typically, these benefits were related to the engagement of people in the social fabric of the community. One example from a rural employer illustrates this:

> The primary beneficiary of course is the trainee because in this day and age if you don't have any skills you really don't have any opportunity, it's very hard to

> make your way. But the community benefits too in that training teaches people to focus themselves and this I think protects the community from boredom which leads to delinquency and other forms of antisocial behaviour.

The implication of this statement and the following one from a community leader is that doing training leads to a job, which in turn leads to individuals being involved in the community as responsible citizens:

> We have a wife, we have children and we have a work ethic, we've got money in our pockets and we can meet at the pub on Wednesdays for some boys bonding and we can have a beer and then we've got a good sense of community. But if we didn't have that sense of community, that training behind us, that feeling of self worth perhaps we might meet on a Wednesday, have way too much grog and fight each other, you know, do stupid things.

These views are predicated on a belief that VET is primarily about building individual capacity. In this framework, skills therefore belong to the individual and address individual needs. The resulting identity that is formed is one that enables those individuals to fit in to the existing social structure.

Direct benefits to communities

An alternative view suggests that training addresses the needs of the community as much as it does the needs of the individual. Some stakeholders saw training as a vehicle within a strategic planning framework to facilitate community development. At one level, the community benefits were seen in terms of social engagement, cohesion and civic involvement. Some examples of effective programs cited by respondents where these kind of social benefits were identified include:

- Literacy and numeracy programs in Queensland mining communities;
- An AFL sponsored sport program for youth in an Indigenous community;
- First aid training in Indigenous communities;
- LandCare programs involving young people in a rural community;
- Informal computer training run through community libraries; and
- A Certificate in Translating used by church members to translate parts of the Bible.

In each of these cases employment outcomes were not the primary motivators for running the courses. However in each case the value of programs was recognised for the way in which they helped people engage with and contribute to the life of their communities. In the following example from a first aid provider, it is clear that the training was directed at—and useful for—the whole community.

> …the entire community I think benefits in that respect from the training. And that flows through, because its not only what to do if somebody gets hurt…. we put a lot of information into our training about what we call preventative first aid. …we don't get the feedback to say… people are doing this but we do keep getting invited back. So it says to me that if it wasn't relevant for the participants they wouldn't be doing that.

At another level—particularly in Indigenous communities—the benefits were seen in terms of health and nutrition, community safety, land management and environmental management. Other benefits cited included training for leadership development and governance and maintaining cultural heritage. Training at this level may well be

directed to achieve employment or existing enterprise outcomes, but the benefits are clearly related to the whole community.

One illustration of this kind of community outcome is drawn from a provider who was training in a local government context:

> Just simple things like the chairman being an Indigenous person was constantly being overridden, having a meeting taken over by the CEO. And in the last couple of meetings we attended you had the president of the board saying. "Excuse me, you're the CEO. I'm running this meeting. You can take your turn..." The confidence of those people—you could just see how much more confident they were.

Looking at it another way, it is apparent that in many cases skills learned in an employment context are transferred to family members and others in the community. One respondent in the health industry described this as:

> Its almost like that empowerment of education and training goes on a little bit further… the more information you spread out to the community the better it is as far as impacting them to be empowered about how to look after themselves.

These direct community benefits of education and learning therefore enable communities to better plan for their future, respond to the social demands and needs of residents and in the process, empower individuals to contribute more effectively to the life of the community.

VET and industry

'Industry' is used in this paper to refer to the various stakeholders that contribute predominantly to private enterprise. For the purpose of analysis used in this paper, defence force respondents were included as industry—not government—representatives. These stakeholders include industry associations, peak bodies, unions, employers and enterprises.

It is apparent that across the savanna region in many industries there are skills shortages. In the Northern Territory there is an acknowledged shortage of trades-qualified people especially for major projects (NT Government 2003, Business Sunday 2004) and in central Queensland there is similarly an apparent shortage of qualified people to work in the mining and manufacturing industries (DET 2004). VET in this context is a foundational building block for the future sustainability of many of these industries.

Apart from meeting the future skills needs of industry, VET builds capacity of industry in a number of ways. These can be described under headings of productivity/competitiveness, addressing risk management and building stakeholder relationships.

Filling skills gaps

There is plenty of evidence from the data that suggests that employers in industries across the savanna region are using VET training to meet their skill requirements. In some cases, most notably in this research in the Bowen Basin, there are critical skills shortages, with attempts being made by many to address the issues associated with increasing opportunities in manufacturing and mining and a limited skilled labour force. In the Bowen Basin region of central Queensland a number of issues were identified by respondents that impeded their ability to meet skills needs. These can be summarised under headings of:

- A difficult pathway into the mining industry;
- Population drift to the coastal fringes;
- Use of fly-in fly-out labour;
- A 'grab for cash' by employees seeking the 'fastest buck';
- Lack of training providers to deliver in remote locations; and
- The high cost of providing training to mining sites.

Interestingly none of the above issues were identified by respondents in the Northern Territory case study sites. This is partly due to the different nature of the Northern Territory sites. Only one of the sites (Site 4) included mining and this had a single major mine (Ranger Mine, Jabiru). In the Bowen Basin region visited (Site 3), there were about 20 significant mining sites in a radius of about 80km from Tieri (see Figure 1).

In the Northern Territory sites the issue of using VET to meet skills gaps was still evident, but there was not the same sense of urgency among respondents. The issues for industries appeared to be more controlled and less urgent. In defence for example, skills were readily acquired and developed according to a well managed strategic direction. In the retail industry, respondents argued that demand for training was limited by availability of funding but again the situation appeared to be well managed by individual employers. There were a number of examples of training strategies designed to meet upcoming skill needs. These included:

- Extensive VET in schools programs;
- Nationally coordinated training and recruitment programs for larger retailers; and
- Pro-active initiatives from training providers.

The issues for the Indigenous case study site were different again. The concern of many respondents was about getting local people to fill local jobs. The key to this was felt to be training Indigenous people above Certificate II level. Capacity in this context is therefore built through VET's ability to build and maintain an appropriately skilled and qualified workforce.

Improving productivity and competitiveness

One of the common threads running through all sites was the perceived need to use VET as a means of building a productive and competitive business environment. The extent to which these needs were realised or observed will be considered with more detailed analysis of the data but one respondent commented:

> …business is basically using the VET process to build a nurturing and forward looking culture in business and that gives people a sense of achievement that builds into the business and fosters a very productive sort of environment…

While the specific issues in each site were different, it is clear that employers and enterprises in all industry sectors were demanding skilled people to make their operations more efficient, more competitive and more productive. The results of effective training programs were described in terms of:

- Direct application of training to the demands of the job;

- Contribution to industry strategic and competitive advantage;
- Improved decision making skills;
- Increased sense of personal responsibility for employees;
- Better communication and interpersonal relation skills;
- Better financial management skills for business owners and mangers; and
- Improved technical skills to perform industry specific tasks.

All the above outcomes of training were seen to contribute to the productivity and competitiveness of industries across all sites.

Addressing risk management

Training was seen as a tool for reducing risk across all sites. One respondent succinctly described the value of training as follows:

> Training is going to lessen the risk. The risk is always going to be there but if we can lessen the risk by training, it's great…

The risks that various industry representatives identified were different. In horticulture and food retailing, food safety and hygiene were identified as key risks. In the tourism industry, risks associated with taking people into remote locations—even the risk of crocodile attacks—were identified. In the coal mining industry, there were clear risks associated with use of heavy machinery, enclosed spaces and underground work. In other industries it was health and safety generally. There were several driving forces behind the need for training to address risk management issues. These included:

- Legislation and regulatory requirements;
- Marketing and competitive advantage (particularly in food related industries);
- Costs associated with addressing safety issues; and
- A sense of moral obligation that came from providing safe places to work and live.

The above illustrates the way that training builds capacity by increasing workplace safety and reducing injuries, increasing the confidence of customers, building a sense of security and to some extent appeasing industries' and communities' moral expectations of safe and secure environments.

Building stakeholder relationships

Respondents from all sites commented on the importance of training to meet the expectations of stakeholders. This was often described in terms of customers and customer service, but in some cases customers were far removed from the immediate operations and in other cases, industry needed to work with other key stakeholders to achieve its goals.

Regardless of the industry group in all the sites, the importance of customer service and stakeholder negotiations can be summarised in terms of relationship issues. In the cases of retail, financial services, tourism and hospitality industries the relationship with the customer is direct and immediate and training therefore is seen as a way to build the trust and confidence of the customer so they will use the service or buy the product again. In the horticultural industry the end user was seen to be somewhat

removed from the grower but again by building effective responses to customer needs, suppliers were building the trust and confidence of consumers to ensure they bought the products again.

In the coal mining industry of central Queensland (Site 3), respondents gave little attention to customer relationships, but it was clear that relationships with the communities in which the companies worked, were critical to the sustainability and profitability of the mines in those areas. In the horticultural industry at the rural site outside Darwin (Site 2) there were similar concerns about the community as a stakeholder; with concerns about chemical use in particular. Similarly at the Indigenous site, the needs of traditional owners were paramount for mining, tourism and hospitality industry stakeholders.

The data shows that training builds stakeholder relationship skills in a number of ways. These include:

- Building the interpersonal skills of employees (particularly younger people with limited social and work experience);
- Developing conflict resolution and negotiation skills;
- Ensuring appropriate technical and management skills so that customers' need for timely, accurate and professional service is given;
- Increasing awareness and understanding of stakeholder values, cultural mores and traditions; and
- Creating opportunities for bridge building between one group in a community and another.

A large proportion of the items on the list above are not included in the assessment criteria of courses particularly in Certificate I and II programs—and are therefore not specifically taught/learned—but they happen as part of the process of learning. In some cases the relationships that are built during training serve as models for relationships that are built with stakeholders *after* training. The data suggests that for almost every industry group, building constructive and productive relationships with industry stakeholders is considered to be critical to the success of the organisation.

VET and new enterprises

While a lot of attention was given to jobs and employment outcomes, relatively little attention was given to the role that VET plays in facilitating new enterprises. Indeed, the data from this research suggests that while there are clear VET pathways to community, personal and employment outcomes there is not a clear or well defined pathway to training for enterprise development outcomes. This is not to say that examples of VET being used to build new enterprises did not exist. There were a handful of successful programs cited, that involved VET training at one level or another. All the examples given were Indigenous enterprises and some respondents suggested that Indigenous enterprises were a possible solution for unemployment in Indigenous communities. On the other hand, there was some dispute about the validity of the term 'enterprise development' in the context of Indigenous community. One respondent suggested that:

> Enterprise development is a western concept. [It] really flies in the face of a lot of Indigenous concepts of partnerships, or clan responsibility and mutual obligation…

This argument aside, it was evident from the responses of providers, that generally they are not targeting new enterprise development for their trainees, whether they are Indigenous or not. Those examples of 'successful' new enterprises cited involved a partnership between stakeholders. Commonly this partnership involved a non-Indigenous training provider, an Indigenous community stakeholder and individuals wanting to establish an enterprise, as was the case with the 'Nabarlek' project, which is well-documented (Harrison 2004).

The set of skills required for new enterprise development is clearly different from those required for employment. Further, that skill set required by communities is often completely absent. One respondent described the problem:

> those [new enterprise] structures often struggle because the range of skills… necessary for enterprise development; they are missing in a lot of those communities. So if that whole skills set is absent from the entire community then it's also very difficult for that community to properly identify how to get to the point where they want to get.

While the Northern Territory government recognises that "the opportunity for Indigenous involvement in enterprise development is one of the most sustainable forms of employment for Indigenous people…" (NT Government 2003) there is little evidence in the data from this research that providers have the capacity to meet the enterprise development needs of Indigenous communities, let alone non-Indigenous communities. Despite the potential, the pathways to new enterprise VET outcomes are limited and unclear.

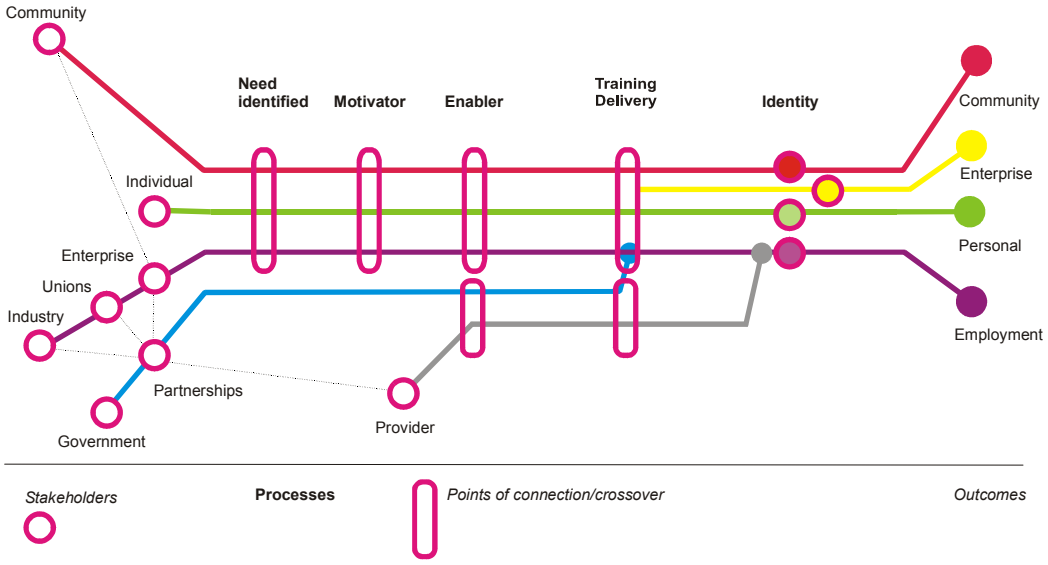
Having considered the capacity building *outcomes* of VET identified in the case studies, this paper now goes on to consider briefly the *inputs* that are necessary for effective training outcomes.

Inputs and processes required to produce effective VET outcomes

One of the key objectives of the case study interviews was to identify the processes by which effective outcomes were achieved. Effectiveness in this paper is used to describe outcomes that were felt by respondents to be either successful or positive according to their own perceptions. Figure 2, below, is an attempt to show pathways and required inputs for capacity building outcomes. The diagram shows three clearly defined tracks that lead to community, personal and employment outcomes of training. The pathway to the fourth outcome—enterprise development—is not clearly defined (as discussed above) and has no clear origin.

The diagram also shows that there are points of connection along the way for the various tracks, suggesting that individuals progressing down one track can change for another track at various points. The various stakeholders are identified along the way as having input to the processes shown as precursors to training. Partnerships are shown on the Government track only for convenience and it is recognised that partnerships in training can take many forms and serve to produce several different capacity building outcomes. The steps shown along the tracks will be discussed in some detail in the sections that follow.

Figure 2. Synthesis of findings showing pathways to effective training outcomes



Role of stakeholders

Figure 2 identifies a number of stakeholders that have input into the training process. The diagram assumes that communities have input into the track that leads to community outputs, individuals as participants provide input into the outputs they want for themselves, and industry bodies including unions and enterprises play a key role in establishing the direction of training for their own purposes.

Governments, according to the diagram, work alongside those three tracks to assist in processes of needs identification, in providing appropriate motivators or incentives and as enablers, providing funding. Governments, more often than not, are not involved in training delivery but certainly provide input into and shape training delivery.

Providers, more often than not, do not identify need and do not provide incentives (though there are exceptions) but work alongside all the stakeholders to enable and deliver training. Providers, it would appear, also have a role to play in forming the identify of participants as they follow on a track or cross-over to a different track on the way to a training outcome. The diagram also suggests that there are important points of connection between government and providers at the enabling and delivery stages of the process.

Precursors to training delivery

The role of stakeholders in producing effective capacity building outcomes will not be discussed further at this point. The focus of the ensuing discussion will be on the processes that occur along the way to producing capacity building outcomes. It is suggested here that there are three important precursors to effective outcomes even before training is delivered: *needs identification*, *motivators* and *enablers*. These will now be discussed in the light of the research data.

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, 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 process 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 it's 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. One example of needs identification can be see in the following example, which shows trainees identifying 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.

Other respondents gave examples of individuals who recognised their need for self-improvement and entered into training for that reason. Identification of need therefore determines the initial reason for training and to some extent determines the track which the individual sets out on.

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 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 industry 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.

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—and not just funding but *long term* funding. This commitment to the longer term has been identified as a key factor for effective delivery at other levels, most notably in the recent Northern Territory secondary education review (CDU/NTDEET 2004). 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.

Another 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 benefits.

Often, as suggested by Figure 2, the connections between the various tracks—which may be facilitated by formal or informal partnerships between stakeholders through collaborative processes—are vital to the outcomes of training programs. It is recognised that these collaborative arrangements can happen at any point along the way, even at the point of needs identification, but the net result is that have an enabling influence through resource sharing and information sharing. The data showed several examples where collaborative approaches were key to effective outcomes. The following example from a respondent involved in government identified the significance of collaborative approaches for meeting educational, personal and employment needs in individuals and the needs of the community as a whole:

> I would say it has to be a collaborative approach that we are all working together to try and prove to the community, particularly to our young ones, that education is a key not just to get a good job and earning lots of money and even though that appeals to them; its the key to self esteem.

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.

Training delivery

With the need identified, and effective motivator in place and enablers available to resource training, the next critical point along the track to effective outcomes is clearly the training delivery. The interviews revealed several key factors that were important as part of quality training delivery. In the first instance these include a set of *content and delivery* considerations:

- Training that meets the needs of individuals;
- Training that is relevant to the desired outcomes;
- 'On the job' components (often described as 'hands on' or 'practical');
- Consideration of the cultural, language and social context of the trainees; and
- Standards of assessment consistent with competencies required.

Alongside these issues related to the content and delivery, are a number of *characteristics* of programs that are also associated with effective outcomes. Training programs were seen to be effective if:

- They related directly to tasks being done at work or in the community;
- There was adequate support for individual trainees;
- They were flexible and adaptable to meet needs of trainees;
- They were engaging and provided opportunity for interaction; or
- They were enjoyable or fun.

Further, respondents identified a number of *process* issues that were associated with training delivery that again contributed to the effectiveness of outcomes. These process issues did not relate directly to the content or the method of delivery but were important adjuncts to the delivery. They were identified in terms of:

- Positive and long term trusting relationships between providers and stakeholder (community, individual or industry);
- Mentoring of individuals (providing effective role models);
- Effective coordination (often described as liaison between providers and communities);
- Planning and evaluation (to ensure that needs of stakeholders continue to be addressed);
- Worthwhile recognition of the qualification obtained in training; and
- Structures that facilitate ongoing learning in a fair and equitable way (these included partnerships and networks that can be tapped into).

The above lists are not necessarily exhaustive and require a degree of 'unpacking' within their relevant contexts. However, they do provided an indication of the range of training delivery factors that may contribute to effective outcomes. The training delivery is crucial for effective outcomes because first it brings together the relevant stakeholders in a kind of convergence of multiple interests: providers, government, participants, industry and community at a significant phase in the training process. It is important because of the significant amount of effort and resources that are provided to make it happen.

While the statistical significance is yet to be tested, the initial analysis suggests that if some of the precursors to training are not addressed then it is less likely that there will be a positive outcome. The examples of 'training for training's sake' cited in the data illustrate the lack of attention given to the precursors to training delivery.

It is also important because of the way in which to a large extent the outcomes are determined at the point of training in terms of community, personal, new enterprise or employment. The point of training delivery is then the last point along the process where an individual can switch from one track to another. The training also has some influence over the formation of identity, which is the next and final step.

Identity formation

If 'identity' is about defining who and what I am and if 'identity formation' is about defining who and what I want to be, then this last step is an important final step to

producing effective capacity building outcomes. Identity formation also draws on the current and historical understanding of self. Training feeds into identity formation by providing new skills, new knowledge and new relationships as well as a new sense of personal self-worth. In terms of the data, identity formation is expressed in a number of ways:

- A recognition that training builds self-confidence and self-esteem;
- Application of training to achieve things that were previously not thought to be possible;
- Re-engagement in the social fabric of the community; and
- A fresh discovery of how individuals fit into their community, work, family or organisational environment.

Formation of the identity also depends on what follows on from training. If for example training comes to an end and there is no application for the skills and knowledge learned then the outcomes cannot be expected to be effective. If on the other hand the training facilitates engagement with meaningful activity—paid or unpaid—the results of the training could be expected to be effective.

Implications and conclusions

The results shown here should be taken to be formative and indicative. They are presented with only a limited analysis, with more in-depth analysis yet to be carried out. It should also be noted that this paper does not draw on the full extent of the data available from the research interviews conducted. There is considerable additional data available that shows perceptions about drivers and barriers, that is yet to be considered. With these things taken into account, four implications are tentatively offered for consideration.

Implication 1: Eliminate training for training's sake

The focus of this research has been on what makes training effective. Many respondents contrasted their examples of effective programs with those that were ineffective—those that were 'set up to fail'. If the precursors to effective training, described above and shown in Figure 2, are valid and they are indeed necessary prerequisites of effective training, it would be reasonable to assume that by ensuring that there is a need identified, that there is adequate motivation and that there are adequate resources before training is delivered, then ineffective training—training for training's sake—could be avoided. The implication of this is simple. There would be more funds available to be applied to where training is needed most.

Implication 2: Planning new education and learning initiatives

Conversely to Implication 1, for those stakeholders planning to develop new training programs, the three precursors to training provide a framework that can be applied at any level of training, to ensure that it is delivered to produce effective outcomes. The criteria for the precursors can be applied equally to training for community outcomes, training for personal outcomes, training for industry outcomes or training for enterprise outcomes.

Implication 3: Pathways to enterprise development

This research has identified the lack of a clearly identifiable pathway to effective training for new enterprise outcomes—Indigenous or non-Indigenous. It appears from

the data that most examples of effective new enterprise development emerge from partnerships between stakeholders. However, it could be useful to consider developing clear strategies to provide pathways that can be applied to new enterprise development. The research has also identified a lack of training providers who are properly equipped to address training for this purpose.

Implication 4: Alternative indicators of successful training

Success of training programs is often measured in terms of completions, certificates attained, attendance, retention rates and other quantifiable measures. The data reviewed here suggests that there are equally valid and measurable qualitative indicators of success, which could be applied to a variety of training programs. These indicators could also be tailored to suit the desired end result in terms of community, industry, personal or enterprise outcomes. It is therefore suggested that a combination of measures of success be used to determine the worth of training programs and that evaluation of programs be made on the basis of a mix of measures appropriate to the application of the training. These measures would include outcomes such as:

- Personal development outcomes (e.g. indications of improved self-esteem, leadership skills, problem solving and decision making skills)
- Community development outcomes (e.g. contribution to health, education, social engagement, civic participation, engagement with networks)
- Stakeholder relationship skills for industry (e.g. indicators of cultural awareness, bridge building, improved interpersonal skills)

Conclusion

This initial report on the findings of the research has focused on two key questions:

How does VET build capacity in savanna communities? and

What inputs and processes are required to produce effective VET outcomes?

The research has shown that capacity in savanna communities is built through outcomes that are produced for individuals, in communities, for industry and through new enterprise development. For individuals, capacity is built through training that leads to employment and career paths. But it is built equally through personal development that comes from training and as a direct result of the achievements that are made in gaining qualifications. For communities there are both direct and indirect benefits. The indirect benefits are seen as spin-offs as a result of training that is conducted for industry outcomes. The direct benefits arise from training that is targeted to specifically meet the needs of the community. For industry, training builds capacity by filling skills gaps, improving productivity and competitiveness, addressing risk management issues and by building stakeholder relationships. The research also identified a small number of examples of effective training that led to new enterprise outcomes, showing what is possible in producing potentially sustainable economic futures, particularly in Indigenous communities. However, there was no clearly defined pathway of training for enterprise development and there were few providers identified with capacities to effectively meet new enterprise development needs.

The findings have also pointed to a number of inputs and processes required to make training outcomes effective. *First*, a need has to be identified by stakeholders, including participants, to establish the reason for training. *Second*, there must be an

adequate motivator or incentive to establish the impetus for training. *Third*, there must be enablers, which provide the human, physical and financial resources to ensure the training can be effectively delivered. Respondents indicated that effective delivery means more than 'good content'. It needs to be characterised by a variety of things including flexibility, enjoyment, engagement and adequate support. It also needs to be accompanied by a number of processes, including development of positive relationships, effective coordination, proper planning and evaluation processes and worthwhile recognition for participants. *Finally*, effective training delivery will lead to positive identity formation. Training that does lead to a meaningful application—paid or unpaid—is often accompanied by an improved sense of self worth and the ability to contribute to the intended purpose above and beyond what was previously thought to be impossible. This report of preliminary findings therefore suggests that in order to build capacity all these factors need to be present.

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