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## First Things First: The foundations of organisational development

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### Introduction

Tourism has long been promoted as a powerful and dynamic industry which can help alleviate poverty, enhance cultural pride, reduce economic vulnerability through diversification, and which also supports the development of skills and entrepreneurial capacity (WTO, 2002). In Australia, Indigenous tourism is seen to be a market segment that can capitalise on these particular characteristics of tourism and which could lead to economic development as a pathway to greater independence, increased employment opportunities and less reliance on Government transfers. Indigenous tourism is not a new concept (Altman, 1993; Altman, 2001; Whitford et al., 2001), however it gained more impetus in the early 1990s when Aboriginal economic development was identified as a key recommendation arising from the 1991 *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1991; Birdsall-Jones et al., 2007) with tourism promoted as a particularly viable option for Indigenous communities. Despite the promise of Indigenous tourism and expectations that the market would grow, there has been a small but steady decline since 2005 to 13% of international visitors in 2010, which is the last year that statistics were collected for this market (Ruhanen et al., 2015).

Developing Indigenous tourism product can be difficult and there is limited research that engages with this market segment from Indigenous perspectives. The majority of recent research on Indigenous tourism has focused on integrating sustainability in areas such as branding (i.e. for festivals and events), visitor impacts and satisfaction, research methods, heritage management, and policy and empowerment (Whitford and Ruhanen, 2016). Whitford and Ruhanen (2016:1091) state that “it is imperative that academic researchers gain a more comprehensive understanding of Indigenous tourism from the perspective of Indigenous stakeholders.”

This chapter seeks to address this paucity of research from the perspective of Indigenous stakeholders and reports on results of a study undertaken with the Jubal Aboriginal Corporation (Jubal), in Northern NSW. The aim of the study was to gain clearer insights into the needs of Aboriginal communities in developing a tourism business and what capabilities are required to develop a sustainable tourism business. Importantly, the study focuses on the Bundjalung Nation of Northern NSW, which is a region that is not well represented in existing research about Indigenous tourism development.

At the commencement of the study Jubal was in the process of identifying options for development. Tourism was one viable development option identified. However, as this study shows, such an aspiration was premature and would have failed if Jubal had not first attended to its organisational development. This study highlights the difficulties and lack of practical support available to Indigenous organisations to develop viable tourism businesses. Schaper et al. (2007 cited in Higgins-Desbiolles, 2014) identify the importance of studying failure to identify barriers to successful business venture formation, growth and management. The Jubal story is not a story about failure; rather it is one that shows a strong belief in the community’s sovereign rights to make development decisions that suit their aspirations and where they are in the process. Jubal decided that tourism was not the right pathway to development for them at the time. At a very practical level, their experience highlights barriers to the successful development of business ventures and provides insight into the factors necessary for success.

## **Barriers to development**

Indigenous tourism businesses often fail for the same reasons that non-Indigenous ones fail (Pitcher et al., 1999). These can include inadequate market research, absence of a detailed business plan, inadequate funding,

lack of business advisory support, inexperienced managers and poor marketing skills (Bell, cited in Pitcher et al., 1999, Birdsall-Jones et al., 2007).

However, nascent Indigenous businesses can also encounter barriers specific to their context as shown in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1:** Barriers to tourism enterprise development in Indigenous communities

<b>Economic barriers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty accessing required capital;</li> <li>• Community ownership requires wide distribution of profits;</li> <li>• Financial success can lead to a reduction in program support resulting in negative net benefit;</li> <li>• Lack of control in joint ventures;</li> <li>• Lack of access to land tenure.</li> </ul>
<b>Resource barriers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of adequate managers;</li> <li>• Lack of access to appropriate legal advice;</li> <li>• Lack of skills and training in tourism jobs;</li> <li>• Insufficient infrastructure;</li> <li>• Lack of interest in interactions with tourists;</li> <li>• Individuals choosing not to work;</li> <li>• Community conflict and lack of understanding about its causes.</li> </ul>
<b>Industry barriers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High expectations of the mainstream industry regarding professional delivery of product;</li> <li>• Conflict between the tourism industry's reliance on tight itineraries and the observance of cultural and social protocols;</li> <li>• Conflict between industry requirements for volume products and the tendency of Indigenous enterprises to accommodate small numbers for limited periods;</li> <li>• Concern about pricing and whether it is possible to be competitive and viable;</li> <li>• Disconnect between Aboriginal culture and the economic and political structures involved in tourism;</li> <li>• Remoteness and cost of travel;</li> <li>• Lack of networks between Indigenous and mainstream tourism businesses.</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural barriers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concern that in the process of customising Indigenous culture to attract and entertain tourists that culture may be distorted, exploited and undermined;</li> <li>• Reduced lack of access to land utilised by tourists.</li> </ul>

*Source:* Altman, 1983, 1989; Birdsall-Jones et al., 2007; Commonwealth, 2008; Craik, 2001; Rooke, 1993.