

Educating Indigenous People for Employment in Australian Mining: The Rio Tinto Alcan Initiative at Nhulunbuy

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The persistent labour market disadvantages of Indigenous people in remote regions of Australia attracts resurgence of interest in their employment in the minerals industry. This paper describes and presents achievements of an educational-vocational programme that is conducted at the remote centre of Nhulunbuy in the Northern Territory (NT) of Australia for Indigenous Yolngu people. The initiative is conducted by Rio Tinto Alcan personnel in association with the Charles Darwin University, the NT Ministry of Education, and relevant training/accreditation bodies. Presented material identifies a diversity of issues for initiatives to improve Indigenous employment, and challenges the prevailing assumption Indigenous people will pursue their socio economic independence through employment in the minerals industry. Concluding comments advance the notion pathways to short term and long term benefits are linked to greater understanding and appreciation of the expectations of all stakeholders.

Keywords: Education, Employment, Indigenous, Yolngu, Australian Mining

Introduction

Relative to other Australians, Indigenous people experience substantial labour market disadvantage. Indeed, a great deal of literature has reported the high rates of Indigenous mainstream unemployment (Cutcliffe, 2006; Daly, 1995; Gray & Hunter, 2002) as well as the extent of their dependence on welfare payments (Daly & Smith, 1998; Gray & Hunter, 2005). To redress the low level of Indigenous labour force participation the Australian Government, in 1977, introduced the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme as an alternative to unemployment benefits (Altman & Gray, 2005; Hunter, Kinfu & Taylor, 2003). Installation of the CDEP scheme, which required Indigenous participants to perform work for unemployment benefits (Altman, Gray & Levitus, 2005; Arthur, 2002), was a response to concerns by the Australian Government, and prominent Indigenous leaders that unemployment benefits were being obtained without doing any work. Following a number of assessments of the CDEP scheme, that gave equivocal findings, in 2009 the Australian Government announced the CDEP scheme would be structured into a work readiness training service (Altman & Jordan, 2009; *Participant Fact Sheet*, 2009).

In remote regions of Australia there are poor job prospects for Indigenous people. Often there are insufficient mainstream work opportunities, while the few available job positions are likely to be filled by better trained and educated non Indigenous people (Altman, et al., 2005; Gray & Hunter, 2002; Trudgen, 2000). A concern for the Indigenous underprivileged sector, particularly in remote and rural regions of Australia, has onset resurgence in interest in employment of Australian Aboriginals in the mining sector. Although Indigenous employment rates in Australian mining are relatively low (Brereton & Parmenter, 2005; Harvey & Brereton, 2008) the mining sector remains "... one of the few available avenues to deliver economic and other improvements to Indigenous people living in those areas." (Barker, 2006: i).

A prevailing assumption that remote mineral operations will lead to an increased Indigenous participation in the mining workforce is driven more by hyperbole and less by evidence. In spite of the commitment through the policies of the Australian Government and peak mining bodies to facilitate employment opportunities to Indigenous people their representation in cadres at refineries and mine sites is unfavourable (Brereton & Parmenter, 2008; Taylor, 2004). Concerns for the Indigenous underprivileged sector (particularly in remote regions), a shortage of skilled mineworkers outside the area of the mining activity, an impetus to obtain employees in boom periods, and that in the remote areas a substantial proportion of the population is Indigenous people, has resulted in Australian mining

companies taking a more proactive approach to Indigenous community engagement (Barker, 2006; Brereton & Parmenter, 2008; Harvey & Brereton, 2005). Although there are perceived benefits from partnerships between mining companies and Indigenous communities contemporary mineworkers are required to possess high levels of technical competence (Colley, 2005; Gray & Hunter, 2005), qualities that are likely to be held by very few Australian Aboriginals in remote communities. And while the core business of the mining industry is not education the reported low levels of English literacy and numeracy skills of Indigenous school children and adults, and particularly in the NT (Hughes, 2008; Kral, 2009; Tripcony, 2000), compels mining companies to promote vocational training programmes.

This paper presents, in six parts, the description, results and consequences of a work readiness programme that is conducted for Indigenous people. Following the introduction (the first part) is a description of the programme to outline the foundation and refinements to the current variant. In the third part of this paper is given the site, participants and an overview of how the education-vocation programme is undertaken. The fourth section provides results as Tables and electronic images of some Indigenous graduates in their workplace. A fifth part of the paper integrates the outcomes of the work readiness programme with the relevant literature. The concluding section addresses some of the observations with short and long term consequences.

The ALERT Work Readiness Programme

During 2006 Alcan personnel prepared a document (*A Response*, 2007) to gain support from a wide spectrum of stakeholders for a new Indigenous training and employment programme. This ambitious work was labelled the Alcan Learning Education and Regional Training (ALERT) programme. In early 2009 when Rio Tinto became the principal shareholder of the mining operations in Nhulunbuy Alcan was replaced with Arnhem. This document was designed to cater for the interests of the Traditional Owners, Indigenous Organisations, the three levels of Australian Government, the education sector, business and employer groups, relevant industry organisations and peak bodies of the mining sector. As the document had to reflect the shared interests of a plethora of local Indigenous Yolngu people and important external (often non Indigenous) parties the content was wide ranging.

At the core of the ALERT programme was a series of seven stages. The first stage, *Application*, was when the potential candidate completed an application form to provide relevant personal information (i.e., gender, age, clan, shoe size) and the names of two non clan referees. In the second stage of about one hour, the applicant completed a *Discovery Session*, which had been developed (Pearson & Daff, 2008) to assess the aptitude of the candidate without prejudicing them because of their deficits in English literacy or numeracy skills. The third stage of the ALERT programme was the *Selection* of 15 candidates (the number was determined by executive management) from the total presented applicants following some rudimentary testing of their job relevant skills and educational abilities. An *Induction* period of at least one week was the fourth stage. In this stage personal hygiene, issue of uniform, advice of the bus collection details, signing of a family contract and a host of other matters concerning the candidate and the family was addressed. The work readiness vocational part of ALERT was *Work Prep* (stage five), *Work Ready* (stage six), and *Work Starts* (stage seven). *Work Prep* was for four days a week for three months, *Work Ready* was for four days a week for four months, and *Work Starts* was for five days a week for up to 29 months. The purpose of *Work Prep* was to build the ALERT trainee's confidence to start training, *Work Ready* was to practice and reinforce work/learning behaviours in specific job contexts, and *Work Starts* was the commencement of employment as on the job training. Although trainees are paid once selected the rate of pay in *Work Starts* depended on the job position.

The seven stages of the ALERT programme had two main objectives. First, to choose the 15 candidates that were assessed as the most suitable from the total number that applied. Second, to provide the Indigenous Yolngu ALERT trainees with practical work skills that would enable them to be employed in community mainstream jobs, preferably at the Nhulunbuy refinery or the mine site. Embedded within the second stage was the focus to a) instil in the trainees robust work habits

including regular daily attendance, b) provide a learning environment in which candidates could develop their English literacy skills and numeracy competencies, c) present the programme to generate enthusiasm and self esteem levels in the trainees, and d) teach them practical and valued work skills. The vision of executive management was there would be two ALERT programmes each year.

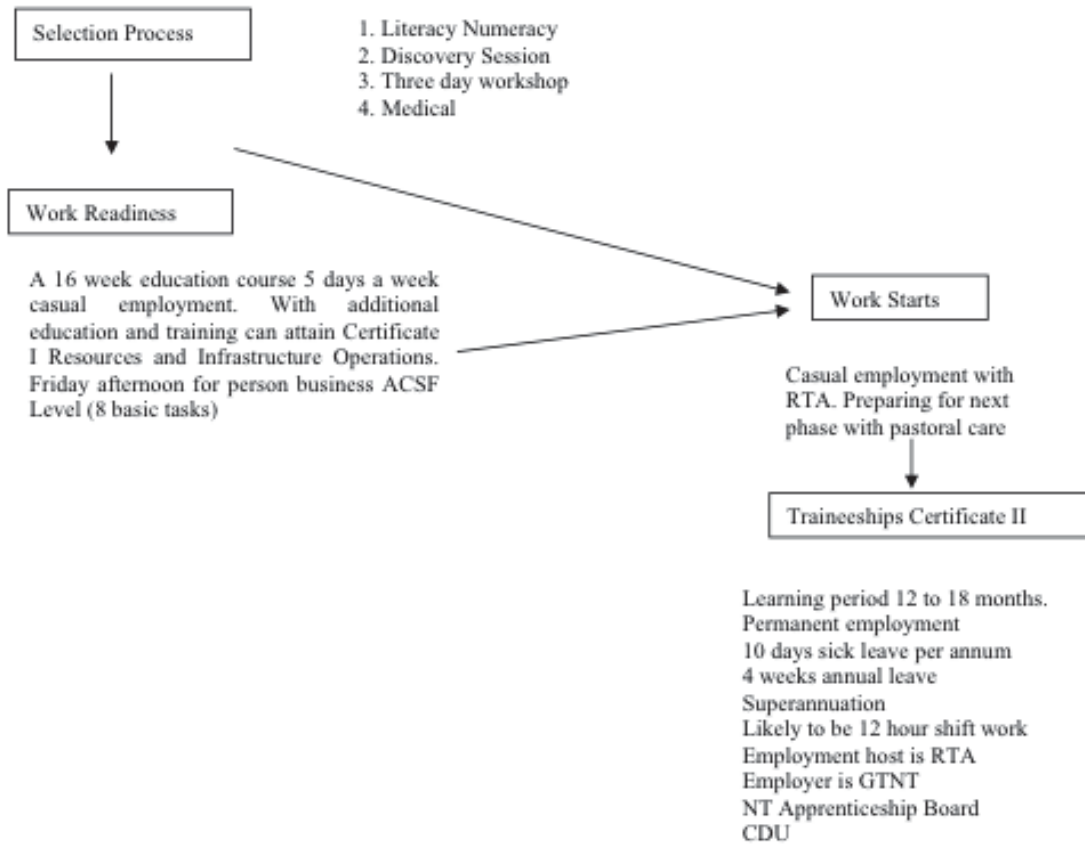
Before the commencement of the third ALERT education-vocation initiative it became apparent the programme would profit by some refinements. From the first two ALERT programmes about one third of the candidates had withdrawn, about one third had returned to their communities to work mainly in CDEP projects, and less than one third had graduated and become employed in Rio Tinto Alcan positions at the Nhulunbuy refinery or mine site (Pearson & Daff, 2009). Although the employment of Yolngu people in mainstream community jobs was a valued result, and while the number of graduates who chose to work for Rio Tinto was a welcome outcome, the extent of investment by the ALERT programme deliverers for the high level of leakage of candidates led to a conclusion a better strategy was warranted.

There were three prominent changes to the inaugural ALERT programme. First, the programme was restructured into the two streams of *Work Readiness* and *Work Starts*. Nominally, applicants who successfully completed the selection process and had a formal education of Year 10 were employed in *Work Starts*, while those who completed the selection process, but their formal education was less than Year 10 and greater than early level primary school were invited to enter the *Work Readiness* programme. The *Work Readiness* component was for 16 weeks, for five days a week when the trainees received education and training for paid casual work. On Friday afternoon trainees were assisted with personal business matters (e.g., banking). Second, a more stringent selection process was introduced. This screening process employed national literacy and numeracy tests, the completion of a *Discovery Session*, a three day residential workshop, input from two non clan Referees, and a thorough medical examination. An outline of these two changes is shown as Figure I. Third, the selection process stage was extended to enable the assessors more time to evaluate the applicants. While the 15 Yolngu applicants were being assembled for the *Work Readiness* element they were given closely supervised paid casual work (e.g., women might be doing administrative work, men could be aiding a supervisor). As the intention was to have four intakes a year, and with some applicants moving directly into work, it was expected a greater number of Yolngu people could be employed in mainstream jobs than the initial versions of the ALERT programme.

The refined ALERT programme was conducted for 2009, but an unfavourable level of candidate leakage persisted. From a total of 126 Indigenous applicants 42 were chosen when they completed a *Discovery Session*, undertook literacy and numeracy testing, their Referees were interviewed and a successful medical examination was undertaken. By the close of 2009 there were 22 departures (withdrew, suspended, custodial removal). Of the remainder two left to work in the community and 18 chose to work for Rio Tinto Alcan, but nine of them later left their work position at the refinery. In effect, nine of the 42 (21.4%) remained in employment with the vocation – education provider by the close of 2009.

Unexpected highlights of 2009 were an intensity of applications and the need to further refine the selection process. In 2009, ALERT won the NT Ministry of Education award for the most innovative education programme, and public exposure of this achievement led to a ‘flood’ of applicants from across northern Australia. To address this ‘spike’ in potential ALERT participants the screening processes were made more restrictive. For the first intake of 2010 Indigenous trainees applicants were required to provide documentation to demonstrate educational – vocational competencies (e.g., formal education certificates, employer references, driver license, other work relevant accomplishments). A short list of 26 applicants was then invited to travel to Nhulunbuy and attend a one week residential assessment workshop, At the end of the week 12 people were offered a contract to enter a 14 week *Work Readiness* scheme and four others were invited to commence in *Work Starts*.

Figure 1. The Rio Tinto Alcan ALERT Education-Vocation Scheme



Notes:

- a. Rio Tinto Alcan (RTA) Has weekly feedback from the Supervisor so if required candidates can be given additional training/education.
- b. Group Training Northern Territory (GTNT) Responsibility for employer/employee IR.
- c. Northern Territory (NT) Apprenticeship board gives representative visits to the trainee half yearly, which is a requirement of NT government funding.
- d. CDU The Charles Darwin University is the registered training organisation and conducts the trainee final assessment. Trainees enrolled in a Certificate II programme of 12 units with 4 mandatory.

The ALERT trainees have opportunity to complete university certificates and obtain full time employment in the minerals industry. With application a trainee in *Work Readiness* can complete a Certificate 1 in Resources and Infrastructure Operations, a qualification that is awarded by the Charles Darwin University. Participants of *Work Starts* can undertake a Group Training NT (GTNT) Certificate 2 in a variety of streams (e.g., Engineering, Administration, Metaliferous Mining Operations). Full time employment is available to graduates at the minesite or the refinery. The outcomes of the ALERT programme since inception is outlined in the Results section, but first some delineation of the ALERT site, participants and how the programme is administered is warranted.

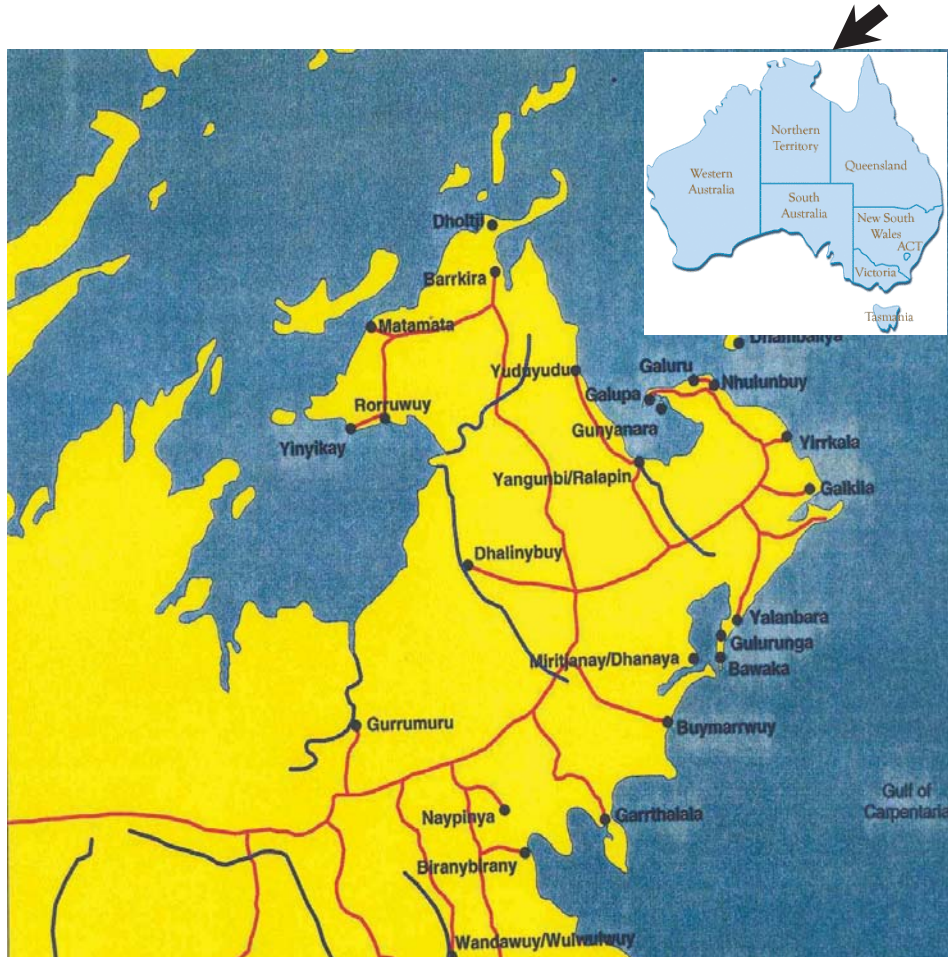
Methodology

Site

The ALERT programme is delivered in dedicated education facilities at Nhulunbuy as well as at the refinery and minesite. Nhulunbuy is on the remote Gove Peninsula of the NT of Australia, as shown in Figure 2. The town of Nhulunbuy has a population of some 4000 residents, many of whom are

employed by Rio Tinto Alcan, which operates the mine and the refinery. This refinery, one of the largest in the southern hemisphere, has a capacity of 4.0 million tonnes of alumina per annum. Although relatively isolated from other large centres Nhulunbuy has all the infrastructure of contemporary Australian towns (e.g., hospital, shopping centre, court, airport, swimming pool, hotels).

Figure 2: The Region of Influence of the ALERT Programme



The education component of the ALERT programme is mainly conducted in buildings that were extensively upgraded in 2006 and 2007 by the mining operator. To the south west of the town centre, and on the periphery of the Nhulunbuy town centre, is the ALERT premises. Inside a security fence are two large teaching buildings, a large building that houses industrial equipment, two ablution blocks, a swimming pool and a parkland area where the graduation ceremonies are conducted. These facilities were provided by Alcan, which was the then current mining operator. In addition, other off the job teaching and instruction is undertaken at the Nhulunbuy Technical Education School where the course content is delivered by staff from the Charles Darwin University. On the job training is given at the refinery or the minesite by Rio Tinto Alcan supervisors, some of whom are dedicated ALERT staff. At different stages of the *Work Readiness* programme specialist contracted trainers/educators deliver courses (e.g., first aid, working at height) at the main ALERT teaching rooms.

Participants

The ALERT programme is reserved for Indigenous people. Initially, the programme was preserved for the Indigenous Yolngu people of the Gove Peninsula within a 50 km radius of the refinery. Indeed, the participants of the first two programmes and a majority of those in the third programme were from Yirrkala, Galuru, Galupa and Gunyanara. Yirrkala, which is 25 km south east of Nhulunbuy, has a population of about 800 people mostly Indigenous; Galuru no longer exists; Galupa is a handful of houses with about 25 people, adjacent to the refinery, which is 15km to the west of Nhulunbuy; while Gunyangara has about 20 houses and about 150 people. Disturbingly, few of the early ALERT participants displayed an interest to be employed in full time industrial type jobs.

A lack of suitable local regional Indigenous applicants encouraged searching of more distant centres. For example, the outstation of Dhalinybuy, which has 13 houses, a one room school, a light aircraft landing strip, and a population of about 100 people was visited. This recruitment drive by a team of ALERT personnel was undertaken after invitation by the Indigenous community leaders and following formal visitation authorisation by the Dhimurru Land Management Aboriginal Corporation. After testing the four presenting applicants it was found they had unacceptably low English literacy and numeracy competencies. As other more distant outstations were likely to have fewer applicants and visits to them would require considerable expenditure of resources in preparation and visitation activity this strategy was abandoned. Thus, applicants are now sought by use of available media.

Selection Procedure

Since the initial ALERT programme applicant screening has become more intense. Hallmarks of the inaugural intake were a robust enthusiasm of executive management to get started, the absence of public knowledge how recruitment of Indigenous people was undertaken by the Australian mining sector, an eclectic adoption of contemporary HRM selection practices, and recognition of the formal education limitations of the narrow pool (21) of applicants. Acknowledgement of the absence of prior work history and low levels of English literacy led to investment in a *Discovery Session* (Pearson & Daff, 2008) that was designed and employed to assess applicants' aptitudes without prejudicing them for literacy and numeracy deficits. However, some literacy and numeracy screening was undertaken with flash cards. Nomination of non clan referees was required and they were interviewed. All successful candidates were medically examined.

A great deal of knowledge, acquired from successive ALERT programmes, has been embedded into refined screening mechanisms. For instance, endeavours to raise English literacy competencies with accelerated literacy procedures has generally, been unsuccessful, and now national reading tests are employed in the selection procedure. Candidates with less than year 10 English literacy scores are seldom chosen. In addition, the one to one assessing was expanded in 2009 to include a one week residential workshop to observe problematic behaviours (i.e., substance abuse, dysfunctional team

issues). The latest intake in April 2010 required selected *Work Readiness* or *Work Starts* trainees to complete all individual testing, to have provided all required work relevant documentation, and to undertake a compulsory a medical examination before being invited to attend the week long residential segment at Nhulunbuy.

Results

From May 2007 to May 2010 a total of 250 Indigenous people registered a formal interest in entering the ALERT programme. In round figures 100 were accepted after interviewing, but few progressed to obtain mainstream full time jobs in either the community, the refinery or the mine site. In summary, these results are shown as Table 1.

Table 1 presents categories of non accepted and accepted ALERT applicants, The extreme left hand block shows over one third did not proceed after application, and almost another quarter were found to be unsuitable because of literacy constraints or they were medically unfit. The deficit in English literacy is particularly disturbing when adults, who claim to have had extensive schooling cannot read a word of English, or do not know the letters of the alphabet, the days of the week, or the months of the year. Turnover accounts for a further 17.6 percent of leakages when candidates withdraw, are suspended for continual absences, regularly present unfit for work, or are removed to serve custodial sentences. The first job placement for ALERT trainees is less than 23 per cent, and within a year nearly half are likely to have moved back to their remote communities.

**Table 1: Pathway of Applicants to the ALERT Programme from May 2007 to May 2010 %
(N = 250)**

Withdrew	Non Selected		Turnover	Selected	
	Literacy	Medical		Community	RTA
34.8	13.6	11.6	Withdrew 12.4	6.4	16.0
			Dismissed 3.6		
			Custodial 1.6		

Notes:

- a. After the first two ALERT intakes, which had 44 applicants, the required education threshold was incrementally raised with each intake to a desirable Year 10.
- b. Work position is only recorded to the first vocational appointment after the participant leaves the ALERT programme.
- c. RTA: Rio Tinto Alcan.

Table 2 summarises educational and vocational attainments by the number of Indigenous ALERT participants. The number of ALERT trainees who have graduated with a Certificate 1 or a Certificate 2 are few, but outstanding. These recipients are the first Indigenous Yolngu to be awarded this achievement by the Charles Darwin University. And the Indigenous Yolngu male, who has recently commenced an engineering apprenticeship, is also a prominent first event.

Table 2: ALERT Programme Accomplishments

Educational			Vocational	
Certificate 1			Community	16
	2007	7		
	2008	9		
	2009	11	Rio Tinto Alcan	
Certificate 2			Refinery	27
	2010	5	Minesite	3
Inaugural Yolngu		1	Training	10
Apprentice 2009				

Note.

Certificate 1 in Responses and Infrastructure Operations

Certificate 2 is a GTNT in a variety of streams such as Administration, Engineering or Metalliferous Mining Operations.

Also shown in Table 2 is the first vocational destiny of ALERT participants. A total of 16 members chose to work in community, and a majority (13) returned to their communities to work on specific tasks, usually a CDEP for the East Arnhem Shire. Indeed, some returned to the Gumatj Corporation cattle station at Garrathiya, some 100 km south south west of Nhulunbuy. There they have been productively engaged in timber milling and dwelling construction (Pearson & Helms, 2010). A total of 30 ALERT participants are employed in full time jobs at the refinery or at the mine site. Figure 3 shows a female ALERT graduate loading a truck, and Figure 4 is a male ALERT graduate and his 100 tonne haul truck. Figure 5 is an ALERT graduate who has chosen to work in administration. These appointments are gargantuan as they are the first Indigenous people to work in mainstream jobs at these locations since the Nhulunbuy mining operations were commissioned in 1972.

Figure 3: Female Indigenous Endloader Operator



Figure 4. Indigenous 100 Tonne Haul Truck Operator



Figure 5. ALERT Graduate Certificate 2 Administration



Discussion

The ALERT programme has been an evolving eventful journey blessed with a plethora of opportunities and challenges. Selection of suitable applicants has been an awesome task made more difficult by a lack of public documentation how Indigenous people are employed in the Australian mining sector. Almost every applicant presented without evidence of exposure to contemporary work experience, but all reported backgrounds rooted in hunting and fishing with regular attendance at cultural events. These preferences have been documented in the relevant literature (Altman & Gray, 2005; Altman et al., 2005). Justification for these hunter – gather pursuits is given by the renowned Yolngu leader Gallarwuy Yunpingu (2009) who states the activities are essential within the oral culture of the Indigenous Yolngu who need to regularly attend cultural events and festivals to learn the laws and traditions of their extant society. Despite education being employed for over 200 years to address the ‘Australian Aboriginal problem’ (Reynolds, 2005) the Indigenous Yolngu irregularly attend classrooms of Western education, which are perceived as instruments of assimilation (Coombs, 1994), that undermine their cultural heritage. Consequently, the English literacy and numeracy competencies expressed by the applicants were often well below the required benchmarks necessary for engagement in the mining sector (Hughes, 2008; Tripcony, 2000). In spite of extensive investment by the ALERT teaching staff a feature of the first two programmes was over one half of the participants irregularly attended and eventually withdrew or were suspended.

The ALERT education – vocation programme is mainly driven by social and pragmatic realities. Prominent contributions from the international arena for the principle of equal rights and self determination have been promoted by the United Nations for the protection and integration of Indigenous people (Humphury, 1995; Summers, 2004; Weller, 2009). And the International Council on Mining and Metals (*ICMM*, 2008) has advanced policies and direction for delivering better outcomes for Indigenous people. At the national level interest in Indigenous wellbeing has been demonstrated by a memorandum of understanding between the Mineral Council of Australia and the Australian Federal Government (Barker, 2006), which commits to improved outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

Recent Australian legislation has contributed to enhancing the socio economic opportunity of Indigenous Australians. Guidance from International discourse (e.g., Environmental Convention 1982, UN Conference on the Environment 1992) has been endorsed in Australian Environmental legislation (Harding, 1989) that gives commitment to socially aligned paradigms of sustainable development. In addition, the historic legal decision known as *Mabo* (*Mabo*, 2009), and the Native Title Legislation (*Native Title*, 2009), that was to follow in 1993 “... profoundly changed the direction and scope of relations between mining companies and Indigenous groups in Australia.” (Crawley & Sinclair, 2003: 363). Following from these two streams of the Australian statutes has emerged provision for employment and training within the mining land agreements between the Traditional Indigenous owners, the mining companies and the Australian State Governments.

An assumption the sharing of ore resources between Indigenous people and mining operations will create better prospects for remote communities is debatable. Indigenous representatives and miners conduct private and commercial in confidence negotiations, that the mining companies are resolute in not allowing the details to become public. And although royalties eventually flow to Indigenous national and local organisations there is a degree of inequality in the distribution of the funds. For instance, the Nhulunbuy mining tenements are leased from two Yolngu Indigenous clans (the Gumatj 80%, and the Rirratjingu) of the 13 prominent Yolngu clans of the East Arnhem Land region. Realising the commercial bauxite ore bodies will be exhausted within the next 20 to 30 years may have prompted both of these (two) clans to establish sustainable business ventures.

The evidence of Table 1 shows that while many Indigenous people of the Nhulunbuy region have enquired about ALERT few have undertaken serious investment to improve themselves or their community. Upon realising ALERT is not another welfare (dole) scheme many applicants do not

entertain joining ALERT or shortly after being employed withdraw. Within a context of obtaining income from welfare, royalty payments, humbugging or liberal working conditions of a CDEP, where an incumbent can be absent from work as much as 65 per cent of the time (Altman & Gray, 2005) to go fishing, hunting or attend cultural festivals, Indigenous people can be considerably distracted from obligations to work in mainstream jobs in the mining sector. Indeed, many Yolngu Indigenous people report a preference for participation in government economic programmes, which gives greater flexibility to be involved in their customary non market and cultural activities.

Conclusion

Reconciling the requirements for working in Australian mining contexts, and the mindsets of Indigenous Yolngu people is extremely difficult. The longitudinal data presented in this paper demonstrates few of the participants of the ALERT education – vocation programme successfully graduated and became engaged in mainstream jobs at either the Nhulunbuy refinery or the mine site. Moreover, few of those employed in this first job continued their employment, but preferred to return to their community to enjoy an alternative lifestyle. Notably, some of these Indigenous Yolngu did find useful work in the community within their traditional ancestral land.

Yolngu Indigenous people have mindsets that are foreign to industrial work climates. Indeed, their thinking is in frameworks of hunters – gatherer pursuits, that are strongly interlaced with community based obligations. Furthermore, these people are from an extant oral society that requires them to regularly visit and be involved in cultural festivals and events to refresh their knowledge of their laws, and traditions that define them. These vital activities compel them to withdraw from contemporary industrial work settings of inflexible industrial relations arrangements. Nevertheless, the evidence of this paper shows some of the ALERT participants have chosen to robustly engage in contemporary work arrangements, and together with achieving university accreditation, show they have been motivated to unnaturally embrace organisational values.

The reported observations attract criticism of the prevailing assumption Australian Indigenous people will exercise an opportunity to hold a mainstream job in the mining sector. In spite of international and national regulatory and policy environments advancing unqualified propositions that the granting of mining licenses will ensure the creation of mainstream jobs, to which many Indigenous people in these remote regions will aspire (and so become less marginalised), these linear arguments are shared by few of the ALERT participants. Moreover, education vocation systems designed to attract and prepare Indigenous people for working in mainstream mining jobs face the considerable challenge of retaining participants who realign their commitment from diligence to acquire knowledge and a preparedness to work in extremely onerous mining working conditions for a preference of dominant ‘softer’ community and cultural priorities. Furthermore, despite employment and work relevant training arrangements being a feature of land use agreement between Indigenous Traditional Owners, Australian governments and mining companies seldom are rigorous assessments of work readiness mainstream recruitment practices by mining corporations published while disclosure of Indigenous participation in the Australian mining sector labour market is cursorily perfunctory. Nevertheless, there has been a resurgence of interest in Indigenous employment, which is driven by legal and regulatory guidance, a strategy of addressing the persistent poor socio economic conditions of Australian Aboriginals, and the prospect of wealth creation for a range of stakeholders. The evidence presented in this paper (albeit obtained from one large refinery minesite) suggests the interconnectedness of these strands warrant inclusion of the cultural and economic ancestral heritage of Australian Indigenous communities.

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