

Indigenous Entrepreneurial Motivations: Purpose, Profit and Leadership by Michelle Evans and Ian Williamson*

Understanding entrepreneurial motivations, actions and intentions has been a focus in the literature since Schumpeter (Jones and Wadhvani 2014). In the Indigenous entrepreneurship literature, where the unit of analysis has tended to be community level, developing a clear articulation of individual entrepreneurial motivations has been less of a focus. This paper brings forward a dialogue attempting to unpick the central tensions underlying motivations of Indigenous entrepreneurs. Starting with a review of the literature we unpack the dual tension between individual and collective level motivations described by Indigenous entrepreneurs as inspiring their business lives. Bringing forward an analysis of Indigenous entrepreneurial motivations we present empirical findings to extend the theoretical literature reviewed. Finally, we discuss how the motivating factors shape Australian Indigenous entrepreneurial leaders as they traverse these difficult and consequential terrains of Indigenous economic development.

Keywords

Indigenous entrepreneurship; Entrepreneurial motivations; Indigenous economic development; Indigenous community development; Self-determination

In Australia, the number of reported Indigenous self-employed individuals has tripled over the past two decades (Hunter 2013). The growth of the Australian Indigenous business sector is particularly important because of evidence linking a growth in entrepreneurship to community economic development (Wong et al 2005). Some have even heralded the Indigenous business sector as a 'sleeping giant' (Burton and Tomkinson 2015; Hudson 2016). However, despite these successes there are still important questions to be answered about the development of commercial enterprises in the Australian Indigenous community. In particular, as the Indigenous business sector grows questions have been raised about what should be the purpose and motivation of Indigenous entrepreneurs.

At the heart of Australian Indigenous enterprise sits a central tension — the pursuit of profit for individuals versus the pursuit of independent Indigenous economic development for collective purpose. Traditional perspectives of entrepreneurship focus on firm development as a means of wealth generation for individuals or their families (Peredo and McLean 2013). However, some scholars argue that Indigenous entrepreneurship is a form of social entrepreneurship (Overall et al 2010) wherein individuals are motivated by their passion to address collective Indigenous social issues through market-based methods (Grimes et al 2013). The discursive weight of this expectancy, most recently articulated by the Prime Minister of Australia (Turnbull 2016), sees the

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Indigenous business sector enrolled in addressing intractable social problems as well as assuming responsibility for delivering economic returns for Indigenous Australians. However more often than not individual Indigenous entrepreneurs are provided with little publicly-declared clarity on the role their firm plays in the implied collective mission of Indigenous entrepreneurship.

The variety of agendas and pressures placed on Indigenous businesses can create conflicting interests and raise questions about what activities, practices and outcomes should be prioritised. In any organisation effective leadership plays an important role in helping firms manage competing priorities as leaders help shape firm values, goals and the environment that supports goal accomplishment (Kotter 1974, 1990). Yet, to date, little research has specifically examined leadership in Indigenous businesses. It is here that this paper seeks to contribute by critically discussing how Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs enact leadership as they determine the motivation and purpose of Indigenous entrepreneurship in their businesses.

Starting with a review of the literature pertaining to Indigenous entrepreneurship, we will unpack the duality at the heart of Indigenous entrepreneurship through a critical discussion of the cultural captivity of entrepreneurship (Peredo and McLean 2013) and the ramifications this has at the individual firm level for Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs. Bringing forward an analysis of Indigenous entrepreneurial motivations — both at the personal and sector levels — we present empirical findings to extend the theoretical literature reviewed. Finally, we discuss how the motivating factors shape Australian Indigenous entrepreneurial leaders as they traverse these difficult and consequential terrains of Indigenous economic development.

Indigenous entrepreneurship

The Indigenous entrepreneurship literature is growing from early pioneering studies in remote sub-arctic communities (Dana 1995), to theoretical development (Hindle and Moroz 2010; Peredo et al 2004) and more recent critical analysis (Peredo and McLean 2013; Tedmanson et al 2012). Hindle and Moroz (2010: 367) reviewed 102 works on Indigenous entrepreneurship and separated the literature into three broad categories — literature focused on definitional clarity; literature presenting empirical or theoretical data on Indigenous entrepreneurship; and a secondary literature not directly expressed as Indigenous entrepreneurship but sitting adjacent to it, connected by a shared meta narrative of independent Indigenous economic advancement.

What is notable about the Indigenous entrepreneurship literature, when compared with the parent field of entrepreneurship, is the central focus on community as the unit of analysis (Hindle and Moroz 2010: 369). This is taken up by the more recent work of Dana (2015: 160) who explores the divergent nature of the Indigenous entrepreneurship literature, arguing that it is the cultural values of Indigenous people that counter conventional assumptions underpinning the mainstream entrepreneurship field. From an economic level of analysis, both Lloyd (2012) and Altman (2005) argued strongly for the Indigenous hybrid economy whereby customary or subsistence practices overlap with the state economic relationship with Indigenous people and the market economy. Indigenous entrepreneurship arises from this interplay, subject to globalised capital forces, social change and market innovations

(Lloyd 2012). In Australia, the small corpus of scholars working in this field have produced diverse contributions ranging from case studies (Foley 2005; Furneaux and Brown 2008), to participatory action projects (Russell-Mundine 2007) and economic research (Hunter 2014). Although many of these studies do focus on the individual as the unit of analysis through primary qualitative interviews (see for example Foley 2005), there is a general theoretical interest in community and organisational level analysis (Pearson and Helms 2013).

To date, a relatively small body of research has had a central focus on the experience of the individual Indigenous entrepreneur (Foley 2005, 2008; Fuller et al 1999; Pearson and Chatterjee 2010; Schaper 1999). This is an important limitation as the skills, relationships, motivations and capabilities of individual Indigenous leaders play an important role in shaping enterprise outcomes. Furthermore, the lack of research on the individual represents a distinct barrier in understanding how Indigenous firms balance and/or select between individual versus collective pursuits.

Consequently, empirical and theoretical understanding of Indigenous entrepreneurship can be usefully extended by using an individual-level leadership lens to examine entrepreneurship behaviour (Vecchio 2003). For example, upper echelon theory (Hambrick and Mason 1984) suggests that the background of leaders is predictive of firm strategy, performance and success. The theory predicts that individual factors such as socioeconomic background as well as a range of individual cognitive and personal factors determine a leader's approach and in turn impacts firm success. We draw on this perspective to examine the manifestation of leadership in Indigenous firms.

Indigenous entrepreneurship as culturally captive

Peredo and McLean (2013) presented a sophisticated argument that the cultural and economic assumptions underpinning entrepreneurship are a barrier to understanding the true nature of Indigenous economic engagement. Schumpeterian conceptualisations of pecuniary advantage as the driving motivation of entrepreneurship are “applicable only in those cultural settings where the apparatus of classical and neoclassical economics can get a reasonable grip (Peredo and McLean 2013: 605). The key idea Peredo and McLean (2013: 608) examine is the understanding that the root of entrepreneurship is connected to “individualistic, merit-based, and profit-orientated market arrangements”; as compared to the communal and embedded orientation of Indigenous peoples (Cahn 2008; Peredo and Chrisman 2006).

This tension of economic versus cultural responsibilities is a central issue for Indigenous entrepreneurship. This was recently exemplified by Dana and Riseth (2011: 117) in their study of Finish reindeer herders: “...self-employed Sami people have been *pulled* to community-based reindeer herding because of social conditioning including a close relationship with animals, but *pushed* into individualistic secondary enterprises, in order to make a living without leaving their traditional area.” Indigenous entrepreneurship seemingly has become a readymade solution for the economic and cultural pressures faced by Indigenous people. The neoliberal hegemonic way of thinking prescribes the assent of individual freedoms and responsibility as the state shirks away (Harvey 2005). Indigenous entrepreneurs are doubly captured by

entrepreneurial and Indigenous discourses. Firstly, entrepreneurs are upheld as Indigenous success stories because of their individual economic accomplishments, and secondly they are distanced from western norms; 'othered' in sometimes overt and covert political ways (Ariss 1988).

The most pressing example for the Indigenous entrepreneurship literature is the sustained focus on connecting Indigenous entrepreneurship with the broader considerations of Indigenous economic development (Foley 2005; Fuller et al 1999). The colonial impact and continued conscription of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into welfare dependency has created a 'passive paradigm' whereby the primary relationship between Indigenous people and the state maintains an unequal economic relationship (Pearson 2000). The call for self-determined economic independence may ring through the popular media, yet as Maddison (2009) articulated, self-determination as a strategy has yet to be tried. Why does this matter so much to the literature of Indigenous entrepreneurship? It is, as (Anderson 1999: 3) presents, the hope for the future to reposition Aboriginal people as 'viable and self-reliant' rather than as costs to the economy.

Methods

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the intersection of leadership and entrepreneurship as experienced and articulated by Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs. Specifically we are interested in understanding the motivations of Indigenous entrepreneurs entering into business, and how Indigenous entrepreneurs speak to the tension between their own individual ambitions and the cultural/collective motivations underlying their business engagement. A part of a larger multi-method longitudinal study¹, the goal of the study is to understand the way in which the participants make sense of leading from their entrepreneurial work, rather than seeking an instrumental relationship between leadership and entrepreneurship. Participants in this study were drawn from the MURRA Indigenous Business Master Class program at Melbourne Business School². Individuals who participate in the MURRA program are competitively selected based on two criteria — being in business for at least two years and expressing a desire to grow their businesses.

The relationship between the participants in the study and the researchers is multi-layered. Both authors have acted in multiple roles such as program director, program selection committee member, teacher and researcher. Researchers are in relationship with the participants, and as such lack a level of objectivity (Brayboy and Deyhle 2000). Insider-outsider researcher reflexivity is pivotal to the research enacted in this study. How do we remain, as Smith (1999) requires, ethical and critical as well as humble? Having a relationship with participants, and having experienced the educational program of MURRA alongside each other, we share a language, discourse and

¹ Australian Research Council Linkage Grant LP130100410 Australian Indigenous Entrepreneurial Leadership 2014 – 2017.

² MURRA (woi wurrung for 'fishnet') is a three times four day intensive program for established Indigenous Australian entrepreneurs wishing to grow their enterprises. Established in 2012, the program is now in its fifth year and has graduated 90 Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs. The authors are co-founders of the MURRA program. See <https://mbs.edu/faculty-research/centres/apsic/murra-indigenous-business-master-class-program>

commitment to upholding Indigenous entrepreneurship as a newer way of expressing Indigenous self-determination. This shared political commitment is mediated by our different contributions — for the participants their active entrepreneurial and community level contributions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and for the authors, our theoretical, academic and practice-based contributions made to participants, to the MURRA community and to the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We acknowledge our positioned knowledges, and worked to create distance in the data collection (interviews via phone at least five months post the participants’ engagement in the program).

The study is being conducted using Indigenous research principles and values (Irabinna-Rigney 1999; Nakata 2007; Smith 1999) whereby participants are culturally respected and recognised as experts in their fields, and have the right to control the use of their contribution to the research via transcription checking, publication review and notification, and the right to withdraw from the research. Importantly, we acknowledge that Indigenous research is a political act (Smith 1999), and as such the knowledge compiled with participants is both a form of self-determination and resistance. We consider this cohort of Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs significant in that the way in which they frame their firms, make strategic decisions and communicate their value alongside their Indigenous identity, personal experience and cultural values, provides for a novel platform for the action of leadership (Hambrick 1989; Hambrick and Mason 1984).

The sample

This paper focuses on a set of qualitative interviews with 25 Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs, all of whom are alumni of the MURRA program. The sample size was selected to provide diversity across three categories – business size, industry focus, geographic location and gender (see Table 1).

Table 1: Sample diversity – Australian Indigenous entrepreneurial leadership

BUSINESS SIZE	INDUSTRY FOCUS	GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION	GENDER
One person consultancy	Creative Industries	Queensland	14 Women
Small business	Professional Services	Australian Capital Territory	11 Men
Medium business	Education and Training	New South Wales	
International trading business	Labour hire	Victoria	
Joint Ventures	Technology	Western Australia	
	Strategic Supplier		
	Bushfoods		
	Energy		

Further, 25 Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs provided an adequate sample to address the focus of the research question — *What are the motivations underlying Australian Indigenous entrepreneurship?*³ For this paper, we

³ Many of the studies continue to feature small sample sizes (Shoebridge Bultjens and Peterson 2012; Wood and Davidson 2011). However, research design and research question

qualitatively analysed responses to the schedule questions: Talk to me about your motivations to run a business; and, is there a collective vision that you share for Indigenous entrepreneurship? These two questions were asked of all participants. The interviews were transcribed, checked by participants and then uploaded into NVIVO. Transcripts were first thematically analysed, then a discourse analysis was conducted focusing on how the keyword 'leadership' conveyed meaning as well as how the term was actioned and for what ends by the participants.

Motivations

Understanding entrepreneurial motivations, actions and intentions has been a focus in the literature since Schumpeter (Jones and Wadhvani 2014). Our findings, at the individual unit of analysis, included identification of fairly conventional entrepreneurial motivations such as the need to independently operate in the work environment, an individual's ambition and ego-centric passion for the work (Shane, Locke and Collins 2003). However, a significant proportion of entrepreneurs interviewed focused on collective or interpersonal interests as their motivating drivers. When Indigenous Australian entrepreneurs speak about what motivates them to run their businesses, there tends to be two distinct responses: those that focus on personal psychological motivations such as passion for and enjoyment of being in business including personal wealth creation, and those that focus on prosocial motivations (Renko 2013). To unpack these findings we discuss the individual versus collective motivating factors as something that produces friction both within individual entrepreneurs and their businesses, as well as more broadly in the Indigenous business sector.

Individual-centric motivations

Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs who shared that their motivations for running their businesses were more personal tended to respond by highlighting either their clear ego-centric motivations; motivations around presenting or preserving a perception of themselves to others; financial motivations; and viewing the pursuit of business success as a competition they engage in. Those that shared ego-centric motivations spoke about being passionate, loving what they do, and enjoying the game. These entrepreneurs were motivated by feeling good about their work, how they worked, who they worked with and most importantly how it makes them feel:

I am so passionate...I do something that I enjoy, I love talking about my culture, I love educating people...so it's a blend of everything that

rightly determine saturation (Mason 2010). Studies such as Shoebridge Buultjens and Peterson (2012) in which four Indigenous Australian entrepreneurs and their spouse/business partners were interviewed, was focused on understanding the personal experiences of individuals engaged in enterprise. Whereas Morrison et al. (2015), although similarly finding measures of success and constraint experienced by Indigenous entrepreneurs, were interested in the multivariate factors contributing and constraining business success. Hence their sample of 38 qualitative interviews with Australian Indigenous business owners.

I love doing that comes together and every new group that I work with I think is a clean slate (Generation Four participant).

These personal level motivations reinforce both how the individual sees themselves and how their work epitomises their perception of self. This love for the work and love for how the work makes them feel about themselves could be interpreted as a 'selfish love of work' (Shane Locke and Collins 2003). For example one participant responded to being asked about what motivated them in their business by exclaiming:

I love what I do. I don't think about it, like I'm running a business. I get up every day and I'm excited to do what I do. I enjoy the challenge...of it all (Generation Four participant).

Some entrepreneurs speak about being lucky. Different from the Kirznerian perspective of dumb luck (Görling and Rehn 2008), Indigenous Australian entrepreneurs speak about luck as the personal and business opportunities generated through their work engagement:

I'm quite lucky because you know, two weeks ago I went to Bundaberg doing an art workshop and connecting with the local mob there who have just got this amazing inspirational stories and we get to recall that through artwork that is currently being developed into a documentary and a children's book (Generation Two participant).

Business opportunities are also cultural opportunities to share, document and celebrate Indigenous culture. We notice here that the use of 'luck' is a shorthand way of communicating how the entrepreneurial transaction has more layers than purely financial. In fact, it is these cultural possibilities that generate authentic connections for Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs. While these motivations may connect to the literature on cultural entrepreneurship, especially the considerations regarding cultural integrity, participants in this research stress that it is the:

...personal freedom. I mean, I really enjoy the game, as they call it. I really enjoy the experience of business...what drives me is the personal freedom to express myself (Generation Three participant).

The individual-centric need for achievement sees entrepreneurs seeking opportunities to demonstrate their expertise and knowledge as an expression of who they are (McClelland 1961). For entrepreneurs, the game is "the discovery of opportunities — to positively evaluate opportunities, to pursue resources, and to design the mechanisms of exploitation" (Shane, Locke and Collins 2003: 258). The motivating nature of competition within the forces of the market economy is at the heart of Kirzner's (1973: 34) analysis of human action: "...endowed not only with the propensity to pursue goals efficiently, once ends and means are clearly identified, but also with the drive and alertness needed to identify which ends to strive for and which means are available".

Kirzner (1973) articulated a system (the market), the game (ends and means), and the constraints to the game (market forces). A Generation Three participant enunciates a love of the game and describes the elements of the system they inhabit:

I really enjoy the game, as they call it. I really enjoy the experience of business... I grow a lot by maintaining focus on doing business, because you are just meeting people from all different backgrounds. You know, you name it. Education institutes, entrepreneurs, start-ups, you know, service providers. All sorts. You know, you are constantly, it's a really rich environment because you know, and that's what business is. There are just so many moving parts that make it work.

The Australian market and the intervening government policies introduced to induce engagement with Indigenous firms has clearly established a system for the growth of Indigenous business. Indigenous entrepreneurs leverage these opportunities and contribute to driving demand for Indigenous goods and services within the Australian economy. This includes partnering with large non-Indigenous firms to tender for contracts, opening up opportunities to access new clients, more capital and greater capacity to grow. As Hudson (2016: 8) have noted, "The most valuable partnerships between non-Indigenous businesses and Indigenous businesses occur when people invest money and have 'skin in the game'." Therefore, we assert that Indigenous entrepreneurs exhibit classic entrepreneurial motivations.

Collectivist motivating factors

Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs generally express collectivist motivations for running a business. Not dissimilar to research emphasising work-family balance in women's entrepreneurship literature (Hughes 2006), Indigenous entrepreneurs uphold collectivist motivations such as family responsibilities and role modelling, contributing to the Indigenous community, and an emphasis on the relational and cultural strengths of entrepreneurship. Those participants that accentuated collectivist motivations for their business also described how their life story relates to their business development, drawing associations between their "entrepreneur motivations, life course contexts and business actions" (Jayawarna Rouse and Kitching 2013: 37). A Generation Two participant exemplifies how work-family balance is a central motivating factor:

I think my family motivated me because I was a single mum. I was a single mum, I needed to provide and if I didn't, I had to create something that I could do at home. My children's books were part of that idea, so I sat at home, I wrote my stories down. I illustrated, because it was something I could do while my children were resting. While they were asleep and I couldn't sleep, I would be doing this other stuff.

Environmental dynamics and how they relate to life course contexts impact the motivations of entrepreneurs (Jayawarna Rouse and Kitching 2013). As the

participant above prefaced, being a single mother provided the context and placed boundaries around tenable employment opportunities in a remote West Australian town. Further to the flexibility self-employment creates for individuals and their families, Indigenous entrepreneurs express that geographic constraints, such as living in a remote Indigenous community, can actually provide opportunities:

So Indigenous people who have got no chance of an income who live out in the community, if they'd create their own little businesses and if they'd connect in with someone like me who can provide the market for them, they can go forward... So it's using modern day technology and knowledge to preserve the traditional practices and people are now thinking yeah... (Generation Two participant).

It is a common entrepreneurial motivation to work towards personal and financial security (Wach Stephan and Gorgievski 2015). For the Indigenous entrepreneur, generating wealth for the family provides a focused motivation, creating a legacy that lives on past the individual Indigenous entrepreneur. Spurred on often by experiences of economic disadvantage in childhood, Indigenous entrepreneurs describe how they work towards a future vision for their family:

[I'm] certainly focussed very much around my family and where I see my family in the future... I want to be a successful person. I am driven towards that. The makeup of me is about maybe somewhat of my upbringing and how I've grown up and the good, the bad, the mad, the sad and the ugly or whatever, but I suppose I'm an opportunist.... There's certainly a legacy that I, you know, inevitably have and leave for my family (Generation Two participant).

The entrepreneurial drive to seek and exploit opportunity is highlighted in the above quote. While creating a generational legacy through business success may provide the framework for motivation, the commercial drive of entrepreneurs shines through. Indigenous entrepreneurs who position community culture as "inseparable from economic considerations" (Peredo and Chrisman 2006: 309) act communally, venturing towards commonly held goals. This is evident in the following quote:

...my two motivations is to clearly leave a benefit for my children. I'm supporting them through university, so I'm building a product or building things that will be income generating machines. But my other motivation is to build things substantially to enable Indigenous people to benefit. And I think that is a, when people ask what is an Indigenous business, I think that's at the core of it. We all have a family and community focus on outcomes (Generation Three participant).

Nesting motivations from personal to collective again valorises the individual entrepreneurs' worldview. This also is echoed by the social entrepreneurship literature where personal fulfilment motivations are foundational to pro-social

motivations (Germak and Robinson 2014). Given that the interviews were individual or entity level this finding is no surprise. However, some individuals genuinely articulated strong collectivist orientations. In the following quote a Generation One participant demonstrates a community mindset where social change is the primary motivation, which cascades down to the family and individual level:

What motivates me? Making change, if I can make change for the positive, for the Aboriginal community, that's what drives me. It drives me in my business, it drives me on the Boards that I sit on, and it drives me in my family too... So if I can impart skills, knowledge and experience to help somebody else, that's what drives me.

For other individuals, the power of working through community and cultural relationships, and strengthening those through business venturing, provides a source of motivation. Moving beyond an altruistic motivation to do on behalf of others (Miller et al 2012), Indigenous entrepreneurs describe the centrality of strengthening cultural knowledge and relationships as a motivation and an outcome of being in business:

So I need to keep on letting the Elders guide me so that I can actually take this on after they've left this Earth. You know, I need to really, really embrace their knowledge and their leadership instead of being torn between those worlds and operating in those two worlds. I just need to really be more in the now, and trust in the process and this is the best kind of way of doing things... To minimise conflict, we have to literally put a lot of things into place and one of them is that relationships, spending lots of time together and talking is the only way that we can build and strengthen our relationships (Generation Three participant).

Placing cultural knowledge and expertise at the heart of the enterprise requires a different kind of focus and consequentially a different motivation for achievement. A sense of success in this model is, as a Generation Three participant states: "That whole thing of relationality, number one relationships. You're constantly working hard at relationships so that we can lessen the potential for conflict". This participant speaks directly to the tension at the heart of Indigenous entrepreneurship: creating space for community and cultural aspirations and commitments while living with the reality of being in business.

Collective vision for Indigenous entrepreneurship

The contemporary Australian Indigenous business sector is relatively young but growing. Research into Indigenous entrepreneurship in Australia has grown from a reported two publications in 2002 to a budding cohort of scholars across a range of Australian and international universities working on the literature (Hindle and Rushworth 2002). Similarly, from a policy perspective, developing a new generation of Indigenous entrepreneurs requires an ecosystem approach (Isenberg 2014) to achieve both ethical and economic improvements through the private sector. We found that Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs have a

shared vision for their Indigenous business sector, including a grand vision for what they can collectively achieve such as self-determined and independent economic development (Langton 2012).

We asked the participants to clearly articulate their shared vision. The question *‘Do you think there is a collective vision that you share with other people about/for Indigenous entrepreneurship in Australia?’* aimed to elicit the perceived expectations placed at the door of Indigenous entrepreneurs — to deliver self-determined economic independence to Australian Indigenous peoples.

Two themes arose from participants grappling with this question. First there was general agreement that we are stronger together; that a collaborative sense of supporting each other and the Indigenous business sector more generally is a key vision that can and must be enacted each day. Second, Indigenous entrepreneurs demonstrated a social change purpose; whether it be the focus on economic change, changing stereotypes, or clearing the path for future generations. These themes reveal the scope of influence Indigenous entrepreneurs have over the framing of a collective vision for Indigenous entrepreneurship.

Stronger together

Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs expressed the power in collaborating, be it in generating new cultural knowledge, creating community contributions, advocating on behalf of the Indigenous business sector, or doing business together.

We’ve all got different strengths, knowledges and passions, and however we can work collaboratively to support and encourage and to build more business entrepreneurs the better. So, yeah, stronger together...It’s that realising that it’s not about me versus them or I’m smarter than you or my theories are stronger than yours. It’s about this collective knowledge coming together to create impacts in many different areas (Generation Two participant).

For some Indigenous entrepreneurs, holding a collective vision for Indigenous entrepreneurship was about supporting the entire sector to grow because it was embedded within the broader Indigenous community. Seeing Indigenous entrepreneurs as a group of professionals that contribute in many ways to the greater Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community was seen by participants as motivating and rewarding:

I think we’ve always been entrepreneurial people and, you know, we’re the oldest surviving culture on the face of the earth. There’s nothing that we can’t do, and I don’t think we have fully explored our potential in this zone and that excites me and I think a lot of people share that thirst for what might be if we keep going down this track. So we’re all supporting each other to get there, whatever that looks like (Generation Four participant).

Sparking aspiration and motivation for Indigenous people is influential. Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs occupy a powerful role in the economic and cultural advancement of their communities. When participants shared these prosocial motivations as complementing their business strategy, they demonstrate an openness to complexity and a higher-order thinking orientation (Miller et al 2012). These abstracted future-orientated vision frameworks provide theories of change that become both transparent and practical. When Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs make transparent how they align personal, family, community and political motivations in a strength-based collective purpose, they are demonstrating great leadership.

Social Change

Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs report high levels of commitment to social change agendas. These differed in focus between economic change, changing stereotypes and clearing the path for the next generation. Miller et al (2012) questioned whether prosocial emotions such as compassion or group based pride influence how entrepreneurs perceive opportunities. Interestingly, participants discursively link collective vision to business venture as they discuss their perception of the collective vision for Indigenous entrepreneurship.

I think inherently as Aboriginal people, we've always been, had the odds not be running in our favour in terms of historically. So I think that connection, if you're talking to other Aboriginal businesses, you go well, you know what? We're all in this together to be able to break that stereotype, and to be able to promote who we are and what we're doing and why we need to be doing it and why we are proud to do this (Generation Two participant).

The individual responsibility to change cultural stereotypes is potent, not only for Indigenous entrepreneurs but for other entrepreneurs who are designated by their ethnicity. Azmat (2010) found that immigrant entrepreneurs carry a perception of social responsibility for their communities, such as contributing to their home country socio-economic development. Similarly, Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs assume both individual and collective responsibility for economic development:

We all want to drive economic change. We all want to drive, actually, its socio-economic change. I don't think I've spoken to anyone that has an Indigenous business, a for-profit business, that doesn't have a story where they give back. And they give back because they want change to happen. The closing the gap target, we all own that. You know? It's not fair, those stats, when in this amazing first world country (Generation Three participant).

Being committed to economic empowerment is not only about generating wealth inside the business, for your family and/or community group. Many participants were attuned to the time-sensitivity of their personal engagement in the emerging Indigenous business sector and how the current round of policy initiatives, as well as the success of Indigenous entrepreneurs such as

themselves, were vital to shaping the future landscape. A Generation Two participant exemplifies this:

I think the responsibility of Indigenous entrepreneurs at this point is to clear the path for future entrepreneurs and make that more mainstream (Generation Two participant).

It not just clearing the path, achieving policy advances and setting up the infrastructure within the newly forming Indigenous business ecosystem that participants were focused on. Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs hold great hopes for the future:

I would think would be that the future generations that we do have the Richard Bransons. You know, we have got our own fleet of airlines and you know, that our people are so, that we have our land, we have our land, we have our treaty and we're generating income and we're creating our own businesses within our communities, that there is no poverty and our people have got our own little suburb (Generation Four participant).

The Indigenous entrepreneurial dream is inextricably linked to the broader Indigenous political advancement project. Hence, it is important to acknowledge the complexity and historical undertow of the settler-state relations with Indigenous people in Australia (Page and Petray 2015). As Indigenous entrepreneurs creatively express agency through their self-employment social status, they also activate political discourses like self-determination and link them to their business achievements.

Indigenous entrepreneurial vision or collective is really about people being independent. It partly is about people being independent, being able to, to determine their own destiny (Generation Four participant).

Discussion

Understanding that there is a cultural identity challenge at the heart of the growing Aboriginal middle class, created by the growing social mobility of Australian Indigenous people, places individual motivations in conflict with collective and community obligations (Lahn 2013; Langton 2012). Paradies (2006: 359; 363) argued that although there is a risk that "individual success endangers [group] cohesion", there is also risk in exclusivity and that we "must decouple Indigeneity from disadvantage and marginality". Individual entrepreneurs grapple with these difficult and essentialising issues because they are inextricably tied to both who they are and their business venture. Consequently, the prosocial motivations related to being altruistic and serving the greater good that many Australian Indigenous entrepreneurs preference when describing their business purpose are not the only motivations that Indigenous entrepreneurs can or do hold because of this larger, deliberative discourse around Aboriginality (Evans and Sinclair 2016).

The complexity of both the abstracted political and practical logic of enacting concepts of self-determination through individual business venturing remains a deep vein of research not often explored. Alongside the neoliberal discourse of individual responsibility, some scholars have argued that the concept of self-determination itself has been distorted to “closely resemble the earlier model of colonial imperialism” (Napoleon 2005: 33). Commercial competition and entrepreneurship lay at the heart of the colonial project, and yet the agency enacted by individuals and collations of Indigenous business people demonstrates powerful mobilisation of leadership by contesting and re-shaping essentialised Aboriginalities. These Indigenous entrepreneurs are “defying and subverting stereotypical Aboriginal identities, expanding possibilities and identifications for succeeding generations” (Evans and Sinclair 2016: 17).

At the heart of Indigenous entrepreneurship lays a deeply problematic question that this article has tried to wrestle with — are the freedoms achieved by individual Indigenous entrepreneurs attained within a collective relational context? Are successes, achieved by motivated individuals, contributing to the greater advancement of Australian Indigenous people? Can both be true? Our study reveals that Indigenous entrepreneurs are attuned to this central tension and constantly dialogue about this with each other, holding each other to account by making transparent their community contributions.

This conflicted truth is the context from which Australian Indigenous entrepreneurial leadership arises. Leadership in this space comes from individual and groups working together to make a contribution to social change for the broader Australian Indigenous community. We can see it in the collective projects like the establishment of organisations like Indigenous Women in Business⁴ or Indigenous Business Month⁵ which work to showcase Indigenous excellence and promote business as a career option for Indigenous people. Perhaps there is leadership in acknowledging the central tension of Indigenous entrepreneurship, debating it, making it transparent. This poses the possibility of “freeing ourselves from ‘myth-making’ and the internalised racism of identity politics” (Paradies 2006: 362).

⁴ <http://iwibaustralia.com.au/>

⁵ <http://www.indigenousbusinessmonth.com.au/>

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