Leadership

Issues and principles from the Thamarrurr (Port Keats) region of the Northern Territory

NT ICG workshop
Bill Ivory - CDU
The region

- North-west NT Region
- 320 k south-west of Darwin
- A Council of Australian Governments trial site
- Main town Wadeye
- Service population 2,500
- Region covers 3450 sq kms
Key issues

- What is leadership?
- Leadership in the Thamarrurr region
  - Rites of passage
  - Leadership development
  - Why is an understanding of leadership important? Case study
- A new perspective?
- Towards cultural understanding
What is “leadership”?

- Western theories
  - Also “enabling”, “critical”, and “ethical” continue to evolve.
  - Much research in U.S., Canada, and Western Europe. But also often ignored writings from Asian countries.
What is “leadership”?

- Aboriginal concepts (Murrinh-patha)
  - A good leader – a person who cares for others in their responsibility. Honest.
  - Responsibility - ngay ngambamut nu ngarra mangi nhimi (I will give it to you to hold)
  - ngay warda mayit nu (I will now hold it)
  - Authority - ngay ka kardu lurruth ngala ngurran (I am a person continually going strongly. I am going strong for you mob)
The Governance System

Founded on the *Thamarrurr* philosophy - Cooperation, respect, and resolution of issues as they arise

Governance is a mix of classical governance (eg clans) and contemporary
Rites of Passage
Murrinh-patha Male Categories

Other categories - Kardu K… (ceremony leader), Kardu Ngalander (60+)

Kardu Pule (clan leader – usually 40+)
Kardu Kake (18 – 40)
Kardu Kigai (12 – 17)
Kardu Tjambitj (9 – 12)
Kardu Lamatingu (5/6 – 9)
Kardu Mamai (3 - 5/6)
Kardu Wakul (0 – 3)
Case Study
Mission period – Clan A

…with one or two principal leaders who lead with consensus with other sub-group leaders
Case Study – Mission period – Clan A
Ceremonial Trade (*nanji kulu*) – determines leadership relationships
Case Study – Mission period

- 6 sub-groups in the clan – all with leading individuals
- One or two individuals with overall responsibility to “look after” all members of the clan \textit{in consensus} with other sub-group leaders
- These leaders also responsible for interaction and alliances with neighboring clans (and decisions to go to battle)
- Also a responsibility to ensure relationships within the clan (maintained by \textit{nanji kulu}) are respected
Case study - Post-mission

- Mission “built up” certain individuals in prestige and authority
- Sub-groups went from 6 to 8 (incorporation by the clan of “new” ways)
- One individual given higher prestige by investiture in the Church
- This individual seen today as the “leader” by Non-Aboriginal business interests
Case Study - post-mission

Clan A

Lumbuyiltchi

- 3 sub-groups

Lumbuthamul

- 5 sub-groups

…and one “main leader”!
Case study - Outcome …today

- The individual seen as the “leader” by Non-Aboriginal interests is under constant pressure and stress to make decisions.
- Other co-leaders in a traditional sense often not involved at all in some decisions.
- Consequent pressure and sometimes resentment toward the elevated “leader”.
- Economic issues making it imperative that everyone “gets it right.” Development includes new housing sub-division etc (over $4m.)
A new perspective?

- Aboriginal leaders in the Port Keats region, at least, have an obligation to lead.
- They are given responsibility to lead
- The responsibility is given by their people …and being shown the songs (spiritual), told the myths and stories (morals and principles), by going grey…
- As Myers argues, you have it “to hold”
- The only way you can abdicate this responsibility is to leave the community, become senile or do irrational or irresponsible acts (continually)...this sometimes happens
Recommendations

- More research on regional leadership patterns
- Translation of local leadership information into suitable mediums eg. Cross-cultural courses. Particularly for government and development officials
- Courses for Aboriginal participants on non-Aboriginal information ("reverse" cultural courses)
- A bi-cultural “stream” for Aboriginal youth from school to work
Thamarrurr Regional Council
(20 clans – 40 elected members)

Interest groups

Clan / ceremony leaders
“looking…looking…keeping an eye on things”

Senior women on issues of their concern