Aboriginal leadership – Resilience as a key ingredient to social mobility for minority groups in colonial Australia.

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Abstract

This paper provides an Aboriginal perspective of the multi-dimensional nature of resilience as derived within the complex inter-cultural space of between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. We derive twenty-nine dimensions which range from racial resilience to trailblazer resilience, all of which Aboriginal leaders need in order to overcome the structural barriers preventing Aboriginal people from achieving equity in Australia. Our perspective adds to the resilience literature by shifting the discourse away from an individualist perspective to one which privileges the cultural, social and emotional structures that underpin Aboriginal values and philosophies.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore some principles of resilience as related to Aboriginal leadership in Australia. The concept of resilience (from the field of psychiatry) is defined as 'a personality characteristic that moderates the negative effects of stress and promotes adaptation' (Wagnild & Young, 1993; Ahern, Kiehl, Sole, & Byers, 2006). This definition positions the individual as the focal point for analysis, and partitions resilience as a fixed entity of the mind. There is much argument against this individualistic approach which from an Aboriginal perspective negates the social, cultural, spiritual and environmental considerations necessary to individual resilience (Humphery, 2001; Lutschini, 2005).[1] Furthermore, there is no recognition of how resilience is constructed in the complex inter-cultural space of settler colonial societies. In order to further this line of thinking we chose a collection of literature that, in our own lived experiences, struck a meaningful tone within our spirits.

Australia as a settler colonial state has a particular developmental history which for the first century and a half (1788 to 1938) is characterised as a 'period of dispossession, physical ill-treatment, social disruption, population decline, economic exploitation, codified discrimination, and cultural devastation' (Gardiner-Garden, 1999). The effects of this past are evident in broad ranging socio-economic disadvantage (Shepherd, Li, & Zubrick, 2012). However, the current efforts to 'close the gap' (Brien & Hoy, 2009) in Indigenous disadvantage still privilege an individual and biomedical approach based on indicators that reinforce deficit instead of an approach that values Aboriginal epistemology. From our perspective more important indicators should be based on the social, cultural, spiritual and environmental considerations building an equilibrium of power and control to achieve outcomes. Indeed, as Marmot et al. (2008) state health inequity is a 'result of a combination of poor social policies and programmes, unfair economic arrangements, and bad politics' (Marmot, Friel, Bell, Houweling, & Taylor, 2008, p.1661). These 'structural

[1] The term Aboriginal refers to Australia's first nations peoples' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.

determinants' have hindered the mobility of Aboriginal people who strive to achieve equity in all spheres of Australian society.

And there is no one road or easy answer through which to achieve improved social mobility for a number of complicated reasons as set out in key references that discuss Australian federalism (Thorlakson, 2003), the ongoing debates of the interpretation of Australian history (Parkes, 2007), a comparison of Australian Aboriginal health with other nations (King, Smith, & Gracey, 2009a, 2009b), and debates about identity (Paradies, 2006). It should then be of little surprise that to be an Aboriginal leader means grappling with a number of shifting complexities, as we outline below.

Resilience as a Collective Concept

Aboriginal leaders throughout Australia's colonial history have *collectively* built resilience in many forms, continually responding to changing political environments, challenges and social movements. In this article we point to different forms as a checklist for entering the political super market of Aboriginal affairs. While space limitations restrict extensive discussion of each point in order to draw-out the 'how-to' gain resilience, we rhetorically ask can the written English form of communication convey the richly grained and textured fabric of Aboriginal peoples' collective cultural values? Therefore, gaining the forms of resilience inherently rests with aspiring Aboriginal leaders interactions with one another, their communities, and current Aboriginal leaders.

Racial Resilience

Being Aboriginal Australian means having *racial resilience* because underpinning the settlement of Australia was the value of racial superiority which 'played a defining role in the foundation of the nation' (Day, 1996, p. 2). When Australia federated in 1901 (prior to this being separately governed colonies) the first law passed by the new federal parliament (the Federal or Commonwealth Government is based on a combination of the Westminster system of England and the Washington system of the United States) was the Immigration Restriction Act, which evolved to be a series of rules, resources and structures termed the 'white Australia policy' lasting from 1901 to 1973 (Day, 1996). This did not officially end until the introduction of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Grassby, 1976). The extent of race-based notions in Australia should not be under-estimated as public acts and discourse surfaces on regular occasion to highlight the embedded nature of this value (Jackman, 1998). As such an Aboriginal leader needs to be resilient against racial prejudice, but also sensitive to how governance processes can explicitly - and implicitly - reflect such values.

Pattern Resilience

The racial value was codified into every piece of legislation (the legal instrument through which Australian government allocates resources), through different governments, in different sectors of society (health, education, justice, etc.) and through different times. Many publications provide detail about the historically located social values and their reflection in the 'race clauses' of the Australian Constitution (1901) and as expressed in legislation and practice of every aspect of Australian society (Broome, 2001; Chesterman & Galligan, 1997; Eckermann et al., 2006; Keen, 1994; Kidd, 1997; Reid & Tromph, 1991; Reynolds, 1999; Saggers & Gray, 1991). It is claimed that 'every act imposed on Aboriginal people between the 1890s and the 1960s can be classified as an example of institutional racism' (Eckermann et al., 1992, p.

34). Aboriginal leaders need to be aware of the patterns in governance process – from policy to strategy to program implementation – and through this awareness build *pattern resilience*.

Accountability resilience

Being aware of patterns means that one can ask for the architects of policy, be held accountable for its implementation which requires *accountability resilience*. A perhaps infamous example is the finding that the 1989 National Aboriginal Health Strategy (the first Aboriginal-led strategy development process) was 'never effectively implemented' (National Aboriginal Health Strategy Evaluation Committee & Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 1994). In contrast a review of the National Aboriginal Education Policy (also in 1994) found that whilst overall it was a successful and positive policy, some weaknesses could be addressed (Yunupingu, et al., 1994). Importantly, accountability meant that the subsequent forty-four recommendations served to guide future developments in Aboriginal education. A key theme driving the recommendations was 'Equity and Reconciliation':

> 'Equity is the yet-to-be-finished business of the twentieth century. Much still needs to be done. And there is a sense of urgency – both to fulfil Australia's promise of providing a fair go for all and to complete the work of this century before the end of the decade. Time is critical.' *(Yunupingu, et al, 1994, p. 2-3).*

Inter-cultural resilience

The value of equity is one in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can bond through and develop *inter-cultural resilience*. Many non-Aboriginal people were outspoken about the poor treatment of Aboriginal people since European-Australian settlement (officially commemorated as 1788) (Attwood & Markus, 1999; Kidd, 1997; Reynolds, 1999), as well as before the separate Australian colonies federated in 1901 (Brown, 2004) both from individuals and humanitarian societies (Foxcroft, 1941). Unfortunately these voices were not influentially placed to alter the formation of the Australian nation, as the discussions and debates informing the writing of the Australian Constitution (1901) did not include Indigenous people (Anderson, 2001).

Democratic resilience

That the 'dominant' values of a social time period affect official policy points to an inherent issue of democratic process not being equated to equity of voice. Australia is overly governed for a country of 23 million people, with a Federal (also called 'Commonwealth' or 'national') Government, six states and two territories, and more than eight hundred and fifty local government areas (Anderson & Sanders, 1996). In this system, achieving equity requires playing-off against competing political demands presented by thousands of single issue lobby groups (Hendriks, 2002). As such the development and implementation of policy involves negotiating with many different political stakeholders (who may change every three years in Australia's electoral system). Therefore, for *democratic resilience* an Aboriginal leader needs to understand not only the value preferences of different political parties, but how democratic processes operate.

Vision resilience

One of the important factors serving as a foil against changing political values is to have shared *vision resilience*. In 1989 the Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce (AEPT, chaired by Paul Hughes) undertook extensive consultations with Aboriginal people throughout Australia who reinforced the priorities of: Aboriginal community involvement, increasing participation, positive educational outcomes, improving local provision, and strategies for schooling in all sectors of education including early childhood, primary and secondary, tertiary education and higher education. These priorities formed the basis of the 1990 National Aboriginal Education Policy (NAEP) which was to guide the progress of Aboriginal education for the next two decades (Hughes, et al., 1988, p 4-5). The extensive consultations, Aboriginal leadership and an Aboriginal process resulted in a strong shared vision which ripples through time.

Participatory resilience

The AEPT was a mechanism which allowed the embedding and transmission of Aboriginal values which can then be (to some extent) codified into law which thus influences bureaucratic processes. For example, with Aboriginal people officially excluded from consideration in the Australian Constitution (1901), we were 'talked-about' rather than 'talked-with' in discussions and debates that would shape our lives through the adoption of various policy stances. In 1937 a Commonwealth-State Native Welfare Conference a policy of 'absorption' was adopted for 'natives of aboriginal origin, but not of the full bloods, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth' (National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, 1997). The term 'absorption' refers to the loss of physical characteristics through interracial relationships (Ellinghaus, 2003). The policy of 'assimilation' was adopted at the third conference in 1951, and again in 1961 and 1965 (National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, 1997) . This refers to 'cultural assimilation' where it was believed that Indigenous people could be taught how to live as non-Indigenous people (Ellinghaus, 2003). The lesson for Aboriginal leaders is to have *participation resilience* in advocating for Aboriginal voices to be heard in formal committees and consultation processes.

Cultural integrity resilience

Having a 'voice' means giving due consideration for cultural integrity to be allowed in policy processes but this requires *cultural integrity resilience*. In contrast to the assimilation policies of non-Aboriginal people in native welfare conferences, in 1999 a Taskforce on Indigenous Education (Aboriginal members) advised Australian government education ministers that educational equality for Aboriginal people should be under-girded by a clear focus on cultural inclusion (MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education, 2000). A cultural respect framework also informs the Australian government's approach to Aboriginal health (AHMAC, 2004) and Aboriginal cultural awareness training is a standard program in many sectors of society (Downing & Kowal, 2011; Westwood & Westwood, 2010). The usage of the phrase 'cultural respect' in policy documents signals the recognition of Aboriginal collective values.

Advocacy resilience

The emphasis on culture is driven by Aboriginal peoples' participation in formal policy processes, though this did not occur until after 1967. Prior to that Aboriginal influence was achieved through social networks and interest groups (Anderson, 2003; Attwood & Markus, 1999; Summers, 2000) which set the basis for *advocacy resilience*. The first political advocacy organisation (with operations limited to South-Eastern Australia) was the Australian Aboriginal Progress Association (AAPA) established in 1925 by Fred Maynard and Tom Lacey along the lines of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (Foley, 2013).

However, the first *national* advocacy body was the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines (later the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders - FCAATSI, 1958 to 1972). It was a multicultural organisation whose leadership included many non-Aboriginal people (Attwood & Markus, 1999) and it initially focussed on promoting citizenship and civic rights (the right to vote, access to welfare or employment) (Anderson, 2003). One of its non-Aboriginal co-founders, Gordon Bryant, later became the first Aboriginal Affairs Minister in the Gough Whitlam Labor Government (1972-1975), which highlights the need for an inter-cultural resilience (above).

Political activity resilience

Such advocacy groups served to generate a head of steam to drive Aboriginal issues into the consciousness of mainstream Australian society. In order to do so requires *political activity resilience* because it is necessary to seek publicity so as to crystallise interest and stimulate debate. For example in 1965 the Student Action for Aborigines group, lead by Aboriginal activist Charles Perkins (also a member of FCAATSI), organised the Freedom Rides (Attwood & Markus, 1999). This activity generated wide debate in society and served to highlight the segregation activities (such as separate toilets for 'whites' and 'blacks') in Australian towns.

Rights resilience

The Freedom Rides, as the name partly implies, highlighted how inalienable rights were being violated, which means an Aboriginal leader needs to have *rights resilience*. The central issue of land rights became a significant campaign issue for the FCAATSI and many other pressure groups after a strike of Aboriginal stock workers in 1966 lead to the Gurindji land claim (Attwood & Markus, 1999). In 1969 the Yolgnu on Gove Peninsula land rights case challenged the doctrine of 'terra nullius' (that prior to European settlement in 1788 the land belonged to no one), and whilst the bid failed at the time it stimulated the establishment (1972) of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy on the lawns of Australia's Old Parliament House (Dow, 2000). The doctrine of 'terra nullius' was not overturned until the Mabo decision in 1992 (Attwood & Markus, 1999).

Sustained pressure resilience

In noting the shift of time in the dates above brings forward the need for *sustained pressure resilience*. The FCAATSI led a decade-long campaign to change the discriminatory sections (51 and 127) of the Australian Constitution (Anderson, 2003). The social attitudes of ministers from the Australian and state governments at the time was evident in the 1965 Native Welfare Conference (National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, 1997) [even though Australia was one of the eight nations involved in drafting the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights). The Ministers reaffirmed the policy of assimilation (Coombs, 1976, p. 3):

> 'The policy of assimilation seeks that all persons of Aboriginal descent *will choose* [emphasis ours] to attain a similar manner and standard of living to that of other Australians and live as members of a single Australian community-enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities and influenced by the same hopes and loyalties as other Australians'

Nevertheless there was the positive result of the 1967 referendum which is seen as a watershed in Indigenous affairs policy due to its symbolism and its head of power for legislative changes (Gardiner-

Garden, 1996). For example, the Australian Government could fund Aboriginal programs and 'develop a lead role in national health policy and strategy' (Anderson & Whyte, 2006, p. 10). Thereafter, Aboriginal participation shifted from being solely through social networks and interest groups and into formal processes and structures. New aspects of resilience were required by Aboriginal leaders in order to deal with the administrative structures of a Western democratic state.

Power/control resilience

Underlying the intent of the advocacy for the 1967 referendum was the need to redress the disempowering effects of past policies by achieving equilibrium through *power/control resilience*. One of the key ways to empowerment is through educational attainment such as framed by the 2010 – 2014 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (MCEECDYA, 2010) which provides a clear rhetoric around cultural principles and values, however the outcomes are yet to be seen. This action plan 'sits' within an inter-government National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage (known as Close the Gap) (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). Pholi, et al (2009) identifies two main criticisms of the 'Close the Gap' initiative, a 'predominately individualistic focus, which fails to account for an imbalanced distribution of power and a limited degree of control exercised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians' and secondly 'a distinct ideological heritage, reflecting certain trends in social policy and public health more broadly.' (Pholi, Black, & Richards, 2009, p. 11). Although the 'Close the Gap' campaign has obvious good intentions it is questionable to whether the idea is an approach based on a deficit model with an underlying assimilative tone, with a power imbalance rather than one based on true self-determination.

Political change resilience

Campaigns such as Close the Gap are subject to three-year election cycles (in Australia as in the United States there are federal and state level elections) often resulting in changes to political parties and thus alterations in the governance processes. In this society an Aboriginal leader needs to have *political change resilience*, for each Australian political party that wins office re-organises governance process to do with Aboriginal participation (Weaver, 1983a, 1983b). For example after the 1967 referendum the then right-wing Liberal-Country Party government established an *advisory* Council for Aboriginal Affairs (CAA, 1967-1976) (Coombs, 1976). This institutional development marked a continuous cycle of 'experiments' by governments to gain Aboriginal peoples' perspectives on social policy (Weaver, 1983a, 1983b). As we noted earlier, a shared vision and pattern resilience serve as bulwarks against political expediencies.

Social change resilience

Though the cyclical nature of political change reflects sentimentalities in Australian society for the decade after 1967, as rapid changes were occurring in Aboriginal affairs policy, the dominant social values were altering to be of more socialist in intent. The left-wing Whitlam Labor Government (1972-1975) was elected after twenty-three years of right-wing Liberal government (1949-1972). This era saw the rise of community participation and consumer involvement in mainstream health care, a period of social revolution (environment movement, women's movement, anti-Vietnam war protests) (Baum, 2002). There were 'New Left' policies of self-management and participatory democracy, with strong links to human rights (Carter & O'Connor, 2003; NRCCPH, 2004). Aboriginal affairs moved into a new era from one dominated by assimilationist values to another of self-determination. Aboriginal leaders need to gain *social change resilience* in order to leverage political change.

Adversity resilience

Being aware of broader social change also means that there is strength to be gained by looking through the 'here-and-now' to the potential for future change, which requires *adversity resilience*. In 1972 the Whitlam Government introduced the policy of self-determination (a markedly different value basis to that of assimilation), which marked the beginning of a new journey for Aboriginal people (Kowal, 2011). The policy instated Aboriginal people with the right to promote and control their own culture, heritage and language, prompting the Commonwealth Government to establish processes to enable effective consultation and advice from Aboriginal peoples. However, adversity was faced in the purely advisory role of the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC, 1973-1977) and its successor the National Aboriginal Committee (NAC) (Coombs, 1994). As Weaver (1983a, b) notes governments wanted advice whilst Aboriginal people sought greater control and power.

Socio-political resilience

In combating adversity there is a need to shift the nature of a political messages which indicates *socio-political resilience***.** By 1972 the focus shifted from 'land rights' to gaining autonomy through principles such as sovereignty, self-determination, and community control (Anderson, 2003). In 1970 a group within FCAATSI formed a separate organisation (National Tribal Council) to better reflect the value of Aboriginal autonomy (Attwood & Markus, 1999) by having Aboriginal-only members. This separatist movement meant that the FCAATSI 'became a pale shadow of its former self' (Attwood & Markus, 1999, p. 21). However, the Aboriginal community controlled health services (run by Aboriginal only, community elected, board of directors) is regarded as the institutional embodiment of self-determination (Bell et al., 2000). Autonomy and self-determination are principles underpinning socio-political resilience to non-Aboriginal politics, but also to the politics of different interests of Australia's First Peoples.

Cultural diversity resilience

Aboriginal health services cater to the needs of local communities which points to the incredibly diverse nations of Australia's First Peoples (King et al., 2009a). Thus an Aboriginal leader needs to develop *cultural diversity resilience*. As a consequence of diversity the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1975 is a law which allows the direct allocation of resources to thousands of Aboriginal organisations (Corrs Chambers Westgarth Lawyers, Anthropos Consulting, Dodson, M., Mantziaris, C., & Rashid, B. 2002) with their own forms of governance thus giving rise to a distinct Aboriginal service delivery sector (Sanders, 2002). This has created administrative complexity because the Australian Government's bureaucracy in effect deals not with Aboriginal people but with many Nations with differing interests (HRSCATSIA, 2004).

Self-determination resilience

Nevertheless, the diversity of Aboriginal cultures underscores the value of self-determination and the requirement for policy processes to be structured appropriately to cater for difference and diversity. S*elf-determination resilience* should drive an Aboriginal leaders' engagement with the Australian State. For example the Aboriginal Consultative Groups' (ACG) 1975 report to the Commonwealth Schools Commission (in Australia, the term Commonwealth means 'federal') provided the vision that:

> 'we see education as the most important strategy for achieving realistic self-determination for the Aboriginal people of Australia. We do not see education as a method of producing an

> anglicised Aborigine but rather as an instrument for creating an informed community with intellectual and technological skills. We wish to be Aboriginal citizens in a changing Australia' (Aboriginal Consultative Group, 1975, p.3)

Importantly the ACG consulted with Aboriginal peoples across Australia relating to the education of Aboriginal children, with a major recommendation for the establishment of a 'statutory funding body called the National Aboriginal Education Commission'. The recommendations were listed in categories which consisted of Aboriginal involvement and appointment of positions that would influence high level decision making; developing professionals that will meet the needs of Aboriginal education; providing appropriate programs and resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within all modes of education; and providing opportunities for Aboriginal people to re-engage in education in an appropriate setting. Clearly, education and self-determination are inter-twined in Australia.

Consultation resilience

One of the key ways to achieve self-determination is for Aboriginal people to participate in the processes that influence resource allocation. An Aboriginal leader spends much time providing advice to bureaucratic officials and government departments and thus develops *consultation resilience*. Being 'consulted' may not directly translate into actions as Sally Weaver (1983a,b) noted in her examination of Australian governments' attempts to gain Aboriginal peoples 'advice', although Aboriginal people were consulted the policy, strategy drafting and decision making were done by executive government members. Furthermore, as with all policy decisions in Western democracies, it is the politically elected party official as a 'Minister' who has ultimate decision making authority in Cabinet deliberations and debates.

System design resilience

This was no more evident than in the establishment (1990) of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), a statutory authority (non-government organisation funded to act autonomously, through an act of the Australian Parliament) (Hand, 1987). The intent behind ATSIC was apparently 'to ensure the maximum participation of Aboriginal persons and Torres Strait Islanders in the formulation and implementation of programs' (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 2001) however its role was 'subject to the powers of the Minister' (referring to the Australian Government minister of Aboriginal affairs) (Keen, 1993, p.34). In spite of this governance arrangement, ATSIC made deliberate attempts at advocacy rather than advice, and sought to distance itself from the 'advisory role' to government (Sanders, 2002). The lesson from this is the need for *system design resilience* for Aboriginal leaders to be knowledgeable of the intricacies of Western institutions (legal, political and judicial).

Tribal rivalry resilience

Another factor in the ATSIC organisation was the role of *tribal rivalry resilience*. In the early 1990's Aboriginal controlled health organisations successfully advocated for 'health' programs to be the remit of the Australian government because there was 'resentment' that the majority of resources for the health were directed – through ATSIC – outside of the health sector (Anderson & Sanders, 1996), and that there were 'unwanted competition for resources with other Aboriginal community controlled organisations' (ANAO, 1998, p. 126). Thus, an Aboriginal leader needs the skills to negotiate different tribal politics, just as a Australian politicians negotiate in Australian society. Changes in the experiments in Aboriginal affairs, such as ATSIC, are often justified by financial restrictions, there always are ample resources available to fund the cycle of bureaucratic changes in Australian governments.

Reform resilience

Bureaucracy is a term referring the institutionalised administrative processes through which political parties deliver their Australian governments 'reforms'. For example, in 2004 the then right-wing Howard Liberal/National Coalition Government (1996-2007) proposed New Arrangements in Indigenous Affairs (Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination, 2006) predicated on the principles of 'shared responsibility' and 'mutual obligation' (Anderson, 2006). Such reform processes are referred to as 'innovation without change' (Gardiner-Garden, 1994) and occur without any discussion of costs of doing so, in line with this, Aboriginal leaders then need to develop *reform resilience*.

Navigation resilience

Understanding the past reform processes builds the capacity for re-navigating changing reform and an Aboriginal leader has to develop *navigation resilience*. Aboriginal education has seen many reports over the decades such as: Education for Aborigines: Report to the Schools Commission (Aboriginal Consultative Group, 1975); Report of the Aboriginal Education Policy Taskforce (Hughes, 1988); National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Yunupingu, 1994); and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010 – 2014 (MCEETYA, 2010). The knowledge gained from these reports *guide and inform* the progress of Aboriginal education in Australia. However, the repetitive publication of statistical-based reports is met with cynicism (not another report!) especially when resource allocation is argued not to meet the vertical equity considerations to address the high level of need (Mooney, Jan, & Wiseman, 2002; Wiseman & Jan, 2000).

Expertise resilience

Furthermore, a degree of animosity exists in regards to the methods and processes used to collect statistics and generate reports about Aboriginal people, especially through western research methods (Humphery, 2001). Subsequently Aboriginal people advocated for unique ethical processes in the development and conduct of Aboriginal research (Johnstone, 2007; Monk, Rowley, & Anderson, 2009). However, such ethical standards are not followed in the political appointments of non-Aboriginal 'experts' to advise on government reform processes in Aboriginal affairs (Weaver, 1983a, 1983b). Therefore an Aboriginal leader needs to have *expertise resilience*. The experts can have enormous influence in Aboriginal affairs especially medical professionals (Anderson, 2001), health researchers (Humphery, 2001) and anthropologists (Langton, 2011). Notwithstanding the positive contributions that experts have and do make to Aboriginal affairs, there is always the inherent question of their cultural authority.

Trust resilience

Nevertheless, the maintenance of healthy relationships within Aboriginal communities and external stakeholders can translate into a *trust resilience* which enables an increased social mobility and influence in policy development processes. In 1977 the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) was appointed by the left-wing Labor government originally in an *advisory* capacity and later as *principal advisors*, increasing their level of influence on government policy development and funding allocations (Ohlsson, 1977). Furthermore, state Aboriginal education advisory groups were introduced and played a vital role in bringing the Aboriginal community together collaborating with the NAEC to ensure all Aboriginal communities were given a voice in developing a federal education agenda (Parbury, 2005). Trust is perhaps the critical inter-cultural value through which equity may be achieved (Tait, 2011).

Negotiation resilience

The concept of voice highlights the need to develop due processes through which Aboriginal oral knowledge is collected and coded into written English. The integrity of the knowledge translation process is important because of the codification of values into the various instruments of policy such as 'agreements' and 'treaties', which then set-out the conditions by which a government will provide resources to Aboriginal organisations (Langton, Tehan, Palmer, & Shain, 2004). Thus, the need for *negotiation resilience* is another requirement for an Aboriginal leader. They will be required to consider sector-specific (health, education, welfare) agreements (Leeder, 2003) as well as high-level inter-governmental agreements between the different states that form the Commonwealth of Australia (Sullivan, 2011).

Empowerment resilience

The attainment of education is an important ingredient for Aboriginal professionals to lead negotiations through *empowerment resilience*. Achievements in Aboriginal education were framed by the NAEC (1977 to 1989) and outcomes such as the '1,000 Teachers by 1990' program which had a flow on effect resulting in Aboriginal enclaves being introduced in universities and Colleges of Advanced Education (CAE). The enclaves are the foundations of the now established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centres at all public universities in Australia, though progress has not materialised to the extent originally envisioned (CSHE, 2008). Therefore, the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI) (2012) revitalises the '1,000 Teachers by 1990' program, aiming to continue to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and additionally contribute to the professional development and potential of these students (Hughes and Willmot, 2012). Education empowers Aboriginal leaders to effectively re-shape governance process so that Aboriginal people are better placed to overcome the historical rooted structural determinants to social equality in Australia.

Trailblazer resilience

Underlying this narrative is the collective strength of generations of Aboriginal leaders, strength which is embedded within us through sharing and storytelling. For example, the MATSITI is led by Professor Peter Buckskin, Dr Kaye Price and Conjoint Professor Paul Hughes who exemplify Aboriginal leadership in education. Further acknowledgement needs to be given to all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who have made a significant contribution to the journey of improving Aboriginal social mobility over the past forty years. Aboriginal people are now prominent in all areas of Australian society and are role models for the leaders of the future. Indeed they empower us because of their *trailblazer resilience*.

Conclusion

Aboriginal people have been constantly challenged throughout history and continue to overcome diversity, moving forward with powerful motivation and determination. Resilience literature from a western perspective promotes an individual's strength to recover from experiences of adverse circumstance and move forward. This paper has provided testimony to the fact that from an Aboriginal leadership perspective resilience is evident as a collective, communal force that is founded on the cultural, social and emotional structures that underpin Aboriginal values and philosophies.

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