My Success

An exploratory study of positive experiences in the working lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Darwin

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Executive summary

Studies in the field of Australian Indigenous employment tend to focus on issues of 'unemployment', and from this position, examine barriers to employment. Yet, there is much to learn from exploring the positive experiences and perspectives of employed Australian Indigenous people when developing strategies aimed at improving the recruitment and retention of this population within the formal labour market. This exploratory study aimed to investigate factors that contributed to positive work experiences and understandings of success for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in Darwin's urban labour market. This focus was taken in order to move away from the generation of knowledge that stems from a deficit model to one that values and utilises the knowledge of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who (i) participate in employment, and (ii) are viewed as successful both in terms of being in employment (not unemployed) and from the perspective of their own self-evaluation. A recognised need for more research exploring the work aspirations and experiences of urban and regional Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander populations was the rationale for focusing on Darwin as the location of this study. The guiding questions for this exploratory research project included:

- What contributes to and constitutes work success for Indigenous people?
- What innovative employment behaviours, values and strategies do Indigenous people adopt during their work experiences and how do workplace practices impede or support these?
- How can employers contribute to Indigenous peoples' success in work?

Fifty employed Indigenous people from the Darwin region were recruited and shared their perspectives on their employment experiences through participation in a short online survey.

From their own perspective, participants confirmed that employment initiatives aimed at increasing: training/professional development and career pathway opportunities; access to mentors; the cultural awareness of non-Indigenous employees; identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander positions; and tailored support mechanisms, were all associated with positive work experiences and understood as facilitating success. Importantly, they also provided new insight into the relevance of mutual cross-cultural awareness journeys framed by the building of personal relationships within the workplace. This study has indicated that by adopting a strength-based perspective a new discourse around Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment can be provided. Rather than creating a negative picture of deficits and insufficiencies, this study has presented a story of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees committed to employment, and their strong and proactive work motivations, values, behaviours, problem solving and coping strategies.

Participants reported that they valued spaces and opportunities for 'getting to know one another' and the process of relationship building between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees and management. Positive personal relationships within employment environments contributed to a framework where Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees could better utilize the innovative employment strategies and behaviours which supported their success. In environments that were felt to be 'socially comfortable' they reported that they were able to ask questions, seek advice, try new things and subsequently engage in positive employment experiences.

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Background

The Northern Territory Government has set research priorities (2008-2015), which are used to guide NT Government investment and decision-making in research and innovation. Through compatibility with this strategic direction, this project was awarded one of five Northern Territory Government 2011 competitive research grants. Developed as a small exploratory study, to be conducted within a short time frame, this research aimed to provide a solid platform from which to better define a more comprehensive and in depth study.

It has been widely acknowledged that Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people experience significant disadvantage relative to the non-Indigenous population (SCRGSP 2009). Along with poor health and education outcomes, high levels of unemployment are understood as common characteristics of this disadvantage (Norris 2001; Gray and Hunter 2005; Dockery and Milsom 2007). The aim of improved education and training outcomes is inherently linked to achieving employment outcomes. The links between employment, health and emotional wellbeing have continued to gain academic, public and policy traction (Beder 2000; Ciulla 2000). Given this context, it is not surprising that, improving employment outcomes is viewed as essential in any attempt to overcome Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander disadvantage (Taylor 2005).

Preparing Aboriginal people for the workforce, as well as attracting and retaining them in employment, has become a dominant theme in Federal, State and Territory government agendas. Traditionally, Federal strategies to reduce Indigenous unemployment have focused on creating vocational training opportunities, employment programs such as the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), and increasing the number of employment opportunities for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the public sector (Dockery and Milsom 2007; Constable 2009). More recently, alongside the launch of the Australian Employment Covenant in 2008, there has been a major push to encourage the private sector to

become part of the solution to Indigenous unemployment (Constable 2009; Jordon and Mavec 2010).

Taken collectively the amount of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment strategies and programs which aim to support the economic development and provide labour market assistance for this population have yet to achieve a state of employment equality. Relative to the 83% participation in employment rate for non-Indigenous Australians, Purdie, *et al.* (2006) reported a decrease from 59% in 2002 to 56% in 2007 for the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population.

Reviews of national Indigenous employment programs undertaken by Dockery and Milson (2007) and Constable (2009) have suggested that the failure of these strategies and programs could be attributed to the lack of rigorous evaluation of initiatives, which examine both what has worked for people and what has not. Constable (2009) has highlighted the scarcity of Aboriginal voices in discussions regarding the lived reality and effectiveness of employment initiatives. Similarly, Jordon and Mavec (2010: 26) have, acknowledged that *"there is still inadequate research about Indigenous people's aspirations and attitudes to paid employment, particularly among those living in urban or regional areas*" (Jordon and Mavec 2010: 26). Although the present exploratory study is not an evaluation of specific employment initiative, it goes some way to responding to this identified knowledge gap by investigating the perspectives of urban based Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, hearing their voices, on what has enabled and contributed to their success in employment.

Rather than replicate research that focuses on deficits and barriers in employment for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (Norris 2001), this exploratory study has adopted a strengths-based approach in its investigation. The assumption underpinning this approach is that understanding factors that contribute to positive employment experiences and working-life success for employed Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, would lead to a widening of the lens surrounding employment recruitment and retention approaches.

Literature review

This review provides both a context and justification for the present exploratory study. It provides a brief overview of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment demographics and statistics. It then critics the literature on barriers to employment for Indigenous Australians and the smaller body of work that explores Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander perspectives on employment experiences. The final section provides a brief overview of current Indigenous employment, strategies, policies and programs.

Participation in the labour market

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders people make up 2.5% of the total Australian population. The 2010 Census estimated that almost one third of this population resided in major cities (32%); 21% lived in inner regional areas; 22% in outer regional areas; 10% in remote areas; and 16% in very remote areas. It has been well documented that this population experience relative employment disadvantage, irrespective of where they reside. The unemployment rate for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is at 18% (ABS 2010), while the rate for the non-Indigenous population is presently resting at 5.3% (ABS 2011a). Those residing in major cities were more likely to be employed with an unemployment rate of 16%, compared to 23% in more regional areas (ABS 2010).

In Australia Aboriginal and/or Torres Islander people engaged in the labour force were predominantly classified as employees (93%), with 6% working in their own business and 1% were identified as contributing family workers. Over half worked full-time (57%) and 39% worked part-time hours. Most were employed in the private sector (74%) with one quarter (26%) working in the public sector. More than half (59%) worked in low skilled occupations, while one in five (22%) in medium skill and one in seven (15%) in high skill occupations. Relative to the non-Indigenous population, these rates or data demonstrate that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to work part time hours and are significantly more likely to be in low skilled occupations (ABS 2006).

In the Northern Territory, where labour participation rates are amongst the highest in the country, one third of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people of working age were in employment at the time of the last Census (ABS 2006). In the Northern Territory, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people comprise 30.4% of the total population (ABS 2011b). While this population make up a large percentage of those living in regional and remote locations, 75% of the total population of the Northern Territory live in the urban areas of Darwin City and Palmerston-East Arm sub-regions (Northern Territory 2008). It is estimated that between 11.1% (ABS 2011c) and 16.6% (Northern Territory 2008) of this urban-based population identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Consistent with the large public sector, defence and health industries present in Darwin (Northern Territory 2008), at the time of the Census, public administration and safety was the largest employing industry (21.9%). Retail (10.0%), Health Care and Social Assistance (8.9%), Education and Training (8.8%) were also major employers in this region (ABS 2006).

Consistent with broader National and Territory demographics, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in Darwin experience: higher levels of unemployment; lower levels of workforce participation; lower levels of school completion; and lower levels of post-school qualifications relative to the non-Indigenous population. Neville (2011) has stated, however, that for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people residing in Darwin, labour force indicators are relatively better than those of the total Northern Territory Indigenous population and often above those documented in National statistics.

The employment 'problem'

Statistical information, whether on a national, state, territory or local scale, continues to build a picture of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment disadvantage. As a population, they are under-represented in workforce participation rates, have lower household incomes than other Australian, have higher unemployment rates and are much more likely to live on welfare payments (ABS 2006). This picture of high rates of unemployment with a concentration of employees

in part-time and lower skilled positions has led to a proliferation of employment studies which problematise the issue through focusing on unemployment and the barriers to employment. Norris (2001: 2) has highlighted that within this literature there is a common perception of *"skill deficit as the cause of Indigenous employment inequality".* Overcoming shortfalls in the capacities of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and placing emphasis on the potential for education and training to redress these deficits is a common theme in employment debates. Constable (2009: 23) has similarly suggested that many employment initiatives or programs *"tend to focus on the 'deficiencies' of Aboriginal job seekers and equivalent attention needs to be paid to identifying and responding to employer- and industry- related 'deficiencies' or barriers that inhibit Aboriginal employment."*

While a focus on the deficiencies within individuals is dominant in the literature, Giddy *et al* (2009) and Barnett (2007) have recognised a number of employer and industry related factors. They provide a litany of commonly identified barriers to employment, such as: low levels of education, lack of essential employment skills; poor health; poverty; lack of local employment and training opportunities; lack of professional development and career path options; discrimination and racism; and unsupportive work environments.

Employee Experience

In addition to the knowledge generated through statistical and demographic inquiry that as emerged from an organisational and employer perspective on Indigenous barriers to employment, a smaller body of research has placed emphasis on the perspectives of Indigenous employees. Fredericks (2009: 25) has stated that:

> There is documentation regarding the types of jobs and industries we work in, how many of us work. Whether that work is full-time or part-time, the geographical locality of where we live and work and the types of payments we receive from the Federal Government when not engaged in employment. All of this documentation does not tell the whole story of our employment and why and why not we engage in employment or support the employment of other Indigenous people.

Research that has attempted to capture more of the 'whole story' has typically had a remote focus (see Austin-Bross 2006; Gibson; 2010: McRae-Williams 2008; 2011: McRae-Williams and Gerritsen 2010). These studies uncover many assumptions about employment embedded in mainstream Australian culture and highlight the different values and meanings remote Aboriginal populations associate with work. Despite this more recent focus of researchers, Jordon and Mavec (2010: 26) contend that, *"there is still inadequate research about Indigenous people's aspirations and attitudes to paid employment, particularly among those living in urban or regional areas*."

There has, however, been some recent attention paid to Indigenous employee perspectives, yet the emphasis of this work has generally reinforced the barriers approach to employment, which remains dominant within Indigenous employment discourse. These studies have found that the barriers to employment from Indigenous employee perspectives have been many and diverse. For instance, the need for overcoming barriers by fostering: cultural awareness and respect within employment environments; training and development opportunities; support mechanisms such as mentors; flexible working conditions; and genuine commitment to improving Indigenous employment outcomes from employers have been identified (see Barnett 2007b; Constable 2009).

These studies have also subtly highlighted the importance of considering Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander experiences of employment for improving outcomes. These include recognising expertise that people may bring to the workplace, understanding issues of burn out and the pressure of being an Indigenous person working within government and non-government frameworks and agendas which historically have been oppressive or paternalistic toward Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and may continue to reflect such attitudes and actions (see Angus 1998; Constable 2009). Ganter (2010) in an in depth study exploring the experience and meaning of 'representation' for Northern Territory senior public servants, has proposed the Northern Territory Public Service offers Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees an 'ambivalent hospitality'. She explains that the invitation offered by Aboriginal employment policy, for some may read, *"You are*

Aborigines, or you mostly look like Aborigines. What you say reflects them. This will improve us. We want your contributions. But we have work to do, so don't interrupt us" (Ganter 2010: 233).

To a greater or lesser extent most studies exploring Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander perspectives on employment experiences problematise the issue through focusing on problems, challenges or barriers. Speaking from within a health field of research, (Goolishian 1991: 1) has stated that *"The deficiency language has created a world of description that understands only through what is wrong, broken, absent or insufficient."* Bolstered by the documented inequality between non-Indigenous and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workforce participation and the large body of research exploring the employment barriers and 'problems' for this population, this way of understanding operates as both the impetus and framework for developing Indigenous employment strategies, policies and programs.

Employment strategies, policies and programs

The Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation commits to increasing Indigenous employment across the public sector to 2.6% by 2015. The Australian Public Service (APS) Commission has emphasised that improving employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians is the responsibility for all Commonwealth public sector agencies and has implemented a number of interrelated strategies (for example: *Public Calling* – APS Indigenous Employment Strategy and APS Employment and Capability Strategy) and programs (for example: Graduate Program; Indigenous Cadetship Program; Indigenous Entry Level Recruitment Program; Career Trek Programs; and an Indigenous Scholarship program).

There is also federal government encouragement for organisations in the private sector to develop Indigenous employment targets and strategies and a number of program initiatives available to assist private sector employers to achieve their Indigenous employment quota goals, including the: National Indigenous Cadetship project; Corporate Leasers for Indigenous Employment Project; Structured Training

and Employment Program (STEP); Community Development Employment Program (CDEP); Aboriginal Employment Strategy (Constable 2009).

Conclusion

Associated with notions of economic independence and better mental/physical health, increasing work force participation for Aboriginal and/Torres Strait Islander people has become an entrenched component in attempts to address disadvantage. However unemployment or underemployment rates for this population continue to reflect a relative inequality with the non-Indigenous population. There is much known about the main barriers faced by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people when engaging and remaining in employment. It is also the case that much research on the meanings and aspirations for employment by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders people has focused on remote locations. Yet a much larger percentage of this population reside in regional and urban areas. Governments and some employers within the corporate sector have set employment targets and developed strategies and programs aimed at improving Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait islander employment outcomes, yet they remain perplexed by the continuing challenge they face in reaching these set goals. This study seeks to redress the imbalance of the research by focusing on an urban population and attempting to move beyond a deficit model of understanding. It investigates Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employee perspectives on positive work experiences in order to see what can be learned to better inform and guide recruitment and retention initiatives.

Undertaking the research

This section discusses the standpoint from which this exploratory study was developed. It then provides information on the research objectives, the online survey method adopted, how recruitment occurred, ethical issues, the nature of data analysis and the limitations of the study.

Research design – A strength-based approach

In the fields of public health and social work, practitioners place much emphasis on strength-based approaches to practice and research (Laursen 2000). From within these fields the strength-based paradigm is seen to offer a different language to describe difficulties and struggles, allowing for discussion and interventions to be shaped around opportunities and solutions rather than concentrating on problems. However, Waterhouse (2009: 3), has pointed out that:

> *'I think the story of strength-based practice is still largely unexplored, substantially untold. We are still much more familiar with deficit-based approaches. I think we're better at identifying deficits, gaps, holes and problems than we are at identifying strengths.'*

Brough *et al.* (2004: 215) also found when undertaking a strength-based research approach focused on health promotion in an urban Australian Indigenous community, that, *"When we talked to Indigenous people about the strengths of their community, many were very surprised. The people we talked to were used to being asked about problems, not strengths".* Similarly, as demonstrated in the above discussion, employment studies rarely move beyond problem-centred discourse to ask about or explore the strengths of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, how they understand their strengths as employees or what might be considered strengths in the workplace.

An exception is Foley's (2003; 2006) research on successful Indigenous Australian entrepreneurs. Pre-defining his participants as successful entrepreneurs using standard business and economic measures (productivity, sustainability and profit) he explored how these entrepreneurs understood 'success' from their own perspective.

The present study has adopted a similar approach. Acknowledging that successful employment outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are usually conceptualised as a continuum from 'unemployed' status at one end and 'fully employed' status at the other (Giddy, Lopez et al. 2009). Shaping this research design was the assumption that focusing on <u>employed</u> Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, participants could be predefined as achieving a level of employment success. Through this lens of being successfully employed, the study aimed to explore how participant's conceptualised their employment success and what they believe had contributed to their success.

Objectives of study

Framed by a strength-based approach this exploratory study aimed to understand what factors contributed to positive and successful work experiences for Indigenous people in Darwin's urban labour market. The guiding questions for this exploratory study included:

- What contributes to and constitutes work success for Indigenous people?
- What innovative employment behaviours, values and strategies do Indigenous people perceive have contributed to their success and how might workplace practices impede or support these?
- From an employee perspective how can employers contribute to Indigenous people's success in work?

Method

The key method used to explore the research questions was the development of an online survey. This approach was adopted as the most efficient and effective method within the time frame of this exploratory study. The survey aimed to collect predominately qualitative information from Indigenous employees about their positive employment experiences, their notions of success in the workplace, and the potentially innovative behaviours, values and strategies they adopted to support their success.

Project Reference Group

In the spirit of generating quality research that has practical outcomes and that maximises on opportunities for transferability, a Project Reference Group was established. This group, comprised of government and non-government representatives with core business relating to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, communicated through an email network during the research project which served as a space to: discuss research challenges and problems; seek advice/direction if required; gain feedback on draft reports; and explore ways to embed findings into policy and practice.

Online survey

By drawing from the existing literature and with guidance from the reference group four questions were developed that aimed to provide a qualitative insight into the guiding questions. These questions where shaped with the objective of having participants consider their own personal employment and the experiences that they had had in this sphere throughout their lives. It was from this position that they were encouraged to respond in a personal narrative and open-ended manner to the survey questions.

Literature on workplace success emphasises the importance of motivation in moving towards wanted results (Islam and Ismail 2008). While this literature predominately approaches the notion of success and workplace motivation through the lens of a managerial problem (see Amabile 1993), theories on workplace motivation were considered to be relevant to this study and contributed to the development of a survey question aimed at exploring participant's employment motivations (see Appendix A question 1).

In order to explore the behaviours, values and strategies that participants believed had contributed to their success a survey question was developed that asked participants to provide advice to a young Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander who may be entering the labour market for the first time (see Appendix A question 2). This question generated information on factors participants perceived as supportive to their own employment success or which on reflection they believed could have helped them to achieve success more effectively or efficiently.

While potentially seen as reflecting a 'problems' approach to understanding employment, a third question was developed which asked participants to consider a time when they had had a negative workplace experience (see Appendix A question 3). However, aligning it with within the strength-based framework this question encouraged participants to share their perceptive on the positive/useful behaviours, values and strategies they adopted or could have adopted to cope or problem solve during negative experiences. A final open-ended question allowed participants the opportunity to share what from their own perspective constituted positive and effective approaches to recruitment and retention (see Appendix A question 4).

A small amount of Quantitative information was also gathered through the survey (see Appendix A), including: age; sex; work role and/or employment position; and industry/sector where a positive work experience had occurred.

Qualitative information was also gathered through responses to a list of potential factors associated with the meaning of "work success". When attempting to understand employee motivations, many studies develop lists of motivational factors which study participants (employees) are required to rank. The types of factors commonly identified in these lists are: full appreciation of work done; interesting work; feeling of being in on things; good working conditions; good wages; sympathetic help with personal problems; personal or company loyalty to employees; promotion and growth in the organisation; and job security (see Islam and Ismail 2008). Lee-Ross (2005) has highlighted that the theories used to support most work-motivation studies and therefore the research approaches and analytical frames are inherently culturally biased, reflecting a western ethnocentric perspective on the meaning and value of work and forms of workplace behaviour.

Therefore the list included in this exploratory study was influenced by, but does not reflect, the lists developed within most work motivation studies. Rather factors on this list were generated through simultaneous engagement with literature on Indigenous employment and through discussions with those on the project reference group. This question allowed participants to choose multiple pre-identified factors related to success and also provide a space to contribute other factors that may not have been

included in the list. Differing from the common approach in employment motivation studies a ranking approach to this list was not adopted, yet on reflection this may have been beneficial.

The method for administering the survey was through the use of online software (SurveyMonkey). This software is used to develop the form of the survey and provides a unique link (web address) which when clicked on takes potential participants directly to the online survey.

Recruitment

Collaboration with the projects official industry partners: (Group Training Northern Territory (GTNT), Northern Territory Police and the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment (OCPE) were instrumental in the recruitment of participants to this study. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees of these industry partners were contacted directly and invited to contribute their opinions and experiences to the study (see Appendix B). Participants were also recruited through a snowballing approach were by they were asked to forward the invitation to participate to other employed Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people working in the Darwin region, whether colleagues, family or friends. Members of the reference group similarly supported the recruitment of participants through their own networks.

This approach to recruitment did not enable the researcher a method of documenting the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people invited to participate in the study and therefore no response rate could be determined. 50 individuals chose to participate in the research.

Ethics

An application exploring the ethical dimensions of the study was submitted to the Batchelor Institute Research Ethics Committee and full approval was granted on 20th October 2011.

Confidentiality and anonymity

The survey did not collect data, such as names or contact details that could be used to identify individual participants nor was information requested about the participant's present place of employment as this was viewed as compromising their anonymity and the promise of confidentiality. Participation was voluntary and the researcher ensured that the industry partners were cognisant of this by making it an explicit request within the partnership agreement.

Raw data was only accessible to the principal researcher to maintain participant's confidentiality

Data analysis

Thematic analysis of textual responses and description analysis of statistical data was undertaken and all identifying information removed from the data. Through an inductive process the researcher identified themes, with the number of participant responses reflecting a specific theme used to determine its prevalence. The inductively developed themes and their prevalence are depicted through the use of tables within the findings section.

Limitations of study

The main limitation of this exploratory study was the choice of an online survey for data collection. While this was an efficient way of gathering information for an exploratory study with a constrained time frame, it excluded those Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees in the Darwin region who may not have had regular or any access to an email account. The use of an online survey also favoured those individuals employed in positions that involved being computer literate and spending a considerable amount of work-time using a computer. This study excluded successful Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people working in professions with limited computer and/or Internet access such as labourers, trade workers and shop assistants. However, the participant sample was still relatively broad in terms of employment field and included for example; administration officers, trainers and/or educators, support workers, professionals, police officers and others.

A second limitation to the study was the relatively small number of participants due to the short-time frame allocated for recruitment. Despite this, rich qualitative data from the 50 participants was gathered facilitating a meaningful and pertinent analysis for an exploratory study.

Yet, it is important to note that a larger sample size could have enabled more comparison between sectors and explored in more depth potential similarities and differences between participants motivations, positive work experiences and constructions of success across the different sectors.

Study Findings

This exploratory strength-based study investigated, through an online survey, the perspectives of 50 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees in the Darwin urban labour market. It captured this group's perceptions on positive employment experiences, factors associated with achieving success and effective recruitment and retention strategies. The following section describes the characteristics of the participants. The study findings are then unpacked through an analysis of participants' responses to specific survey questions. Through an inductive approach common themes have been identified within these responses and tables provided to demonstrate their prevalence. The nature of each theme is explored and its relationship to the literature is discussed.

Characteristics of the 50 participants

Of the 50 individuals who participated in the study, 64% were female and 34% were male. The age of participants was quite broadly distributed with 14% identifying as 18-24, 32% identifying as 25-34, 22% identifying as 35-44, and 26% identifying as 45-55 years of age. Only 4% of participants identified as aged between 55-64 and only 2% as 60 years or older.

Participants were asked to identify from a list of employment positions, which category or categories best described their current employment (10 participants did not choose a predefined category and provided a response within a text box described as 'other'). The distribution of the 40 participants who responded across these categories is presented in Table 1 below. Note, participants could choose more than one category if appropriate.

Table 1: Present employment role and/or position of participants

Employment position and/or role	Percentage	Number
No Response		10
Apprentice or Trainee	5.0%	2
Labourer	0.0%	0

Receptionist	5.0%	2
Administration Officer	37.5%	15
Customer Service	2.5%	1
Shop Assistant	0.0%	0
Trainer/educator	20.0%	8
Trade Worker	0.0%	0
Support worker	10.0%	4
Manager/responsibility for up 10 workers	7.5%	3
Manager/responsibility for over 10 workers	5.0%	2
Senior management	10.0%	4
Executive	0.0%	0
Professional	10.0%	4
Other Comments	37.5%	15

The ten participants who did not choose from the predefined categories plus five others clarified their work position. Five identified as working within the police service, two identified as being researchers and one as a research project officer. The others identified as a technical officer, principle adviser, coordinator, community development officer, executive assistant, field officer and executive officer.

While it must be noted that there were significantly more female participants then males, across age levels there was a relatively even distribution excluding those in the older age category (55 and over). There was also quite a diverse spread of participants occupying different employment positions and at different levels. However, as mentioned in the limitation section (see pg. 21-22), the characteristics of participants reflect employees with access to email and predominantly computer based or desk type employment roles. As such, no participants identified as labourers, trade workers or shop assistants.

Analysis of the data found that there were generally no significant differences between male and female participant responses. Due to the small sample size significant differences between participant responses based on age, employment role or level could not be meaningfully identified. As such, the following discussion of findings reports on the data as a single set.

Motivation for Success

In order to understand the motivations that support success, participants were asked to describe a time in their working-lives where they had experienced a strong sense of passion and motivation towards an employment situation (not necessarily their current employment). They were further encouraged to explain what was happening both within the work environment and within their own private lives that contributed to making this work experience a positive one.

Many participants identified multiple factors associated with their feelings of motivation and success, often emphasising the interrelatedness of these elements. Participant responses (n 50) were thematically analysed by the researcher and the following dominant motivators for supporting success were inductively identified. The following table identifies how many participants mentioned each of the particular themes, with many participants touching on more than one theme in their response.

Figure 1: Motivators for Success
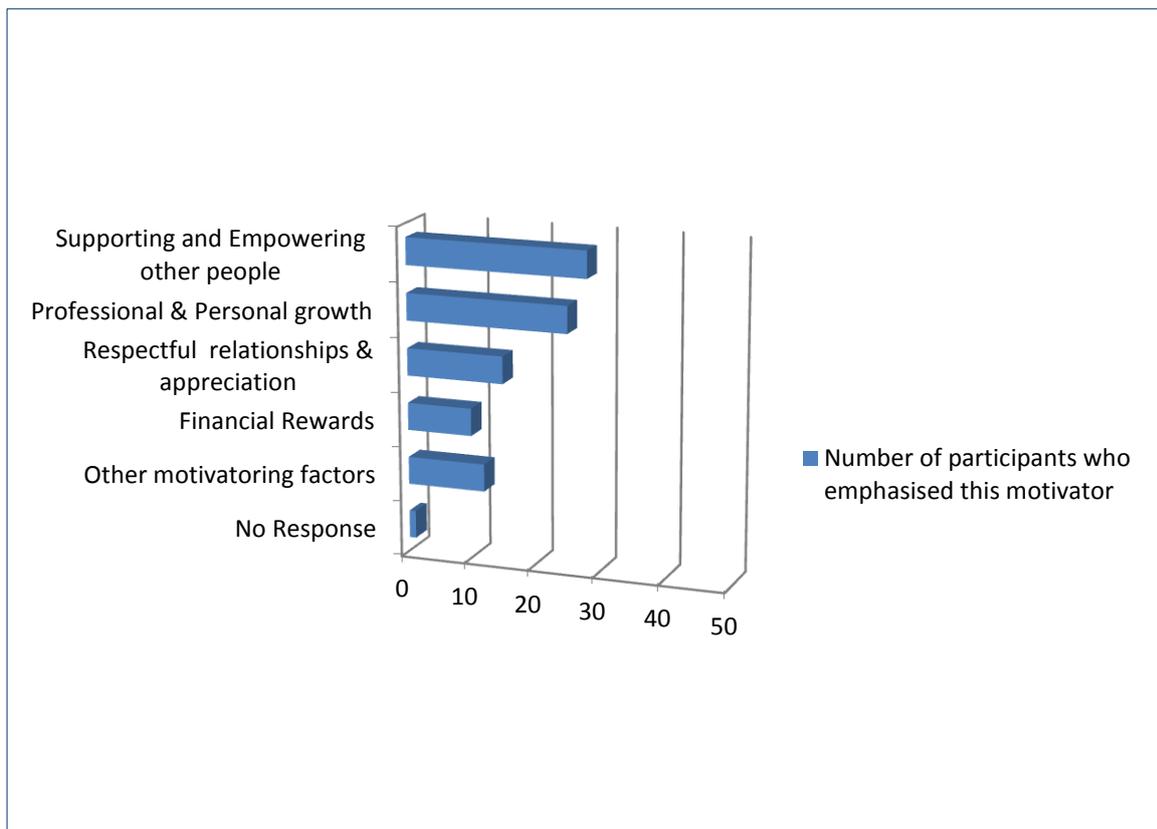
Supporting and Empowering Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

The most dominant theme to emerge was the value participants placed on employment experiences that involved supporting other people, particularly other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people including their own families and communities. Over half the participants highlighted that they were most motivated in the workplace when they felt that they were contributing to positive outcomes for others:

> *'The most positive time of my career is when I am busy helping people in emergency situations.'*

> *'…I am most passionate about my work when I believe in what I am doing, that what I do will make a positive difference to others, empower them but also that I am able to educate or pass on tools to them to 'play it' forward.'*

A large percentage of these participants emphasised that seeing and working towards positive outcomes for other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people was a rewarding experience that bolstered their motivation in the employment environment. Many emphasised the empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a driving force behind their work commitment and associated success. Participants reported feeling motivated and successful when:

> *'…I am able to help and listen to the people from grass root level. I love to encourage and help my fellow Indigenous People that is my passion and to help on the ground being able to sit down and speak with the people…'*

> *'…I feel like I am part of a solution to a problem that directly affects those in my community, especially my family and friends…'*

> *'…working with the community and other stakeholders to ensure that the needs of the community are met.'*

> *'…I could see how I could be of a great benefit to my people in my community'*

> *'[Indigenous people] leave the office happy or when they are confident to come to the office for help'*

'Seeing fellow Indigenous employees succeed…'

Professional and Personal Growth

Half of the 50 participants also highlighted that (i) opportunities to learn new things, (ii) undertake professional development and training and (iii) move both between employment roles and up the employment ladder were important elements for positive work experiences and their employment success. Many participants described how undertaking and overcoming a challenge was when they had felt most motivated about their employment. For example:

> *'…learning new things and coming out of my comfort zone and learning to adjust to new environments. I feel good when I have achieved that.'*

> *'Throughout my work life I have felt most motivated at times when I have been really challenged, not just an insignificant challenge too benefit someone else but a life changing challenge for me. I have been through this experience a few times and succeeded.'*

> *'No day is a waisted day if I have learnt something new about life, myself or people in general. My current job enables all these things to happen…'*

The opportunity to engage in the learning experiences of undertaking and completing training and higher education was similarly associated with positive workplace experiences, and continuing employment motivation. Being supported and having the opportunity to engage in relevant learning opportunities both prior to employment and during employment was a valued aspect of success in the working-lives of many of these participants. Participants similarly associated work environments which offered the chance to work in different fields and where there were opportunities for career progression as positively contributing to their sense of employment motivation.

Respectful working relationships and appreciation

Nearly a third of participants in this study associated the nature of workplace relationships to positive employment experiences, motivation and success. Participants often mentioned that they felt most passionate and motivated about

work when they were part of a "good team". A number of participants also mentioned that having a social relationship with their colleges also contributed to positive work experiences, for example:

> '…I was made to feel like part of the staff members family, they made me – not only trained, coached, encouraged and developed me, but we used to have parties, BBQ, sporting teams and celebrate with staff events like 21st birthday in the office… They are/were not just co-workers, today I call them friends, best of friends.'

> '[I'm passionate and motivated about work when I can] have a good laugh with work colleagues, share stuff with them'

A component of having positive workplace relationships that was highlighted by participants was the importance of feeling appreciated by those you work with and having your knowledge, skills and abilities acknowledged.

> '…I was respected by all my team and other colleagues who would ask for advice. I was proud that people could rely on me because of my knowledge and my age was never a factor…'

> '[I felt appreciated] being asked to have input to the cross cultural workshop'

> '…being able to have input into the organisational changes and really feeling appreciated'

Financial Rewards

A smaller, but significant, number of participants also highlighted financial rewards as an important element that contributed to their employment motivation and sense of success. For example they stated that:

> '…I feel great when I am rewarded with great pay…'

> '…Having my first pay packet was such a good feeling…'

> '…I enjoy the work and the pay is a further reward'

Most often this financial emphasis was couched within their discussion of other motivating factors, such as those discussed above.

Other Motivating Factors

Interrelated with the motivating factors discussed above a few participants also highlighted that having a good work-life balance was essential to their positive employment experiences and continuing motivation. For example, they felt motivated and passionate about work:

> '…When I felt there was a good work-life balance. Work was challenging, but I was able to fit in exercise and eating routines.'

> '…holidays…has been great and feels like you deserve it.'

Other motivating factors mentioned by participants, included being motivated and feeling a sense of success when: *"doing something for myself";* having *"flexible work arrangements";* when there was a *"clear purpose"*; *"working outdoors";* having good employment benefits and job security; and when *"working for myself".*

Discussion

Lee-Ross (2005) suggests that work motivation theories can be grouped into two categories. The first holds that as long as an individual's job contains sufficient "content" variables an outcome of high motivation and subsequent job satisfaction will result. The content variables identified in Hackman and Oldfield (1975) a commonly cited and applied theory (Amabile 1993) reflects to some extent the perceptions of participants in this study.

Hackman and Oldfield suggest that task significance (the importance of the work) and task identity (the degree to which the job produces something meaningful) and are important components of work motivation (cited in Amabile 1993). The most dominate motivator perceived by participants was similarly associated with feeling like the work was important and that they were producing something meaningful, through supporting and empowering other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. This meaningful engagement was perceived by participants to be associated with positive work experiences and feelings of employment success.

Task identity and significance, 'Feeling like you make a positive difference' has been documented as an important motivator for those who engage in public service work (Burke and Fiksenbaum 2009). Reflecting this, just less than three quarters of participants identified the public sector as the employment environment in which they had felt most motivated. Yet, the study also found that supporting and empowering other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people was perceived as a dominant motivator for those who identified other sectors. This suggests that employees across the sectors may well be similarly motivated by a sense of supporting and empowering other Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander people. However, for this to be further explored a larger cross-sector sample size would be required as would the inclusion of employees from trade or less-desk based employment positions.

Another motivating factor mentioned by Hackman and Oldfield is skill variety, the number of different skills required by the job (cited in Amabile 1993). This was also reflected in participant's perceptions of positive work experiences. Participants believed that opportunities to try new things, engage in learning, move between roles and up employment hierarchies had supported their employment success. However, participant perceptions of their own employment motivation did not reflect the variable of autonomy (the degree to which the individual has freedom to decide how to carry out the work), highlighted as essential by Hackman and Oldfield (cited in Amabile 1993). With the exception of one participant who mentioned being motivated when working for themselves, autonomy was not mentioned as a contributing factor to positive work experiences and feelings of employment success for participants. This could potentially be because as Islam and Ismail (2008) and Lee-Ross (2005) have demonstrated through cross-cultural studies, emphasising the importance of autonomy to employee motivation is an example of western assumptions inherent in work motivation theories.

The final motivation variable mentioned by Hackman and Oldfield is the degree to which an individual obtains ongoing feedback indicating success in the work (cited in Amabile 1993). This variable is somewhat reflected in participant responses in that they believed that feeling appreciated and being acknowledged by peers contributed to their motivation and employment success. Yet, much more emphasis was placed

on the importance on workplace relationships within their perceptions of motivation and feelings of success. This emphasis on the importance of personal, positive and respectful relationships to employment success are one of a number of themes that reoccur within this study.

The second category of work motivation theory is shaped by "expectancy theory" and contends that employee motivation depends not only on content variables as discussed above but also the perceived relationship between effort, reward and performance (Lee-Ross 2005). These theories acknowledge among other things that financial rewards play a large role in work motivation. It is common sense to acknowledge that receiving financial rewards is a defining feature of formal employment and that it would be an unusual employee who would continue to turn up to work if no payment was to be forthcoming. It is therefore not unexpected that financial rewards would be perceived by participants as a motivating force and a measure of their success, it is somewhat surprising however that more participants did not highlight such reward and that those that did predominantly positioned it within the context of other motivational factors.

Mechanisms for Becoming Successful

In order to understand what participants perceived were the values, behaviours and skills that had supported their own journey towards employment success, participants were asked to draw from their own experience and provide advice to a young Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders who may be entering the labour market for the first time.

Participants' advice to young people about positive approaches that could facilitate employment success covered many interrelated components. The dominant themes to merge from participant responses are identified in the following figure and discussed in further detail under the relevant subheadings. Participant's responses often included more than one theme as indicated in the following table.

Figure 2: Advice about how to become successful in employment
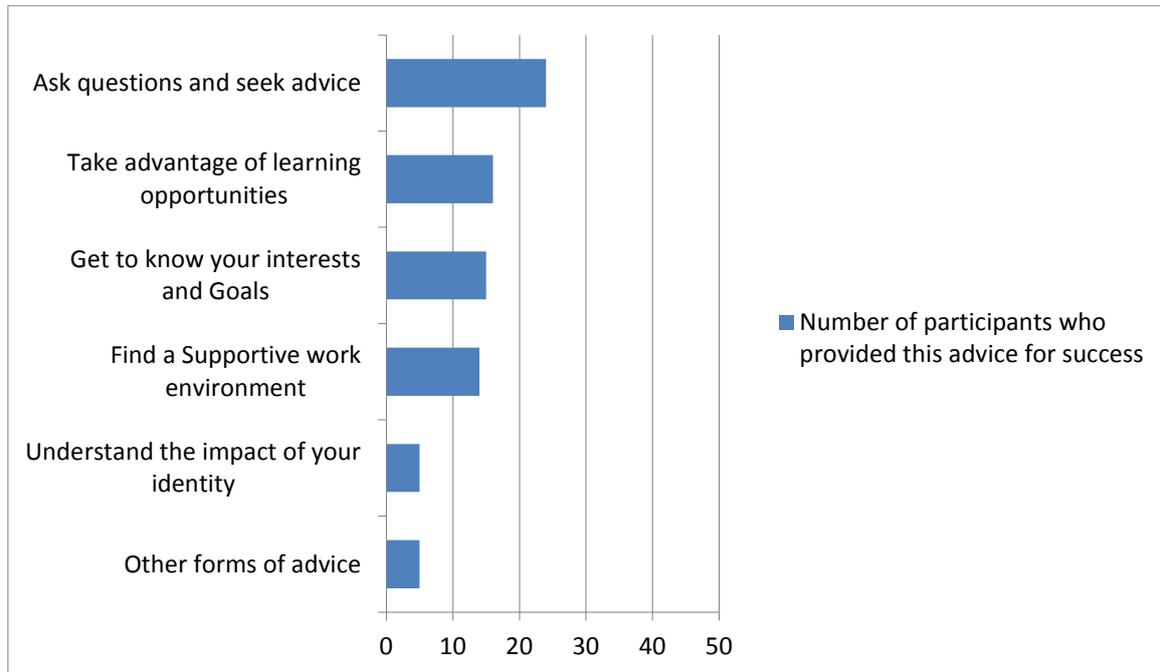
Ask questions and seek advice

Almost half of participants in this study highlighted the importance of asking questions of employers and colleagues both during the interview, induction and employment periods as a way of facilitating employment success. Being confident and prepared to ask questions was associated with young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people developing skills for success.

> *'I would advise them to ask as many questions as you can, write down what you have learnt so that you can put it into practice…'*

> *'…ask questions about the workplace and its culture…ask for help if you don't understand, ask for help if you are struggling.'*

> *'…don't be afraid to ask questions'*

> *'…I would advise them to ask questions, as you won't know anything unless you ask…'*

'…don't be shy to ask for help. It's ok to make mistakes. You won't know everything all at once it takes time and practice.'

For a significant number of these participants, asking questions about workplace opportunities for professional development, career progression and the availability of support mechanisms was viewed as an important action for the young person to engage in. By asking such questions participants believed that the young person would develop awareness about processes and supports for achieving continued success in the workplace. Examples of such advice include:

'…Always ask about personal development options that are available to you, how can you apply for them etc. and don't be afraid to ask your employer of how they can help you achieve your goals that you have set yourself…'

'…I would advise them to ask questions about mentoring, career pathways, further training in their chosen field...'

'Choosing a workplace where further training is implemented to better their careers…'

A number of these participants also emphasised asking questions of the employer about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets and whether they have specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategies in place. For example:

'…Ask questions about how this particular workplace supports their employees, especially Indigenous workers, what strategies are in place to increase and sustain Aboriginal employment.'

'I would advise them to make sure that the workplace does or has employed Aboriginal people, and if so find out what strategies they have in place to support and mentor Aboriginal people to achieve success and outcomes in their employment…'

'…ask their employer if they have an Indigenous Employment Strategy and a Career Pathways Structure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.'

Related to this advice, some participants also drew attention to the need for a young person to investigate options for having an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentor.

> '…Make sure they have an Indigenous mentor that can walk you through the first year…'

> '[Ask] what they are offering you, budding up, mentoring…'

Two participants in this study highlighted their own commitment to being a mentor for young employees if this was needed.

> '…look for a good mentor and if you like the work you have been employed for you will no doubt love your job into the future. If they haven't identified a mentor I would make myself available.'

> '…They must feel like they have support, so that's what I would provide. Being a mentor as well as a friend…'

Take advantage of learning opportunities

A third of participants emphasised the need to "just have a go" as an important component of working towards and achieving employment success. They explained that while the employment position may not be ideal, there are many things of value to be learnt through all employment opportunities. These participants pointed to the importance of approaching every opportunity as one in which to learn valuable and relevant things that support employment success. Many emphasised the value in learning from others in the work environment.

> '…even if the placement is not the ideal job that you have been looking for stick it out , learn what you need to learn gain the skills of the job so you can build on your personal development and also giving yourself better and more options…'

> '…Stay in there, Give everything a try, participate even if you are shy because eventually you will break out of that and it's the only way to move your way up and learn as much as you can.'

'I'd suggest that they go on and get the job first, and then just suss out good people in that workplace and listen to them, be mentored by them. Actually not mentored, cos I think that's crap, but be motivated by them. Look at what they are doing right and find out if that will work for you.'

'…have an optimistic approach to work and ask to assist others with their duties, that way you learn while you are helping others.'

Related to "having a go" some participants highlighted the importance of being willing to take up and overcome challenges and to "try your best" as essential components in the journey towards employment success. For example participants stated things such as:

'…Don't be afraid to do anything, even when you are unsure. It is better that you give it a go and fail and learn from that then not give it a go at all and not learn anything…'

'…thrive to be the best you can.'

'…Don't be afraid of a challenge.'

Get to know your interests and goals

Contrastingly, a similar number of participants chose to emphasise that the first step to workplace success was to deeply consider what you're interested in and passionate about, and what you want to achieve in terms of life goals. They advised that a young person should seek out employment opportunities that supported or provided a base from which to move in their chosen direction. For example, many provided advice such as:

'Ensure that the area of work is something where you have a genuine interest. It may take a while to figure out what it is that genuinely interests you and that's OK…Set your goals and remember your long term plan, because you can't please everyone and you may not get along with everyone but even if it gets hard – keep the big picture in mind (i.e. your goals).'

'…-choose something you enjoy – choose a career that achieves what you would like to see achieved e.g. helping others, achieving your dreams from the money earned…'

'…understand what you want to achieve and how the workplace can get you there…'

'…make sure it would be something you think may be interesting, something that will help you later in life…'

'… what are their aspirations - pick the right place to support your occupation or what are you good at?'

Find a supportive employment environment

Just under a third of participants emphasised the relationship between supportive employment environments and employment success. These participants suggested that finding out whether the employer had other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees was a good idea, as this could be an indicator that the employment environment was supportive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and had a commitment to supporting their success. Similarly researching the workplace and its stated goals and directions and talking to others who may have worked there or known someone who had were highlighted as ways of gauging whether it would be a workplace supportive of employment success. For example:

'… [choose] a workplace that has a strong influence of Indigenous people working in it for support.'

'Research the workplace you are choosing…talk to friends and family if they know this organisation and what they are like…'

'…For young people maybe a place where the is a high percent of A&TSI staff which shows it's a supportive employer, which retains staff, and that staff feel valued and are able to ' be all they can be'… place with good reputation - incidences of bullying etc stamped out - word of mouth on employers is important - or place where family already employed so they have support in the workplace and pastoral care.'

'*Look at the staff and see if they are happy, and laughing with each other, do they support each other*.'

'*…Researching organisations on the web to ascertain what their core function is, what their vision is and the types of work that the organisation has a history or reputation for achieving in your community.*'

By finding out about both the employer and employment environment, participants believed that a young person had a better chance of feeling comfortable within the workplace, a view that participants expressed as essential to successful employment.

Be prepared for the impact of your Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity

A small number of participants in this study also raised potential workplace issues relating to cultural identity and its impact on employment success. One participant described the advice they would give a young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person:

'*Expect that you are going to be viewed differently, and that there are going to be a different set of expectations placed on you and your performance. When an Aboriginal person does something wrong, it is a reflection on all Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders. When a non-Aboriginal person does something wrong it is a reflection on them as an individual. So you are not only working for yourself, you are working to break down barriers/stereotypes/assumptions about all of us. You are an ambassador for all Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders - and your positive impact in the workplace will be the best stamp for improving opportunities for future Aboriginal employment. In this regard you can never expect to be in a fully 'supportive environment' unless you work in an Aboriginal work unit (and even then, you still work within mainstream, and so non-Aboriginal people are viewing you/your work/and your unit and making judgements on all Aboriginal people). While this may sound pessimistic I don't think it is. I believe it is up to you to create a supportive environment by networking with others; offering to support above and beyond your own duties; and by performing your job to the best of your abilities - including*

having a continuous quality improvement aspect to doing your job (ie, when you fall down, pick yourself up, dust yourself off, learn and improve the next time).'

Two participants explained that it is important to *"not take negative attitudes to heart"* and to *"be strong as the colour of your skin will make it hard but try not to have a chip on your shoulder as it is not you that has the problem…"* One participant explained that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentorship can be an important support mechanism for a young person when dealing with racism in the workplace.

Other forms of advice

Interwoven with other elements associated with becoming successful in the workplace, some participants provided advice that others had not specifically emphasised. These included: developing a *"work ethic"; "turning up for work everyday"*; being punctual; and being honest.

Discussion

Barnett (2007b) found that Aboriginal employees in her study described low levels of confidence as a major barrier to employment. Similarly, from the perspective of participants in this study, being confident to ask questions is an important component of employment success. Their emphasis on asking questions about training, professional development, support mechanisms, Indigenous employment targets, Indigenous programs and the options for a mentor or support relationship, suggests that from the perspective of participants these things were effective supports for employment success. This reflects the employment literature which emphasises the necessity for all the above to overcome Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment barriers (Barnett 2007a; Giddy *et al* 2009; Constable 2009).

However, participant focus on the need to ask questions suggests that the availability of such opportunities/supports may remain invisible and or unavailable without a proactive uncovering or highlighting of need by employees. The emphasis placed on the necessity to be proactive for employment success was further emphasised through participants' perceptions regarding the importance of 'just

having a go' and the emphasis they placed on the need to deeply consider personal aspirations.

Barrett (2007a) found that a common barrier to employment for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people was a feeling of discomfort within the workplace. Participants in this study viewed the importance of supportive and comfortable work environments as important to employment success. Again focusing on the need for the employee to be proactively involved in their own success, they suggested that finding out whether there were other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people successfully employed in the workplace, talking to people who worked or had worked there, finding out the vision and goals of a workplace and observing whether workers interacted in a positive manner, were all perceived as good strategies for setting yourself up for employment success.

Racism and discrimination in the workplace has been consistently identified as a barrier to employment for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (Barnett 2007; Constable 2009; Giddy *et al* 2009). While the comments by participants regarding the impact of Aboriginal identity in the workplace point to such experiences, by coming from a strength-based approach, participants perceived personal strength to be an essential element associated with achieving success in environments were negative stereotypes may pervade perceptions and practice.

Problem solving and coping strategies for success

Workplaces and employment environments have the potential to accommodate both positive and negative experiences for individuals. Recognising this, the present study aimed to gather information and knowledge around how participants managed or coped with difficult work experiences. Participants were asked to consider a workplace experience that was demanding or worrying and encouraged to describe the positive problem solving strategies and coping mechanisms they did or could have used in this situation. The responses of participants provided perspectives on how to overcome negative experiences in the workplace in order to achieve and maintain employment success.

Participants shared many stories of difficult and stressful situations they had encountered in employment environments. The most common negative experiences shared by participants related to instances of workplace bullying, tension between colleagues and harmful gossiping. Salin (2003) has emphasised that there is increasing attention being paid to bullying in organizational research and alarming findings about the negative consequences associated with bullying, both for the individuals and the organisations concerned. Bullying and gossip were perceived by these participants as negatively impacting on their feeling of employment success.

Many participants also perceived times when they felt overloaded with work and stressed due to the demands of employment as having a negative impact on their sense of success. A perception of work overload is well recognised as a common stressful employment experience for both men and women and across different kinds of occupations (Narayanan, Menon et al. 1999).

Highlighted by one or two participants where experiences of: job insecurity; being undervalued and missing out on promotions; unsupportive management; racist or culturally naive workmates and workplaces; and personal experiences of loss as perceived experiences negatively affecting employment experiences. Job insecurity, lack of opportunities for promotions, unsupportive management, racism and lack of cultural awareness on the part of non-Indigenous employees and peers have also all been identified as barriers to the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees (Barnett 2007b, Constable 2009).

However coming from a strength-based perspective participants in this study were encouraged to describe the positive problem solving and coping mechanisms which they perceived had helped or could have helped them during such negative experiences. The problem solving and coping strategies emphasised by participants where often interconnected and having a suite of approaches was highlighted as important. The following figure (3) provides an overview of the most common strategies mentioned by participants. These strategies are further unpacked through discussion under the subsequent subheadings. Participant's responses often

included more than one theme and the following table identifies how many participants mentioned each of the particular themes.

Figure 3: Problem Solving and Coping Strategies
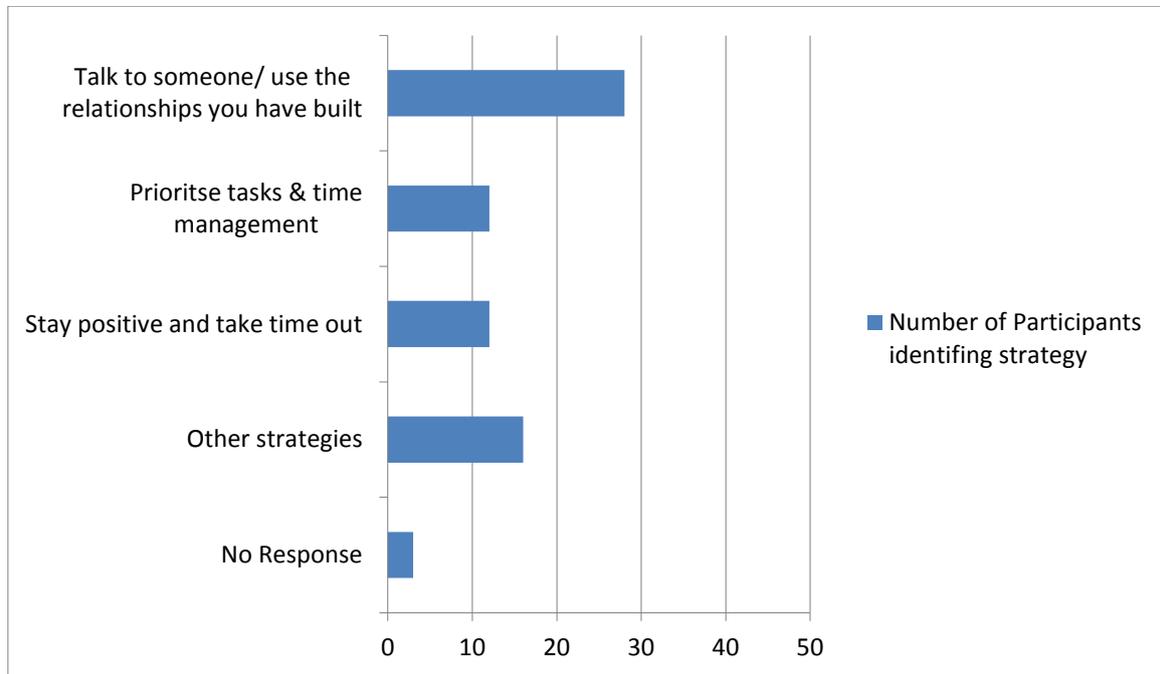
Talk to someone/use the relationships you have built

From the perceptive of participants the importance of building and utilising relationships for effective problem solving and coping strategies was emphasised. They believed that talking with those you have a relationship with about the problem or issue and seeking help and advice in regards to how to deal with it was an effective approach. This common theme is effectively captured by the words of two participants.

> *'Establish relationships with people you trust inside the workplace and also maintain friendships outside of work. These people will become your support network. Talk to them when you are stressed…'*

> *'Know the workplace…use the relationships you have developed…'*

Most of these participants perceived that building relationships that facilitated communication with a work colleague or supervisor was important, for example, *"Get to know your Supervisor or a work colleague and talk to them about what is*

difficult/worrying you". Similarly, many explained that when finding work too demanding or stressful they,

> *'…spoke it out with somebody whom I would consider a mentor'*

> *'It took me a while to speak up and let my team know the difficulties I was going through and they ended up helping me and showing me ways in which I could achieve better outcomes…To cope with it [stressful situation] you just need to talk and let people know how you are feeling and your thoughts and provide suggestions…'*

> *'Always ask for advice and talk to other staff members especially your supervisor about the issue that is troubling you and work together on strategies to overcome the problem.'*

One participant described finding herself in a very demanding workplace where many of her colleagues including herself where suffering from high levels of stress. To counteract this she organised a monthly social gathering for colleagues where they could come together in a relaxed environment which encouraged the building of relationships and the sharing of concerns and difficulties, she states that *"There is hardly any stress in the building and the staff are working closer together, and it is an enjoyable working atmosphere".*

Alongside emphasising the importance of communicating concerns and issues with others in the workplace, some participants also placed value on speaking with friends and family outside of the employment domain. Regardless of who they suggested sharing with, participants in this study placed significant value on a stress management strategy that involved *"getting things off your chest"* and *"not holding stress in".* A small number also advised that being aware of workplaces procedures regarding complaints processes and the official channels for resolving workplace concerns was important, as was knowing, what kinds of support systems were available, such as councillors or stress leave arrangements. Such knowledge was viewed as both a preventative stress management strategy and information to draw upon if workplace problems were experienced.

Prioritising tasks and time management

Just under a third of participants highlighted the importance of prioritising work demands and tasks and developing time management skills as being essential to workplace success and the management of stress. For example they explained:

'…The jobs kept coming and I found my time management was poor. Once I learnt to identify all my jobs and what was required for each, I recorded it down on paper and worked through each on methodically…'

'…I had the experience of where my current work load was overwhelming me…As I was fairly young at the time I was inclined to think that I needed to do every task asked of me and this is not possible for one person. What I did is I advised my supervisor and Manager at the time of my predicament, they were able to put in place good work practices that I needed to use and become familiar with and was able to find assistance for me. It is a good idea to keep a diary for every day to prioritise your workload from urgent to not so urgent and work through it crossing of completed tasks as you go…'

'…I use a daily to do list, monthly deadline list and annual work plan to ensure that I achieve everything I possibly can within certain timeframes…'

'Ensure that I had all the information I required, plan my day and what outcomes I wish to achieve…Basically don't start too much that you can't finish anything.'

'…Ensuring I prioritise is very important and not forgetting about time out with family and friends.'

Another participant also emphasised that prioritising may not just be simply about managing work tasks during work hours but also about prioritising other activities, stating that,

'Remember only you can make a difference…you have to be the one choosing what comes first…sometimes missing going to the pub with some mates can ease up your work life…get there [workplace] ½ hour early so you can make meeting deadlines easier'

Staying positive and taking time out

Almost a third of participants also emphasised that "staying positive" was an important element for maintaining a successful working life. For example one participant referred to a quote by Regina Brett which they used to help them remain positive *"If we all threw our problems in a pile and saw everyone else's, we'd grab ours back".* Taking "time out" or time off work when things became overwhelming was also associated with remaining positive and as an effective stress management strategy. For example:

> *'…if it is too stressful take time out for yourself it is amazing how an hour or a day can help.'*

> *'When you feel stressed out from an overload of work, have a break and come back to it later. Go have a tea or coffee. Go for a walk to check the post office mail. Find ways to de-stress yourself.'*

> *'…I took two days off work to come to terms with what I needed to do to move forward…'*

Other strategies

Some participants also emphasised other personal coping mechanisms and problem solving strategies. Four participants placed value on learning to be assertive in the workplace, for example:

> *'…I gave into pressure for various reasons, however through life and work experiences, I have now learned to discuss, negotiate and challenge others, so they see my perspective and Indigenous way of doing things…I have tried to be respectful of other people's position and perspective…'*

Three participants also highlighted that if the work environment becomes too stressful or negative, *"it's not a death sentence"* and a good approach to coping is to *"make plans to change employment".* Other participants suggested strategies such as: *"sleep and eat right…avoid alcohol and drugs"*; just get on with it and problems have a way of resolving themselves; treat those you don't like well *"and you will always be the winner"*; think deeply about the concern, look inside yourself and identity the source; *"don't show you are stressed"*; keep opinions to yourself if there

is no Indigenous support; and prove to those who think you can't do it that you can do more than they expect.
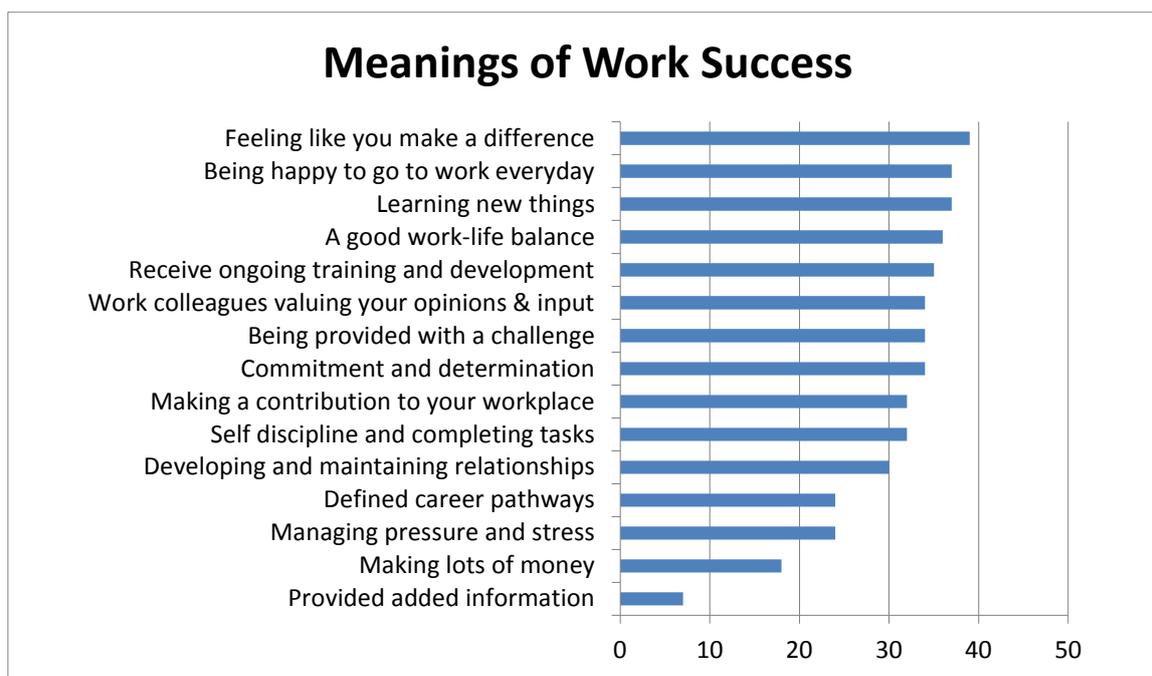
Discussion

Participants perceived that at the foundation of their problem solving and coping strategies was the building and utilization of personal relationships. The importance placed on relationships within participant understandings of employment success will be further explored in the following section. The establishment of relationships was perceived as enabling spaces for positive communication that supported feelings of employment success. Developing behaviours and strategies that supported effective prioritising and time management was also perceived as essential to gaining a sense of success. As was the need to stay positive and acknowledge when you needed to step back or take a break from a stressful situation.

Multiple components to the meaning of Success

Situated near the end of the survey, after participants had been encouraged to think about their feelings of work success from a number of different angles, a list of potential meanings of employment success was provided. Study participants were encouraged to choose which meanings best applied to their own understandings of employment success and had the option of choosing as many suggestions on the list as they wished. They were also provided with a space to describe what 'work success' meant to them.

Figure 4 (below) shows the number of participants who identified the meaning of "work success" with each suggestion. It is clear that most participants identified numerous factors as constituting the meaning of employment success. This was further supported by additional comments provided emphasising the meaning of success as associated with all of the listed factors.

Figure 4: Meanings of work success

Meanings of Work Success

Category	Value
Feeling like you make a difference	~39
Being happy to go to work everyday	~37
Learning new things	~37
A good work-life balance	~36
Receive ongoing training and development	~35
Work colleagues valuing your opinions & input	~34
Being provided with a challenge	~34
Commitment and determination	~34
Making a contribution to your workplace	~32
Self discipline and completing tasks	~32
Developing and maintaining relationships	~30
Defined career pathways	~24
Managing pressure and stress	~24
Making lots of money	~18
Provided added information	~7

There are a number of anomalies that can be identified when comparing the importance placed on factors within this list with the key themes that have developed through analysis of the qualitative data. While the substantial number of participants identifying: 'feeling like you make a difference'; learning new things' 'receiving ongoing training and development'; 'work colleagues valuing your opinions & input' as well as the less often identified 'making lots of money' reflect the emphasis placed on these elements in the open-ended questions. The smaller number of participants identifying 'developing and maintaining relationships' and 'defined career pathways' while strongly emphasised in other sections is not as obvious here. This anomaly would need further investigation if it was to be explained.

While there was little difference between the responses of male and female employees in other section interestingly, men were more likely to identify self-discipline and completing tasks as a component of success while women were more likely to choose receiving ongoing training and development as associated with meanings of success. The small sample size of this study, however, limits the meaningfulness of this finding. A larger sample size and further investigation would be required to explore the potential implications of this.

Some participants also provided added comments about what "work success" meant to them. *These included:*

'A harmonious workplace'

'But most of all it is being passionate about what you do. If you're not passionate, don't be afraid to move on and follow your passion whatever that may be. Be creative, paths may not be as straight forward as you think. But follow your heart, instincts and be faithful and willing to help others on your journey (they usually hold the key to your next move).'

'Personal development, learning, teaching and the gratification of achieving organisational goals'

'Providing the things my family and I want'

'Being able to shift an agenda in some small way; or being able to influence and make change in a positive direction.'

'For me success is not just defined by what I gain - for me as a person of course success means that I have the ability to engage in learning, and meet challenges and supported at times when I need to take time out because success means that my work and my colleagues value me and, if I have been a success in my minds eye, then I have been able to have a positive impact on others - in that each day me or the organisation I work for, has made a difference to the lives of another person, so that they are able to lift their own socio economic status, or gain a job or promotion, or know where the access social services etc. It's being able to influence that person to take control of their own life, make informed decisions, that's success for me. That's just what I think of when I hear 'success'. And I hope they then 'play it forward'. Success is not about individual rewards.'

Improving the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees

After participants had considered what they perceived had contributed to and constituted their own employment success, the final question in the survey asked participants to provide suggestions around factors that need to be considered in

recruitment and retention initiatives and approaches for improving the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. The following figure (5) shows the most common themes within the factors and approaches identified by study participants. Participant's responses often included more than one theme and the following table identifies how many participants mentioned each of the particular themes.

Figure 5: Approaches to improving the recruitment and retention
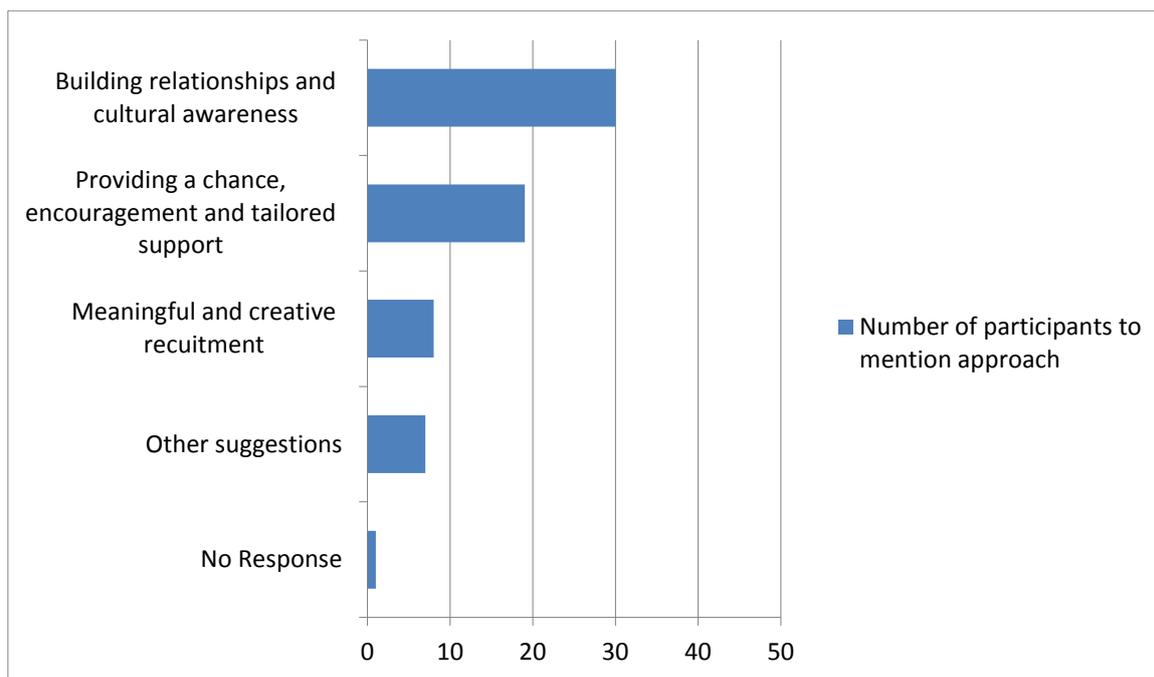
Building relationships and cross-cultural awareness

Well over half of participants in this study highlighted the importance of workplace relationships to the employment success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. Developing and maintaining respectful personal and cross-cultural relationships between colleagues and between all levels of the employment hierarchy was emphasised as the most important component associated with improving the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the employment domain. Creating opportunities for people to listen and talk to one another and share their knowledge and perspectives in a comfortable environment was viewed as an essential factor.

The participant's advised that employers needed to *"get to know their employees",* and that *"understanding each other"* was essential to ensuring the employment

success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While many emphasised the value of cross-cultural training in facilitating this building of respectful relationships in the workplace, they strongly argued for the development of personal relationships between individualsas one participant eloquently explained, "*Ensure that you have a basic understanding of our cultural and ensure that we are treated with respect and understanding each and every day. Do not assume anything about an Indigenous worker. That way you actually have to get to know us to understand us.*"

The value placed on developing cultural awareness in the workplace was significant. Participants advised that employers needed to:

> *'…get to know and understand Aboriginal culture and community'*

> *'…make sure that they understand the cultural background of their employees, and their cultural obligations to ceremony, sorry business and family obligations…'*

> *'…allow for the culture of the Aboriginal to be embraced. Ensure people are culturally aware of sensitivities and differences.'*

Many of these participants emphasised that cultural awareness was not simply something that non-Indigenous people needed to develop but was a mutual journey for both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee as well as others in the work environment. Participants highlighted the importance of building the awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regards to the assumptions, behaviours and expectations of workplace culture. This sentiment is captured in the following quotes:

> *'Improve listening skills – ensure friendly happy working environment. Spend time, through formal training, email, discussions etc. explaining about the work expectations so people know and understand the boundaries.'*

> *'Make people feel like they are a valued member of the workforce, introduce them to the workplace give people an understanding of what is expected of*

them…Make sure people understand the workplace and all the place conditions and expectations.'

'…the employer should know or make it their business to know their staff. Show and give encouragement when needed, be kind, honest, and respectful always make sure that the rules and policies are understood clearly and have the ability to speak to your employee as a valued member of your team, as this will create a comfortable atmosphere.'

The importance of *"getting to know one another"* building relationships based on mutual understanding and working together to achieve workplace success was further emphasised by the following participant:

'…Establish and build up relationship, this is so important, Indigenous people will not enter into a critical conversation, if there is no or little relationship… Then think strategically, how can we work together as a team to support this worker, so he/she is successful in the organisation.'

A significant number of participants also provided warnings to employers about what not to do when attempting to establish and maintain a relationship with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee. Having a general awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture was viewed as important, but getting to know the person as an individual was argued to be essential. Warnings proffered were about not making assumptions or judgements about an individual based on their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity and background. For example, the following comments capture this advice:

'…Treat each person as an individual…'

'…never ask an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander their opinion on something and think they are talking about all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders, because we all come from different cultural upbringing.'

'…don't stick me into a category, judge me on my own merits…'

Coinciding with an acknowledgement of the uniqueness of individuals and the need to get to know one another, some participants also highlighted that building relationships also enabled the recognition that all people have different skills and bring different knowledge and expertise to the work environment. Two comments that capture this include:

'*Give all ATSI people an opportunity to show their wares…'*

'Utilising the unique position ATSI people are in and asking them for their opinions around things. They have a wealth of knowledge and experience that is often disregarded…'

One participant also highlighted the importance of allowing for the development of relationships between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees both within and beyond particular work places.

'…Utilise Aboriginal staff much like you would a professional group (e.g. when a new policy/programme directive may impact on social workers or physiotherapists, those individuals get to meet to discuss the impact of policy/programming on their communities, and their work) – without this being seen as Aboriginal people finding any means to gather together, with the assumption that no work is being done.'

Being given a chance, encouragement and tailored support

While the importance of relationships was the most dominant theme associated with improving Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and the employment success of individuals, providing tailored support, encouragement and professional development opportunities was also a significant and interrelated theme emphasised by over one third of participants. Having a work buddy or mentor, was mentioned by many participants as a valuable and effective approach in providing support particularly for new recruits or younger employees. The building self-confidence through positive encouragement, being provided with challenges and opportunities to contribute knowledge and to participate in training and professional development, were viewed as important in retention initiatives and personal working life success. For example participants suggested approaches such as:

'Encourage staff to try duties and tasks that they would not normally think to try, especially if they are afraid or think they are not good enough. Get them to branch out, try new things. Ask them for their opinions on things, even at management level. Building their confidence is the first step'

'…As the employer, provide positive feedback to your employees whenever anything good has been done, praising your employees is one of the greatest things you can do – to lift morale, to gain trust and also a healthy working relationship…'

'Young people need to be nurtured, encouraged supported and mentored in their work experience. I would advise that intensive training and support go into building people's confidence, self-esteem, resilience, literacy/numeracy, social skills. Help them to believe they have the potential to reach their goals, help them believe in themselves. Teach them explicitly about time management, organizing their home and work responsibilities, teach them explicitly the skills needed for the profession they're entering into. Have regular meetings, informal chats, to touch base with your employees. Keep it as real as possible…'

'I have had the privilege of working with supportive supervisors and mentors/work buddies. Opening up to them and letting them know who you are may be difficult for some but it helps and you might find a supportive/friendly work colleague.'

One participant highlighted – *"don't create indigenous programs that are just created to give basic training that really doesn't apply to any real profession or the same standard as other education".*

Meaningful and creative recruitment

A small number of participants also provided advice to employers regarding recruitment approaches and how to attract Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander applicants. This advice revolved around more creative and meaningful ways of advertising positions, such as:

'…pre-recruitment sessions. This is where as much information as possible about the organisation and the job is provided to potential applicants. This will help them decide if the role is for them. It will also assist them with the application process, because they will know what the employer is looking for…'

'…advertisement done in community language'

'…use common language in selection criteria'

'…Urge other Aboriginal employees to contact their family members and friends and get the word out about opportunities as the main stream of information amongst the Aboriginal community is by word of mouth and through family and friends.'

A few participants also emphasised the value of identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander positions and the continuation of the Indigenous Employment Program within Government as effective ways of supporting the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, while building relationships, supporting personal and professional development and creative approaches to recruitment may well increase the working-life success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A number of participants also emphasised the importance of employers and/or organisations taking the time to understand the reasons and assumptions behind why they may wish to recruit and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employers. This was argued to be an essential action in any attempt to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment success. The following participant has effectively captured point:

'*I would say that there is no one blanket bit of advice [about recruitment and retention] that works for all employers, I think that would be a rather racist premise and would be impossible to enact. I think the key thing is that if an employer recognises that they need or would like ATSI employees, and they can't attract or retain these staff, then they need to sit and listen to the staff that they do have to work out the issue. But I think more than that, they need to work out WHY they want to have ATSI staff in the first place. Is it because of a numbers game, is it because we might be change agents, is it because*

> our client base is Indigenous etc. If these questions can be answered, the
> whole process becomes clearer!'

Other Approaches

The need for employers to acknowledge the primacy of family to Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islanders and the moral obligations related to "sorry business" and
other cultural events was pointed to by three participants. They emphasised that in
order to improve recruitment and retention there was a need for flexible work
arrangement to be developed that could accommodate cultural/family priorities.
Other approaches suggested to employers included: giving individuals "time to step
up" and a *"second chance"*; being aware that pieces of paper (workplace policies
and procedures) do not ensure racism free environments and that there are "*other
factors involved"*.

Discussion

The need and importance of increasing the cultural awareness of non-Indigenous
people as a way of overcoming employment barriers for Aboriginal and/or Torres
Strait Islander people as been documented (Barnett 2007a, Constable 2009; Giddy
et al 2009). However, the perceptions of participants in this exploratory study have
expanded or challenged the sometimes simplistic or rhetorical expression of this
need. From their position while general cross-cultural training is important at the
basis of their perceptions of cultural awareness is the building of personal
relationships. Rather than simply non-Indigenous employers and employees needing
to understand and acknowledge general historical and cultural experiences of
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, participants in this study believed
that actually getting to know them was equally important for supporting their feelings
of employment success. That cultural awareness was conceptualised as a mutual
journey, was also evident in the perceptions of participants, who emphasised the
importance of learning about 'work culture' for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait
Islander employees.

Reflecting the large body of employment literature supporting the provision of
tailored support, professional development, and mentoring opportunities for
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (Barnett 2007a; Constable 2009;

Giddy *et al* 2009), participants in this study have continued to placed emphasis on their value, importance to developing a sense of success, and in this instance more specifically for improving recruitment and retention outcomes. The need to address issues of self-confidence and self-esteem has also been identified as important (Barnett 2007b), however participants in this study perceived that while structured approaches to this were relevant (e.g. training), simply encouraging employees to try new things, providing opportunities for them to contribute knowledge and opinions, and providing positive feedback as ways of addressing this issue.

Ineffective and culturally biased recruitment strategies have been identified as a barrier to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment (Barnett 2007a, 2007b). Reflecting this, participants in this study believed that more meaningful and creative recruitment practices such as pre-recruitment workshops, more appropriate language in selection criteria and using Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander networks, would help to support employment success. Only one participant raised the issue of employers really working out, and deeply considering why they wished to employ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the first place. Yet, this is an important point to consider in light of the employment literature which is commonly framed from a position that sees simply overcoming barriers and getting people into employment as an ultimate good in itself, rather than questioning why this is the case and how such a focus might affect the employment success and workplace experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Conclusion

By coming from a strength-based position this exploratory study has both reflected some findings evident in 'barriers' focused employment literature as well as providing a new perceptive on what contributes to positive work experiences and understandings of success for the 50 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees who participated in this research. Rather than perpetuating a negative picture of problems Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait face in employment, a picture of deficits and insufficiencies, the study has presented a story of employees feelings of employment success, their proactive work motivations, values, behaviours, problem solving and coping strategies.

Participants confirmed that from their own perspective employment strategies aimed at increasing,

- training/professional development and career pathway opportunities;
- access to mentors;
- the cultural awareness of non-Indigenous employees;
- identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander positions; and
- tailored support mechanisms

were all associated with positive work experiences and understood as facilitating feelings of success.

By approaching employment issues from a strength-based position, participants were encouraged to move beyond identifying barriers and provided with a space to further explore the nature of positive employment initiatives. This provided more in-depth information regarding what they perceived, for example, to be positive 'cultural awareness' approaches. For participants cultural awareness involved more than general cross-cultural training for non-Indigenous employers and peers; it was conceptualised as a mutual journey of shared responsibility. It involved intercultural awareness, where both, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and employment/workplace history and culture were equally explored. At the basis of this emphasis was the perceived importance participants placed on 'getting to know one another' as an essential component in supporting the employment success of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees. This focus on 'getting to know them' rather than simply gaining a general understanding of Aboriginal and/or Torres

Strait Islander history and culture suggests that 'cross-cultural' training approaches that generalize about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people may not be sufficient. Without simultaneously encouraging the development of personal relationships between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees, non-Indigenous employees and management, such approaches can reinforce stereotypes and may lead to situations where non-Indigenous employees and management feel that they 'know all about Aboriginal people' without acknowledging the importance of 'getting to know' their Aboriginal co-workers as unique individuals.

Moving beyond a barriers approach to understanding employment, exploring what participants perceived to contribute and constitute work success has provided a wider lens for looking at recruitment and retention initiatives. The 50 participants in this exploratory study emphasised the importance of having a sense of supporting and empowering other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, their own community and family, as associated with feelings of employment success. They also perceived that being provided with opportunities for professional and personal growth (learning new things and being challenged); having employment environments which fostered respectful relationships and where employee contributions were acknowledged and appreciated were associated with positive work experiences and their own employment success. The meaning of 'success' for the participants in this study was found to involve numerous interrelated factors such as those discussed above as well as achieving a good work-life balance, having a positive attitude to work (happy to go everyday); commitment, determination, self-discipline and completing tasks. Financial rewards while also playing an interrelated role in participant's perceptions of employment success were not emphasised to the same extent.

In contrast to the literature on Indigenous employment barriers, the strength-based approach of this exploratory study enabled an exploration of proactive behaviours, values and strategies that Aboriginal and/or Torres Islander participants reported adopting or believed important to achieving success in the workplace. Participants perceived that having the confidence to ask questions and seek advice was an essential strategy and behaviour associated with employment success. Again, the

importance of building relationships was at the foundation of this strategy, utilizing these relationships was perceived as an underlying factor supporting successful employment. Similarly the value of developing strategies and behaviours focused on effective ways of prioritising tasks and time management was perceived as important. The value of remaining positive and adopting strategies of 'taking time out' when this was proving difficult was also emphasised.

Participants in this study confirmed the value of recruitment and retention approaches that have been identified as effective in the literature, such as, cultural awareness, training, development, tailored support and creative and culturally appropriate recruitment strategies. Additionally, from the perspective of participants employers could well benefit from acknowledging the importance of the building and maintaining of personal relationships to the employment success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait employees. By creating spaces where people feel comfortable and encouraging opportunities for 'getting to know one another' Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees can feel confident to ask the questions and participate in the interactions that support their feelings of success.   These spaces need to encourage the building of positive relationships not only through developing the general awareness of non-Indigenous people regarding Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture, but also through mutual learning journeys where individuals are appreciated for the different skills and knowledge they bring to the employment environment.

Further Research

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education has funded a second phase of research associated with this exploratory study. This second investigation will involve informal semi-structured interviews with 10 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees from the Darwin region. These interviews will significantly contribute to a more in-depth analysis of concepts of success from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

The present (first phase) exploratory study has also highlighted the need for further research exploring the development, definitions, forms and benefits of methodologies that can move beyond a deficit model of understanding Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment. Such exploration would involve unpacking the discourse around and the potential baggage associated with, the strength-based concept. An important direction for future research would be to question the appropriateness of strength-based approaches in attempts to move beyond a deficit discourse of understanding Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment.

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Appendix A

What is your gender and what age group do you belong too?

☐ What is your gender and what age group do you belong too? Female

☐ 18-24

☐ 45-54

☐ 25-34

☐ 55-64

☐ Male

☐ 35-44

☐ 65 and over

☐ Other

**Which of the following best describes your present employment position? You can choose more than one option.**

☐ Which of the following best describes your present employment position? You can choose more than one option. Apprentice or Trainee

☐ Trade worker

☐ Support worker

☐ Labourer

☐ Manager/responsibility for up to 10 workers

☐ Receptionist

☐ Manager/responsibility for more than 10 workers

☐ Administration Officer

☐ Senior management

☐ Customer Service/Retail worker

☐ Executive

☐ Shop Assistant

☐ Professional

☐ Trainer/educator

Other (please specify) [   ]

Question 1: Take a moment to reflect on your working life. When have you felt most passionate and motivated about your employment? Describe this time

and place and what it was that made this experience a positive one.

For example, was it to do with financial rewards, workplace relationships, your responsibilities or the opportunities available, or maybe you fell in love or your home life had an influence. Feel free to touch on a combination of things and remember that all identifying information will only be seen by the researcher
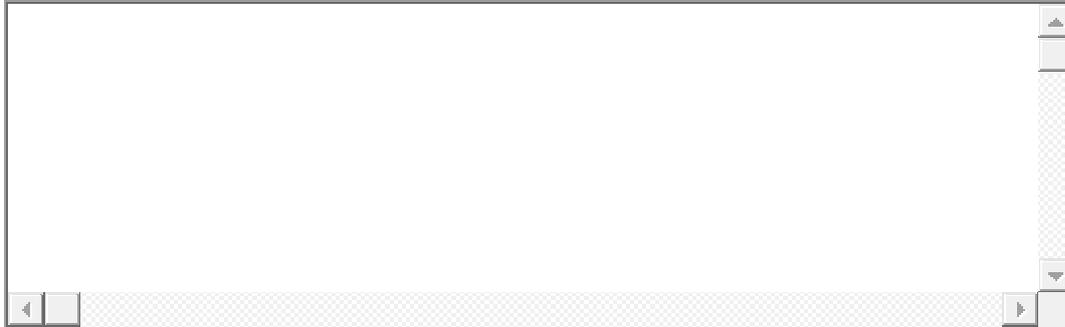
Tick the sector that best describes where the positive work experience discussed above occurred.

○ Tick the sector that best describes where the positive work experience discussed above occurred. Government

○ Private Business

○ Non-Government Organisation (NGO)

○ Indigenous Organisation

○ CDEP (or other employment program, such as work-for-the-dole)

Question 2: Imagine talking to a young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person who was just about to enter employment for the first time.
What advice would you give them on choosing a good workplace that can support them to achieve success?

Question 3: Sometimes employment can be stressful and work environments may not always be enjoyable places to be in. Think about your own experiences of times when employment has been demanding or when a work environment has been difficult or worrying. What strategies did you use or could you have used to manage this workplace stress?

Tell a story about one of these hard times at work and what you did or could have done to help you cope with it.

**For everybody "work success" can mean different things.**

What does "work success" mean to you? You can choose more than one option from the list and/or provide additional information in the text box below.

Being happy to go to work everyday

☐ Feeling like you make a difference

☐ Making lots of money

☐ Making a contribution to your workplace

☐ Work colleagues valuing your opinions and input

☐ Developing and maintaining relationships

☐ Learning new things

☐ Being provided with a challenge

☐ Receive ongoing training and development

☐ Defined career pathways/opportunities to progress

☐ A good balance between work and life

☐ Managing pressure and stress

☐ Self discipline and completing tasks

☐ Commitment and determination

Other (please specify)

Question 4: Statistics say that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have more difficulty finding success at work. What advice would you give employers about improving the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees?
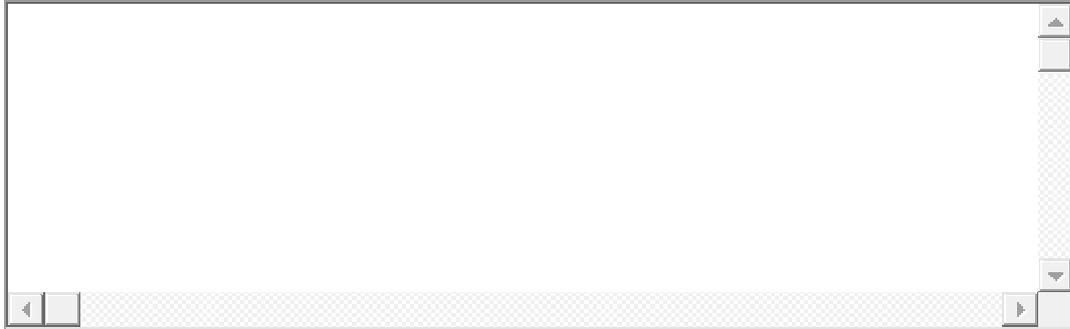
Appendix B

Are you an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander? Do you work in the Darwin region? Would you like to be part of an important research project *"My Success: positive employment experiences"*

My name is Eva and I am the researcher.

I would really appreciate you sharing your employment stories and knowledge with me.

Click the attachment (above) **to hear me talk about why the project is important and how you can be involved** (you may need to right click and download to hear audio)

Dr Eva McRae-Williams
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
Mobile: 0400 759 153
eva.mcrae-williams@batchelor.edu.au

Once you have listened or read the information (see below) click on this link to access the online survey http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Z9XM3VZ (note: you need to push the ctrl button while clicking on this link)

Project Information

I am a non-Indigenous person who works for Batchelor Institute as a social researcher. I'm interested to learn how different groups understand work and value employment. This study focuses on positive employment experiences. Employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is often talked about in a negative way on the radio, on the TV and in newspapers. Focusing on the negatives, such as unemployment rates, barriers to employment or stories of failure, doesn't tell us what attracts people to work and keeps them there.

This study has a few questions about what you have learnt and enjoyed during your working life. Your experiences will help employers to improve their policies and practices to better support Aboriginal employees.

This survey is completely voluntary. You will be anonymous. You will not be asked to provide your name or information about your current employer. Your employer will not have access to your response nor be able to identify your response in the research findings.

So how does this survey work? Click on the link above if you want to be in the study. Read the questions and click the choice or write your answers. It will take you 10-15 minutes or you can spend as much time as want. You can also skip questions if you don't want to answer.

If you change your mind and want to withdraw after completing the survey, you would need to speak to me on the telephone and I can delete your survey.

Now this is important - If you think this is a worthwhile study, you could forward this email and survey link to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are employed in the Darwin Region, whether family or friends. Surveys are a bit impersonal. If you would like a chance to talk

about your experience, face-to-face with me, this will really improve the research. Contact me directly (contact details below) if you'd like to help in this way. This would also be completely voluntary and you can pull out at any stage.

If you have any questions or concerns you can contact me – **or if you are worried about how this research is conducted – please contact the BIITE Research & Ethics Officer on (08) 89 397 249.**
If you want a copy of the report when it is done please send me your email address.