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A Developing Framework for community engagement, knowledge management and ethics.

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Overview of DK CRC research mission

As Jan has outlined, the DK CRC has a commitment to creating economic opportunities for desert people, and to making a demonstrable difference for remote Indigenous settlements through the application of excellent research and training. As a research and training organisation that operates through a partnership approach, all research proposals have to indicate who they are partnered with and how they propose to collaborate with both end-users and stakeholders. This on-the ground hands-on approach is driven by the DK CRC's understanding of the link between research and community development and social change. The DK CRC's vision is a "transformation of research practices from investigator-driven to an adoption of a needs-based approach to research" (CRC for Aboriginal Health and Tropical Health 2002:1). To this end the DK CRC is investing in innovative models for collaborative research partnerships. In this paper I'll overview some examples of some of these partnerships and how they operate within the collaborative and ethical framework that the DK CRC is fostering and further developing on the basis of experience. The complex issues surrounding knowledge management, sometimes glossed as intellectual property, will only be briefly touched upon here. Margaret Raven and Kado Muir, in the following presentations, will discuss this area in more detail. I note here that the DK CRC has only just received a draft of a major strategic scoping paper on Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual property that we are yet to consider in detail.

Overview of colonial legacy of research

It is important to put our current research methods in some historical context, while offering some voice to the scholarship of Indigenous researchers on this issue of methodology. Researchers, such as Eileen Morton-Robinson (2000), Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (2003) and Lester Rigney (1997), all variously illustrate how the legacy of research on Indigenous people was disempowering. Treated as subjects, research became a tool of colonization with research constructing an exclusive knowledge culture in a power-knowledge nexus that served to marginalize local knowledge by controlling and defining it. The worst of this practice led non-Indigenous researchers to enter a community and take knowledge out of it, with little long term reciprocal engagement and knowledge exchange and little or no consideration of local capability development. As a response to this legacy an Indigenous Research Reform Agenda (IRRA) is developing in Australia to which the DK CRC's evolving community engagement and ethics frame work is responsive to.

The current DK CRC statement of key ethics and values

Since its inception the DK CRC board, half of which are Indigenous, have based their approval of *all* research projects on the following criteria:

- 1) A research project will only be approved when it meets the ethics standards established by the board (these are derived from the AIATSIS and the NHMRC (National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines);

And in setting priorities, preference will be given to new projects that:

- 2) involve cooperation between different parties, organisations and different disciplines;
- 3) involve the full and equitable participation of end-users in their determination, control, design, execution and implementation;
- 4) provide education and training opportunities for desert people and particularly Indigenous people;
- 5) return benefits at all levels to people in desert regions, including opportunities for employment, capacity building, new enterprises and local livelihood activities;

- 6) show new ways of creating evolving partnerships between local knowledge systems and the western scientific method;
- 7) are likely to solve identified problems or to show how to break down structural barriers to the development of sustainable livelihoods for desert people and;
- 8) develop a unique desert perspective that builds desert knowledge and contributes to a coherent body of the science of sustainable desert living.

This operating draft is widely promulgated within the DK CRC and is signed off by all research project leaders on accepting DK CRC funding. Although this statement offers some important foundational ground-rules for research it is currently under review by the board, so that it will become increasingly innovative, taking into account the IRRA and the uptake of the findings of research projects, such as those discussed below, and others as yet embryonic.

The diverse suite of projects

DK CRC has been developing a series of research projects in a diverse suite of areas relating to desert conditions. These range from environmental drivers in natural resource management, to the physical conditions of isolation in technical services, to the implications of sparse remote populations on governance structures. Such diverse research questions require different engagement strategies. However, all require collaborative approaches with end-users and stakeholders. What I want to focus on today is engagement with the Indigenous sector of our research portfolio which comprised approximately one-third of the initial DK CRC projects.

Strategic projects

In the first two years the DK CRC supported a number of projects that directly targeted the need to develop collaborative research relationships with Indigenous organisations, individuals and groups. These projects were strategic 'how to' projects that will inform researcher engagement policy at various levels. The emphasis of these projects is that *the research process is as important as the research outcome*. At this stage we have the research findings for three of these projects. The first of these, by the CLC, are protocols

for conducting research and other activities on Aboriginal Land and more broadly their potential application to the entire CLC region. Jocelyn Davies, through the DK CRC and CSIRO has just completed a detailed report on Indigenous Research Partnerships called “Walking Together and Working Together”, which will feed directly into core project 1; “Benefiting Australia through livelihoods from Desert resources” and more broadly across the DK CRC. Metta Young and Kathie Rae at CAT have finalised the working document “Effective Research and Development Collaboration: Participatory and capacity building frameworks for involving desert people”. Metta and Jocelyn will be presenting findings from these projects in the following session and suggestions on how the methodologies will work and in some cases are working in practice.

Projects that lead by example

Then there are projects that are leading by example in terms of their practical and collaborative engagements. Such collaborations are personal and take time to build. Two such projects in the Anmatyerr region are the “Recognition of cultural values of water in natural resource management process”, with Namoie Rea (CDU) and Lucas Jordon, and “community governance and service delivery in sparsely settled desert areas” with Will Sanders and myself. The water project is actively building livelihood opportunities through facilitating training in resource management certificate 1, in IT, in Knowledge database and knowledge management. While more broadly the aim is that the community will have trained ambassadors for water who know their rights and how to participate in NRM decision making processes, especially Indigenous water resource management (final milestone pp5). The governance project is working closely with the ACGC on a needs based approach to research. This means that the council identifies issues of concern, whereby researcher expertise can assist them in making informed decisions. To date the first research issue has been on the fringe camp, known as creek camp, an unserviced population camping behind the council. After developing up a questionnaire with the council, we interviewed creek camp residents, ascertaining the potential service population, why people live there and how. It is hoped that our subsequent report to council will allow them, and others in the Northern Territory government, to make a reasoned and informed assessment about the possible future of the place.

In the project led by Tangentyere on “Population Estimation and Mobility in town camps” some 24 Indigenous researchers were specifically trained to help design, collect and then analyse survey instruments in town camps around Alice Springs. Other projects that use a *participatory action research framework* in engaging Aboriginal expertise are the “Plants for People Project”, with Loius Evans and Kado Muir and “Sustainable bush produce systems for the arid zone” with Martin Ryder and Fiona Walsh. The action research approach that all of these projects are practicing is informed by international approaches to social and community development, the basic purpose of which is to *enlarge people’s choices*. Fundamental to enlarging these choices is building human capabilities – the range of things that people can do or be in life. One of the most basic of these capabilities is being able to participate effectively in the life of the community.

Ethics in Practice

These research projects, like all other DK CRC projects, had to gain ethics clearance. What does this mean in practice? Formally it means that if the researcher is associated with a university then initial clearance is obtained from their institution’s ethics committee. These committees follow the national standard – being the National Statement on Ethical Conduct Involving Humans which are issued by the NHMRC. A DK CRC research project cannot commence without this approval. However, perhaps more importantly, before any research proposal gets to this point of gaining formal approval the research project itself is scoped with other researchers and, depending on the project, local Indigenous groups. It is at this development stage that the three basic ethical principles of: respect for persons as autonomous agents, beneficence or obligations to maximize possible benefits and minimize possible harms, and justice or who ought to receive the benefits of the research are also scoped (National Statement on ethical research involving humans 1999:4). If researchers are not affiliated with a university, such as researchers from Tangentyere or CAT, then the project will pass through the Central Australian Human Ethics Committee. However, there may be benefits for all DK CRC researchers to also gaining ethics clearance from this Central Australian committee, given its local focus. Overlaid on these ethics clearance process are the CLC’s protocols

for conducting research on Aboriginal Land, which currently work in tandem with their permit application system. Finally, each researcher also operates under their own discipline's code of ethics.

The DK CRC is currently developing an ethics register to keep a closer watch on the various approvals and to streamline the processes.

Benefit sharing

Benefit sharing in research can range from the direct employment of Indigenous researchers, facilitators or interpreters, to the long term benefit that may accrue from research that is driven by the community council and arms them with information to develop a position on an important issue. Perhaps, the most common understanding of benefit sharing is in intellectual property. As a result of the Plants for People project, we have now worked through the idea of prospective benefit-sharing based on equal rights for local and scientific knowledge holders through the CLC. The CLC refers to this as the *napatji-napatji* principle, although they are loath to enshrine it in a single Aboriginal language.

The IP protocol also provides for any money generated from commercialisation of DK CRC research to be applied to research that is a priority to the Indigenous community within the general aims of the DK CRC. This measure applies to all DK CRC research, whether or not that research draws in Indigenous intellectual and cultural property, and is additional to any benefit that would flow direct to owners of Indigenous intellectual and cultural property as a result of them authorizing the use of their property in DK CRC research.

Formal aspects of knowledge management

Like the Indigenous community engagement strategy, the Indigenous Intellectual property protocol is a living document that will grow with the IP register that we are currently establishing. The IIP protocol starts from a baseline that aims to achieve effective protection of Indigenous intellectual property in research and in the potential

commercialisation of research. The elements in the protocol as it now stands and as all researchers are required to be aware include the practices surrounding ethics, the collection of Indigenous IP, the use and storage of information, confidentiality, commercialization practice and commercial benefits. I'll leave it to the following two papers to discuss this complex area of knowledge management in more detail. Instead here, I will give two examples of knowledge management in practice.

In the Cultural Values of water project, discussed earlier, cultural knowledge recorded by the school groups is being used in the development of a knowledge database being built at the Anmatyerr knowledge centre – located in the public library. This important part of the project not only trains community members in IT, but also culturally appropriate knowledge management. As 'data' is collected throughout the project, the community can be assured that the knowledge will be stored locally and under their supervision.

Moves to improving our collaborative framework

Where this isn't already happening, the DK CRC needs to 'operationalise' the findings and recommendations in the strategic reports mentioned earlier. This includes more inclusive collaboration with Indigenous organisations and formal partnering with communities. We are aware that there are few Indigenous organisations listed in the original centre agreement. The DK CRC is moving towards possible affiliate agreements with the Anmatjere community government Council, Ngaanyatjarra Council, Tangentyere Council, the Tapatjatjaka (Tjitjikala Council) community government council and Waltja Tjutungku Palyapayi. Although these organizational links don't guarantee community engagement, they are a necessary precursor. As the CLC's protocols report suggested, "community based protocols can function as charters for correct behaviour by those wishing to work with Indigenous communities ... they must be the basis for active and ongoing processes, not just static documents" (2004:10). Thus, they need to operate in a similar manner to informed consent where "consent in research is a process, not a one-off event" (Australian Anthropological Code of Ethics pp2).

The DK CRC is also working on the assumption that capacity not only needs to be built on settlements to realize researcher livelihoods, but also with researchers themselves. To this end we will be holding workshops on collaborative methodologies with researchers, as well workshops to build research capability with potential Indigenous collaborators.

As a learning organization, the DK CRC is now turning the corner where it has to synthesise and consolidate the research experience of the first two years and build on the strategic and policy oriented projects and the successes of the collaborations to date.

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