



University of
Southern
Queensland

**OVERCOMING CHALLENGES FACED BY
PALE-SKINNED ABORIGINAL MEN ON
MAINSTREAM WESTERN BOARDS**

A Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This research explored impacts and influences on pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership positions on executive and management boards within mainstream work environments from a first-person perspective. There is currently a dearth of research on the knowledge, experience, and insights of these insider men and therefore on potential ways to overcome the negative and harness the positive impacts and influences by investigating alternative approaches to boardroom practice.

The methodology of Participatory Action Research (PAR) was chosen to conduct the research. Three pale-skinned Aboriginal men with board experience were selected to be part of an advisory panel (AP) as co-creators of knowledge about the challenges and enablers of productive board environments. Themes of connection, shared and distributed leadership, and yarning emerged as recommended guiding principles which might make for a more inclusive culture in mainstream boardrooms. These principles have the potential to positively influence a boardroom's operations and help overcome some of the challenges that pale-skinned Aboriginal men experience in this environment. These Indigenous principles have been utilised by First Nations people for centuries and are critical for the wellbeing of communities. However, they are not recognised or validated within the dominant mainstream boardroom culture and modes of operation and this impacts on the perception of pale-skinned Aboriginal men as being valued for their contributions within mainstream boardrooms. This research showed how the dominant operating models for boardrooms can create challenges for pale-skinned Aboriginal men.

A conceptual model for principle-based decision-making was developed consisting of principles, the law, and technical aspects. These are underpinned by respect and collectively they all influence the decision-making process. Focus and alignment with the guiding principles potentially grounds boardroom decision-making, connecting it to the community it serves with the potential to positively impact on the legacies of the boardroom.

Key words: boardroom, leadership, Aboriginal, principle-based decision-making, pale-skinned, first-person

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I, Wayne Cahill, declare that the Masters Thesis entitled *Overcoming challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men on mainstream Western boards* is not more than 40,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes.

This Thesis is the work of Wayne Cahill except where otherwise acknowledged, with over 80% of the contribution to the unpublished paper presented as a Thesis by Publication undertaken by the student. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Date: October 2023

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Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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I would like to acknowledge all First Nation People and pay respect to Elders past and present for the foundations they have set down for us to build upon. To always be mindful of the connection and have respect for country around us as we pass through on our journey.

This contribution to knowledge is dedicated to the following: my consistent supporter my wife Kim who has always encouraged me in my research journey to record part of my story. My Mum a proud Awabakal Woman and my late Dad's lived experience have been testament to me of why I should contribute. Mums' resilience as an Aboriginal woman despite the challenges she has faced has been an example for me to push on and achieve.

I would like to pay my respects to the three Uncles as part of the advisory panel contributing to this body of knowledge. These three men are longstanding tireless advocates for advancing the wellbeing and recognition of First Nation people.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Position statement

“The concept of the connectedness of all of creation, animate and inanimate, that is the basic tenet of Aboriginal philosophy” (Grieves, 2009, p. 200).

As an Indigenous person, consistent with traditional Aboriginal ontology of being part of everything around us (Grieves, 2009), this research presents a first-person researcher’s view of impacts and influences on pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership on executive and management boards within Western mainstream work environments. For the purposes of this study ‘paled-skinned Aboriginal’ is defined as having “white skin and relatively European features” (Paradies, 2016, p. 359), or referred to by Foley as “fair skinned” (Foley, 2000, p. 44) and “light skinned” (Bennett, 2014, p. 180).

As a descendant of the Awabakal People, I am currently a local government elected representative who will have served my community in this role on the board for twenty years at the end of my current term. I am therefore conversant with the Local Government Principles (2020) by which a representative must abide (Appendix A). While the intent of these principles somewhat aligns with Aboriginal ontology, the implementation and practice of these may differ significantly.

Leadership in mainstream boardroom environments for pale-skinned Aboriginal men presents challenges. Below are some examples given to assist with understanding the challenges of a sense of not fully belonging or being recognised as an Aboriginal person because of skin colour. This is particularly true when one comes from humble beginnings, struggling with one’s own identity, suppressing heritage as an Aboriginal person. Additional to these circumstances is the associated lack of confidence with having no higher educational background, along with having to deal with institutional racism.

Positioned as a current board member and practitioner with lived experience in public office as a pale-skinned Aboriginal man brings with it a layer of complexities that are unique and associated with the colour of one’s skin. There is a consciousness that colleagues and other participants in the boardroom are constantly trying to reconcile in their own minds where I fit; ‘is he thinking white or

black'? This has manifested on occasion with the question of 'what percentage Aboriginal are you'? This question highlights the need for the majority to classify "implicitly re-enforcing a white center of normality by comparison" (Hickey & Austin, 2009, p. 14). Looking white because of skin colour and identifying as Aboriginal obviously causes confusion. The feeling of isolation of being "too white to be black or too black to be white" (Foley, 2000, p. 47), gives rise to the temptation of wanting to take the path of least resistance by trying to ignore my heritage and allow myself to be assimilated into the majority (white) ways of thinking and doing the business within the boardroom. Not fitting the quintessential view of what an Aboriginal should look like (Paradies, 2016) engenders the feeling of second guessing the value of my contribution and relevance to the corporate needs of the organisation I function within. The ascribing of identity (Hickey & Austin, 2009) and classification by those from a privileged white majority position seems like a constant erosion of the very integrity of my identity and challenges my core values. Whilst acknowledging these individual challenges I am motivated to help others who are facing similar leadership barriers to achieve success.

The focus of this study was about pale-skinned Aboriginal males in leadership roles on executive and management boards of Western organisations, the challenges faced by these men, their personal journeys, and experiences. Further, the study aimed to explore ways of overcoming these challenges. I therefore sought to further understand other leaders' stories and share these experiences of working within the mainstream system as an insider (Sanders, 2008). Sanders uses the terms 'insiders' and 'outsiders' as a way of describing Australian Indigenous leadership styles, how they are dependent upon each other and how these "leadership styles are complimentary", (Sanders et al., 2008, p. 145). My own experience has simultaneously found me as an insider embedded in the system of local government and an outsider of minority as a pale-skinned Aboriginal board member caught in the middle of representing both community and organisation. I have need to constantly remember to be flexible, "not fixed or frozen and hence insider and outsider positions must be fluid" (Hurley & Jackson, 2020, p. 45). The research explored whether other Aboriginal men are undertaking their leadership roles whilst contending with the feeling of isolation, being caught in the middle of being "too white to be black or too black to be white" (Foley, 2000, p. 47). Further,

the research explored the question, are mainstream leadership structures contributing to the challenges faced by these men?

Aboriginal leadership and knowledge systems are based on co-operation and consensus (Foley, 2010). Foley highlights that “Aboriginal circles of knowledge did not allow for a single dominating leader as that imposed on us by the British military invasion in 1788 with Governor Phillip and subsequent frontier domination combined with an adaptation of a Westminster political system and its three levels of administrative government within the cultural dominance of a European monarch” (Foley, 2010, p. 138). Additionally, hierarchical leadership models imposed on a collective leadership culture still cause problems within Aboriginal societies today (Sveiby, 2011). Foley also suggests that “if we are to teach Indigenous leadership then we must allow the insider and the outsider leadership styles to permeate through and their voices to be heard for our youth to learn different management criteria” (2010, p. 147). With a motive to empower others guided by a notion of ‘*if I can do it so can you*’, this study aimed to navigate a pathway forward by contributing further to a body of knowledge on principles for promoting leadership potential for Aboriginal men that others can subsequently build on.

1.2. Research questions

The principal research question for this study is:

What are the challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership roles on executive and management boards of Western organisations?

The sub-research questions are:

- 1. How do leadership styles used within boards align or conflict with the role of representing local Aboriginal communities?***
- 2. What strategies/models can be developed to accommodate Aboriginal leadership styles within boards of Western organisations?***

Artefact: Development of a conceptual model for principle-based decision-making

1.3. Statement of prior learning

This project was conducted from a Professional Studies focus as a practitioner to both add and gain value within the triple dividend framework benefiting the researcher, work environment, and community of practice (Fergusson et al.,

2019). Being a descendant of the Awabakal nation and a local government councillor in the boardroom for almost twenty years. I have a broad cross section of experience within the system of local government, but significantly, in relation to this research, as a 'pale-skinned' Aboriginal man with insight and experience of how to engage with government at all levels. Experience has also been gained through board leadership roles external to local government. My past involvement includes as Chair of Regional Development Australia (RDA), and Deputy Chair of an Aboriginal Medical Service among other leadership roles. I am in a unique position to hold multifaceted views from the dual positions of strategic decision maker and a person of minority who has faced the challenges discussed in this proposal. Hence, the rationale to help bridge a gap of understanding, while adding to a body of knowledge. I was able to further develop my learning and capabilities as highlighted in my learning program developed for the MPSR program (Appendix B) by building on my lived experience. Bloom's taxonomy (Armstrong, 2016) assisted me to identify strengths and gaps in my previous learning.

1.4. Research problem and issues

There is commentary in the existing literature about Aboriginal leaders in mid-level specialist leadership roles within the mainstream work environment (Lahn, 2018; Taylor et al., 2018). However, a review of the literature lacked mention about pale-skinned Aboriginal senior executive or board members of large entities or organisations. Further, there is a shortfall in the literature about the challenges faced by these pale-skinned men in board or executive roles in the boardroom environment. Authors such as Stewart and Warn mention the challenges for emerging Aboriginal leaders in middle management or liaison roles caught between two worlds, or "managing two ways" (Stewart & Warn, 2017, p. 3). Others talk about the leadership styles of insiders and outsiders and how they are complimentary and coexist in public life (Sanders, 2008) but are not specific to the boardroom context. This gap in the literature indicates there is a need to tap into the lived experience and knowledge gained by these pale-skinned Aboriginal men to help advance the outcomes and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in general when interfacing with the Western system. Equally important is the consideration that the experience gained by these men as both insiders and outsiders could bring empathetic insight about the challenges faced and possible solutions for overcoming

these that are of broader benefit to boardrooms and their relevance to both the community and organisations they serve. The resilience displayed by such individuals, in their involvement in two worlds and by operating at a boardroom level, calls for research to help achieve better outcomes and functioning in the boardroom for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

I acknowledge the fact that there may be many Aboriginal women in leadership roles on executive and management boards within the mainstream system and this study may also be applicable to them. However, for this exploratory study, I am choosing to specifically look at the experiences of pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership from the position of an embedded, insider researcher.

1.5. Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research was to better understand impacts and influences on pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership positions on executive and management boards within the mainstream work environment. Searches of the literature indicated minimal work or understanding about this phenomenon. Research was needed to access knowledge of the experience and insights gained by these pale-skinned Aboriginal men, as insiders within the mainstream system, regarding challenges, possible conflicts, and alignment with their core beliefs and values within the typical dominant Westminster hierarchical mode of operation for boardrooms. The research considered the influence of the tone and culture of the boardroom, increasing awareness for Indigenous people of how to interface with mainstream boardrooms and encouraging pale-skinned Aboriginal men to pursue leadership through board positions.

The project aimed to:

- Investigate ways to influence the boardroom environment and how its operation could be improved through the application of Indigenous knowledge and principles.
- Further the understanding of the existing collective body of experience and knowledge, through identification of common themes; and
- Recommend guiding principles that could be further utilised in both future research and current boardroom environments.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The following sub-headings discuss topics of significance, that arose from the initial search of the literature. Insights from this literature review were utilised to provide context to develop the research questions and in the data analysis process to understand the findings from this research. Literature searches based on key terms, namely 'Aboriginal' or 'Indigenous' and 'leadership' have identified four areas of literature that inform the key research question. These have been incorporated into the conceptual framework in Figure 1. The conceptual framework is comprised of four parts, consisting of: (1) Aboriginal men in leadership on Western boards, (2) tokenism and minority, (3) insider and outsider, and (4) assimilation.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework – challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men on mainstream Western boards.



2.2. Aboriginal men in leadership on mainstream Western boards

A topic of importance to this research is the issue of the extended family structure versus the nuclear family model. Whilst the family unit is an important construct in all cultures, the nuclear model is the basis of the focus in Western society whereas for Aboriginal Nations the extended family model is the cornerstone of the community. This distinction helps to shed some light on the challenges that are faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men in mainstream leadership at the interface with Western organisations.

Cultural difference in family structures, and associated communication protocols for interaction and interface with organisations, combined with lack of awareness of such differences, can be the cause for organisations to misinterpret local Aboriginal community's desire and willingness to be included and consulted. This can also occur when the interface between the organisation and the Indigenous community's representatives are founded on different models of leadership (Foley, 2010). The Aboriginal representative within the organisation is culturally responsible to adopt a consensus style leadership answerable to the wider group of Elders and community (Sveiby, 2011) based in the extended family structure. Such leaders can then find themselves in a complex situation where leadership is practiced between the instrumental demands of mainstream organisations and the expectations of collaborative decision-making of Indigenous peoples. This is challenging for emerging Aboriginal leaders in middle management, such as administrators and liaison roles, who are caught between two worlds (Stewart & Warn, 2017). While Stewart and Warn mention the leadership struggles between these two worlds for emerging leaders, the literature appears to be limited in the context of the experiences of pale-skinned Aboriginal executives and boardroom directors operating in this gap.

2.2.1. Leadership styles

The literature shows that there are various discussions about the evolution of leadership styles (Do & Mai, 2021). "There is no universally accepted definition that exists" (Jensen, 2021, p. 6). Hart (2016) developed a taxonomy of leadership theory to organise leadership styles into nine theory clusters. The styles of leadership mentioned in the organisational theory cluster of the taxonomy have points of alignment with an Aboriginal leadership model that are discussed below.

In the organisational leadership theories of Howieson, Burns and Summers (2019) and Yukl (2008), the taxonomy is most relevant as it focuses on views such as leadership effectiveness associated with connections or relationships that are organisation wide, as opposed to the functions of the leader-follower (Avolio et al., 2009). This is supported by Bolden (2003) and others regarding a dispersed model of leadership promoting a culture of collective responsibility for leadership. A well-cited definition of shared leadership says that this style is:

a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both. This influence process often involves peer, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence (Pearce & Conger, 2003, p. 1).

2.2.2. Shared and distributed models

The theory of shared and distributed leadership (Harris & Spillane, 2008) refers to Harris (2007) who states that multiple leaders' actions are widely shared through interactions rather than actions. Further to this, "a distributed perspective on leadership acknowledges the work of all individuals that contribute to leadership practice" (Harris & Spillane, 2008, p. 31). This aligns with Sveiby's view of Aboriginal leadership as a shared symmetric combined leadership model in which task experts find themselves in short term roles rotated according to the task or situation. While the collective is responsible for the long-term view of the group, the rotation of task experts continually reinforces the practice of valuing and treating others with respect. All task experts know firsthand what it means to be in the lead and in the collective (Sveiby, 2011). This collective leadership model is not a recent phenomenon confined to modern organisations, but rather, was developed by the first peoples on the earth and is still practiced (Sveiby, 2011). It is reasonable to consider that the shared or distributed leadership model be referred to as foundational or seminal, in academic terms. However, the idea of collective leadership is an ancient leadership practice with tried and proven principles that are relevant in the modern world rather than referred to as new or emergent leadership theories and models (Bolden et al., 2003) or "new-genre leadership theories", as referred to by Avolio et al. (2009, p. 421).

It appears that we have travelled full circle with some of the inquiry about leadership models, going back to a point which sustains Aboriginal societies. A significant event in Aboriginal history in Australia in 1788, was the “British military invasion in 1788 with Governor Phillip and subsequent frontier domination combined with an adaptation of a Westminster political system and its three levels of administrative government within the cultural dominance of a European monarch” (Foley, 2010, p. 138). This was instrumental in the degradation of the shared and distributed leadership framework that has successfully operated for the wellbeing of Aboriginal communities/nations. Hierarchical leadership models imposed on a collective leadership culture still cause problems within Aboriginal societies today (Sveiby, 2011). Aboriginal leadership and knowledge systems continue to be based on co-operation and consensus (Foley, 2010). The hierarchical models referred to by Foley (2010), are therefore understandably a challenge for pale-skinned Aboriginal men who find themselves in executive or management roles within a Western boardroom environment. Responsibility to the broader community finds an Aboriginal representative, within the organisation, culturally responsible to adopt a consensus style leadership (Sveiby, 2011). This adds a level of complexity to functioning in a boardroom with its foundations embedded in a hierarchical structure.

2.2.3. *The boardroom*

Taking a closer look at the inside day-to-day operations in a conventional boardroom, the platform of debate is an instrumental part of the decision-making process that contributes to policy formulation. Under a hierarchical structure the quality of debate, decision-making, and policy formulation is highly dependent upon the skill, behaviours, and interactions of the participants (Morais et al., 2019), particularly those of the Chair. It could be argued that there is a contradiction or weakness in applying a hierarchical structure model that is dependent on an individual’s abilities rather than a model to facilitate good outcomes. Deficits in individual’s abilities under this ordered structure potentially find a board/leadership without aligned interests or a common definition of purpose resulting in a crisis of governance (Bailey & Peck, 2013). There is a need for greater consideration of the Indigenous shared and distributed leadership model and yarning within the boardroom as an alternative model to contribute to good decision making and policy formulation. There appears to be gap in the literature regarding the consideration

and application of the Indigenous principles and potential benefits of both a shared and distributed leadership model and the operation of the yarning circle within the boardroom. The inclusion of this approach as a process to complement the boardroom environment rather than solely relying on the dominant Westminster operating model with a dependency on individual skills would help mitigate some of the noted risks of crisis governance (Bailey & Peck, 2013).

2.2.4. Yarning circle principles and benefits

“Yarning is a relational methodology for transferring Indigenous knowledge” (Barlo et al., 2020, p. 1). However, the observance and application of the principle of yarning and the circle have far greater application and potential for influence. The yarning circle is a place where equality (Donovan, 2016), respect, protocol, and relationships (Fredericks et al., 2011) are foundational to communication, the transfer of knowledge, and problem solving. These significant elements of yarning could be applied to enhance communication and problem solving in the boardroom environment.

Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010, p. 47) state that yarning “is a rigorous and culturally safe method that is highly transferable into other contexts ...”. They relate this to research as an interpretive methodology to be used alongside Western research methods of gathering data. However, there is also significant potential for yarning to be employed as a principle to aid good decision making and policy formulation in the boardroom. The protocols and principles that are the essence of yarning circles, such as freedom, space, and inclusiveness, could also enhance the human element in the boardroom. Barlo highlights principles attributable to yarning such as reciprocity, responsibility, relationship, dignity, equality, integrity (Barlo et al., 2020). Yarning is multilayered and protocols and procedures can be designed and utilised in different settings (Barlo et al., 2020) and would potentially add considerable value to the dynamics of a boardroom. This is not to state that some of these protocols and principles are not already practiced in the boardroom. However, in the context of a shared and distributed leadership model and the yarning circle as operating principles within the boardroom, in addition to the current status quo, there is potential for enhancement of a boardroom’s performance. The functioning of the yarning circle is conducive to participation, where everyone’s input is relied upon and equally weighted, and each person must wait their turn for contribution (Bessarab &

Ng'andu, 2010; Donovan, 2016). The operational principles of the yarning circle applied in the boardroom could help minimise a lack of participation by passive members as they know that their turn for active contribution will be sought.

Additionally, it is understood in Aboriginal culture that yarning connects us with Country. How we exist in relationship with Country, and what it means to cultivate respectful, and accountable relationships with Country (Hughes & Barlo, 2021) are central for Aboriginal people. Hughes & Barlo invite us to hone our skills to consider how we relate to the place we are sitting in right now. "What do you feel and hear and how might you cultivate your own receptivity? ... What it might mean for you to cultivate a relationship of respect and accountability with the places you live and work and research" (Hughes & Barlo, 2021, p. 361). Consideration of this alignment could alter the tenor of communication and focus of decision-making in a boardroom environment.

2.2.5. Indigenous ontology and methodologies ... the possibilities

The ontology of Aboriginal people includes their relationship to everything, both natural and spiritual, as it is referred to by Grieves (2009). These relationships encourage a sense of connectedness, responsibility, and accountability to community and to Country. Boardrooms could potentially benefit from reflecting on and possibly adopting these to influence the culture and tone of the environment and communication. In turn, boardrooms perhaps cultivate a heightened awareness of leaders' and board members' sense of connectedness and relationship to their decisions and actions rather than being separate or detached from them. An exploratory journey and additional research are needed to raise awareness of Indigenous ontology as an alternative view to enable meaningful dialogue and collaborative decision-making.

2.3. Tokenism and minority

There is varying discussion in the literature about gender, ethnic and age diversity in the boardroom and workplace environments that manifests in the form of tokenism (Abdullah & Ku Ismail, 2017). Torchia et al., (2011) bring attention to gender specific tokenism of the number of women directors on boards and arguments for moving beyond this situation. Lee and Tran (2016) speak about the disregard for the validity of Indigenous governance models leading to Aboriginal

representatives on boards finding themselves at odds with Western governance models potentially resulting in tokenism. The impacts of tokenism raised in a seminal text remain relevant in today's workplace, "Consistent with expectations, analyses showed that numerical rarity by race and by gender significantly increased symptoms of depression and anxiety, respectively" (Jackson et al., 1995, p. 543). There has also been discussion around children involved in collective decision making and governance (Lundy, 2018). Lundy also highlights how passive leaders can utilise tokenism to defend an apathetic position to exclude minorities from collective decision making. The excuse of not wanting to offend people of a minority can be cited as a reason not to consult or engage with these groups as justification for taking this position. Hallam et al. (2018) refers to a Deloitte's study in 2017 finding 77% of Australian companies rated diversity and inclusion on boards important, yet Australian organisations have been slow to transition beyond tokenistic approaches. Worldwide an average of only 12% of organisations are achieving a mature model of a diversified and inclusive culture within the boardroom environment (Hallam et al., 2018). This difference between aspiration and reality appears to point towards an ignorance of diversity and its benefits, particularly with those less obvious dimensions of diversity as highlighted in their conceptual model of the diversity wheel (Hallam et al., 2018) where they specifically raise the topic of cognitive diversity. Cognitive diversity is also "defined as differences in perspective or information processing styles" (Reynolds & Lewis, 2017, p. 2). These concerns support the argument that operating models of shared and distributed leadership and the yarning circle are conducive to cultivating a situation of a safe and respected contribution to the group. When teams face uncertain complex situations, these operating models are like the flux for cognitive diversity and inclusion by facilitating engagement in different ways, encouraging experimentation rather than just analysing (Reynolds & Lewis, 2017). Similarly, in a yarning circle, people are more likely to put an idea on the table rather than just fit in. Further, Indigenous people's ontology of being connected to one's surroundings may also be of value by bringing a new dimension, perspective, and experience to decision-making and cognitive diversity in the boardroom.

Aboriginal people have experienced tokenism as part of their lives by being overlooked or ignored, either unintentionally or intentionally, as not having valid and equal input. Tokenism has also been highlighted as a form of racism (Oates, 2020).

It would be reasonable to expect similar findings about Indigenous representation in the workplace more broadly in Australia. Further work in this context may be of benefit for boardrooms in the Australian environment to help raise further awareness of the need for greater boardroom diversity and the mitigation of stress and role overload for pale-skinned Aboriginal board members. Tokenism (Lundy, 2018; Oates, 2020) has been part of my personal experience in my area of professional practice in the workplace which manifests itself in the form of stereotypical thinking by my colleagues, either consciously or unconsciously.

2.4. Assimilation

The well-established fact that Australian Aboriginal people are part of one of the oldest living cultures in the world suggests there has been considerable cultural evolution via survival through colonisation in the early Western settlement era (Poroch, 2012). Additionally, the legacy of the Stolen Generations, between approximately 1905 and 1967 (Leigh, 2020), with its harsh assimilation policies set by governments of the day, have contributed to the erosion of the structures of Indigenous communities and leadership styles which has resulted in intergenerational trauma, that is borne by many to this day. “Unconscious and conscious assimilative practices” (Keskitalo, 2020, p. 23) are commonly thrust upon minorities by the majority with the bias of expectation for Aboriginal people to conform to the majority’s ways of doing and being. This translates to the boardroom as well as for pale-skinned Aboriginal men working within a hierarchical structure. The subtle and more sophisticated neo-colonialist thinking and culture are still the catalyst for mainstream thinking that Aboriginal peoples need to conform to settler standards and ways of being or be assimilated (Hart, 2018). Now more than ever with the rate of change in our environment on all fronts there is a need for adaptation, though not in the conformist sense as required by assimilation policies.

2.4.1. Indigeneity and identity

First Nation peoples, while not forgetting traditional cultural practices, need to continue to evolve and be part of the mainstream leadership to navigate and guide a future for all (Paradies, 2016). For those who have the benefit of connection to their traditional practice, language, and culture (Waters, 2013) there is an increasing need and responsibility to share their knowledge with Indigenous and non-Indigenous

people alike. Sharing can ensure all Indigenous people continue to be part of this future and should not be confused with Indigeneity or politicised. There is a need for boardrooms also to reflect on the way Indigeneity is considered. My own experience reflects Paradies' view in the opinion below of the future needed for Aboriginal peoples and cultures to survive and be celebrated as a crucial thread in the tapestry of the future.

The essentialized Indigeneity thus formed coalesces around specific fantasies of exclusivity, cultural alterity, marginality, physicality and morality, which leave an increasing number of Indigenous people vulnerable to accusations of inauthenticity. Only by decoupling Indigeneity from such essentialist fantasies can we acknowledge the richness of Indigenous diversity and start on the path towards true reconciliation in Australia (Paradies, 2016, p. 355).

Circumstances such as being a pale-skinned Aboriginal man struggling with identity issues may result in feeling like an imposter (Foley, 2000; Gill, 2020). However, the fact of blood ancestry cannot be denied due to physical appearance and one should feel proud of this reality. As Paradies (2016) identifies racially as Aboriginal-Anglo-Asian Australian, I too am proud to identify as an Aboriginal-Irish Australian and like him, "refuse to surrender my other identities to be Indigenous" (Paradies, 2016, p. 357). Acceptance of diversity, rather than minimising pale-skinned Indigenous people, is essential to move beyond projecting bias upon the minority (Paradies, 2016) and broadening how Indigeneity is viewed, whether that be in a boardroom or otherwise.

2.4.2. Abyssal thinking

The ever-present willingness of individuals to project their paradigms or ideologies onto others is the very thing to be resisted, as it relates to assimilation (Keskitalo, 2020). Keskitalo (2020, p. 23) highlights that Indigenous Sami people have faced "conscious or unconscious assimilation practices for centuries" and that this was forced upon them by the mainstream dominant culture through education and training. This oppressive behaviour is referred to as "abyssal thinking" (de Sousa Santos, 2007) consisting of both visible and invisible distinctions. He describes how invisible distinctions, based on undisclosed assumptions lay the foundations for visible discourse and behaviour which can manifest as social division. What exists

on the other side of the invisible line is considered not to exist or is not validated because it is outside the realm of what the mainstream conception is and is therefore not comprehensible to the majority society (de Sousa Santos, 2007).

Assimilative behaviour (Keskitalo, 2020) and “abyssal thinking” (de Sousa Santos, 2007, p. 45) can be observed in the boardroom environment and may be masked as the democratic process. This can be manifested by tokenistic gestures towards minority member’s different worldviews brought to the board table, often due to assumptions about minority views by the majority members. There is an opportunity to better explore these ideas consistent with the perspectives and principles of Indigenous approaches to decision-making, including shared and distributed leadership and the principles of the yarning circle. Experience shows that opportunity to explore new knowledge and learning is lost, being consumed by the dominant mainstream cultural concepts of what is known and comprehended, when viewed through this mainstream dominant lens. This passive approach from leaders to not stray from familiar convention or “conscious or unconscious assimilation practices” (Keskitalo, 2020, p. 23) in the boardroom is enforced by the ‘majority rules’ of democracy.

This willingness to herd or draft people like sheep through the race at shearing time is the very thing that requires alertness of, and resistance by, Aboriginal people – some of whom have been influenced in their thinking according to the paradigms of neo-colonialist definitions of being Aboriginal (Paradies, 2016). This exclusive paradigm could be a barrier for Aboriginal people and culture to advance and flourish in the future (Bennett, 2015). This is manifested as racism from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous positions alike for pale-skinned Aboriginal people (Bennet, 2014). Paradies (2016) speaks of a hybrid space of multiplicity as a framework for the future. Moore (2020) speaks of the need for recognition of diversity and differences yet being connected interculturally and more universally to improve public policy formation and outcomes. We must move beyond the politics of racial identity and “... recognize that although the poor and the rich Indigene, the cultural reviver and the quintessential cosmopolitan, the fair, dark, good, bad, and disinterested may have little in common, they are nonetheless all equally but variously Indigenous” (Paradies, 2016, p. 363). We must take a higher position above the constant undercurrent of intent to classify people and their Aboriginal authenticity.

2.5. Insider and outsider

When considering the terms insider and outsider we need to be sensitive to who we are and how we relate to our world around us. A researcher's positionality is linked with who they are, rather than a dichotomous position of insider and outsider. It is about who they are within the space created by the research (Hurley & Jackson, 2020), or situation, problem to be solved, message to communicate, or community to connect with. Hurley and Jackson (2020) argue that ... "insider and outsider positions must be fluid" (p. 45). This has broader application and personal experience has positioned me as both insider and outsider simultaneously as a pale-skinned Aboriginal board member embedded within the local government sector in the day-to-day boardroom operations and strategic decision-making across a broad range of topics. Converse to the insider position is the reality of being an outsider pale-skinned Aboriginal board member with the challenges of being a minority. The challenge is to avoid thinking too myopically about the positions of insider and outsider and the confusion this brings, but rather to ask the question, how do you relate to the phenomenon before you? (Hurley & Jackson, 2020).

I agree with the view of Sanders et al. (2008) who pointed out that insiders and outsiders are positions dependent upon each other and these "leadership styles are complimentary", (Sanders et al., 2008, p. 145) and coexist in public life. I would argue additionally that advocating the theme of flexibility and diversity more broadly, consistent with Hurley and Jackson's (2020) view could usher in a generation of future Aboriginal leaders. Opportunities must continue to be explored from the viewpoint of diversity within Aboriginality beyond a position of insider or outsider in relation to a Western structure. When there is a narrow focus on these terms they can "have a profound impact on how Aboriginal people understand themselves and are understood by others" (Bennett, 2015, p. 88). Dominating assimilative actions occurring since the first contact with the colonisers of this country and Aboriginal people "have been the object of a continual flow of commentary and classification" (Dodson, 1994, p. 2). As Aboriginal people we need to passionately embrace our diversity and not succumb to narrow assimilative views and remind ourselves of the value we add via relationships and connection to all around (Hughes & Barlo, 2021). With the subtlety of un/conscious bias there can be a propensity to project your perceptions and views upon others. Perhaps born out of a feeling of the need to gather those of like mind around us as part of a herd mentality which Akram (2018)

speaks of as socialisation, unconscious bias, and discrimination in a bureaucratic setting.

Amid the commentary of insiders and outsiders it is very important that Aboriginal cultures and identity are not lost. I agree with Waters (2013) that we must protect and nurture traditional practices of Aboriginal culture and that this is important for future generations to appreciate. He states, “My Indigeneity remains first and foremost an intuitive connection to my traditional ‘Burruguu-ngayi-li’ or dreaming and this is the foundation of the knowledge base associated with my creative and academic practice” (Waters, 2013, p. 187). Whilst I appreciate and respect the importance of this fact unique to himself, there are many of us, both pale or dark-skinned Indigenous people, raised outside of community, disconnected through the stolen generation, with forebears separated from family by the church or state who do not have the privilege of this position. Respect for diversity within Aboriginality is of great importance when trying to advance outcomes for all Aboriginal people to ensure sustainability and resilience amongst a dominant Western multicultural race (Paradies, 2016).

The harsh reality of the inability to have any control over the past, raised in Lehman’s (2004) seminal work, continues to face those of us as descendants, “... from both Indigenous and Euro-Australian ancestors I am both colonizer and colonized, both black and consummately white” (Paradies, 2016, p. 357). It is not unreasonable to consider the conflict this creates for those who identify as Aboriginal, regardless of skin colour, being raised within or outside an Aboriginal community or family structure. This internal conflict is evident today within Aboriginal leadership with an emerging trend of managing “two ways” (Stewart & Warn, 2017, p. 3) strategically and tactfully. By developing their own styles of leadership, it is possible to accommodate the expectations from the Aboriginal community and the structure of mainstream organisations being caught in the middle of two worlds (Stewart & Warn, 2017).

2.6. Summary

When contemplating the question of gaining a better understanding of the impacts and influences on pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership on executive or management boards within the Western mainstream work environment, the literature appears to be limited in commentary about this phenomenon. A broader enquiry

about Aboriginal or Indigenous leadership and the boardroom identified key topics of leadership, tokenism, assimilation, insider and outsider, that inform the research question requiring further investigation. The apparent relationship between these four topics is of interest and has raised questions. Taking a closer look at Indigenous leadership styles and the practices of the yarning circle (Sveiby, 2011; Foley, 2010; Donovan, 2016; Fredericks et al. 2011; Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Barlo et al., 2020) has promoted possible thoughts and considerations of relevance for today's boardroom environment.

Reflecting upon the topic of tokenism, we can ask: have approaches changed much in the boardroom? (Lee & Tran, 2016; Hallam et al., 2018). Are we entrenched in assimilative actions and thinking, producing tokenistic approaches and outcomes in the boardroom? This is particularly in relation to minority participation and specifically concerning Aboriginal participation.

Considering the topic of assimilation and the evidence of this in the past, present, and likely into the future (Leigh, 2020; Hart, 2018), I propose this topic is of significance when contemplating my research question of "the challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership roles on executive and management boards of Western organisations". This is due to the mode of operation of Western boardrooms with hierarchical structures, and tokenism more than likely contributing to a state of internal conflict for a pale-skinned Aboriginal board member (Keskitalo, 2020; de Sousa Santos, 2007). Additionally, could the principles of Indigenous shared and distributed leadership and yarning possibly be a flux to assist in improving the tone and culture of the boardroom and how could these principles be introduced? Other questions have presented themselves in the areas of principled-based decision-making and do these models potentially enhance the decision-making process and policy formulation?

When contemplating the topic of insiders and outsiders in the context of an Indigenous world view of connection and relationship verses positionality (Hurley & Jackson, 2020; Bennett, 2015), I am curious to explore how Aboriginal leaders in the boardroom understand themselves and are understood by others and where this may lead.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

Central and consistent to my ontological belief of being connected with everything, as described by Grieves (2009), my axiology as the researcher is being part of what is being studied and not isolated from the studied and has informed an appropriate methodology for the research.

3.2. Research methodology

The methodology of Participatory Action Research (PAR) was chosen because of the synergies with my Indigenous beliefs in relation to interconnectedness. PAR allows the researcher to develop relationships with the research participants, allowing them to express their lived experiences freely (Brydon-Miller & Maguire, 2009) as this methodology recognises “the existence of a plurality of knowledges in a variety of institutions and locations” (Kindon et al., 2007, p. 9). PAR allows research participants to be co-contributors of enquiry rather than objects (Evans et al., 2009). PAR “Integrates values and beliefs that are Indigenous to the community” (Kindon et al., 2007, p. 14). Additionally, the participatory component of this research allows a collaborative approach and to establish the interviewees/participants as an advisory panel (AP), to examine the research findings, to explore opportunities for solutions and develop some guiding principles to assist boardroom operations.

“PAR is a recursive process that involves a spiral of adaptable steps that include the following:

- Questioning a particular issue
- Reflecting upon and investigating the issue
- Developing an action plan
- Implementing and refining the said plan” (McIntyre, 2008, p. 6).

PAR was the appropriate mechanism for this body of work as it facilitated a collaborative approach and co-creation of knowledge consistent with the Indigenous principles of connection with the research rather than positioned separate from it.

The participatory approach addresses a potential limitation to this research where the findings could be the subjective view of the researcher only and the

interpretation of the data potentially influenced by their experiences and values. Giving voice and leadership to the development of the knowledge being created through this study to the participants assists the co-creation process by being respectful and inclusive of the knowledge, expertise, and experiences of the participants (AIATSIS, 2020).

3.3. Participant recruitment

Snowballing was utilised to identify potential candidates and those who expressed interest were encouraged to recruit others through referral to their networks for other potential candidates for the study (Sadler et al., 2010). “Snowball sampling is a convenient sampling method. This method is applied when it is difficult to access subjects with the target characteristics” (Ghaljaie et al., 2017, p. 2). The target participants were of similar backgrounds, in that they shared a common heritage (pale-skinned Aboriginal men), and professional experiences (leadership on executive and management boards within Western mainstream work environments).

The first participant was linked to the researcher and other participants were acquainted to the first (Ghaljaie et al., 2017). This method was most appropriate given that these individuals could prove to be hard to find due to the challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men and the degree of their willingness to be identified in their professional roles. Participants were prebriefed, provided with a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix C) and gave informed consent before being interviewed individually.

The technique of semi-formal interviews was conducted in the form of the Aboriginal methodology of the yarning circle. The format of these interviews was congruent with the intent of the principal and sub-research questions while considering the topics developed from the literature review. There were four participants including myself as the researcher. Information regarding the participant’s profiles is discussed further in the publishable article in Chapter 5.

3.4. Design

The Indigenous methodology of yarning was utilised as the overarching principle to conduct this research. The phases of individual participant yarns, AP meetings, and presentation of findings at the panel sessions were all conducted under the umbrella of yarning. The individual yarning sessions entailed discussion

about the research questions to give the context for the research and establish the participants position and experience related to the research to be conducted. The initial yarns also assisted to elevate Indigenous protocols allowing myself as the researcher to establish culturally appropriate relationships with the participants. The next phase for the following PAR cycles was facilitated with some initial thematic analysis by grouping the participants' responses into some emerging themes which acted as points of departure for the AP yarns. This is discussed below in more detail in Section 3.5.1, Thematic analysis. The AP was brought together in a way consistent with the PAR process, with the intent to collectively discuss challenges, form agreement regarding key themes, sub-themes, and then brainstorm potential solutions via a yarning process.

3.4.1. Yarning

Qualitative methods were used via interviews for all participants through this traditional Aboriginal discourse known as yarning to gather data (Barlo et al., 2020). Yarning is described as “semi-structured in-depth interviews to gather information from the participants of their lived experience” (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010, p. 37). The research focus aligned with their commentary about yarning to build rapport and trust with the participants. This is applicable when unpacking the research questions as part of participatory research. Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010, p. 47) state that yarning, “is a rigorous and culturally safe method that is highly transferable into other contexts...”. The participatory process allows embedding of the researcher collaboratively in the yarning circle as an equal with the participants to unpack the research questions, share lived experiences, discuss possible themes regarding the subtopics as presented in the literature review and propose solutions in consultation with the participants.

3.4.2. Advisory panel sessions

There were three PAR cycles via the AP and the initial session started with a yarn to establish the proper protocols of acquaintance and relationship building necessary for the AP to move forward. The phases of the PAR process mentioned above, were utilised by the AP at each of the cycles in the refinement and development of the collective knowledge, utilising the methodology of yarning. Within the recursive process of PAR, further thematic analysis of the data was carried out

and presented as spreadsheets along with artefacts titled 'learning statements' that were produced by me as the researcher for validation by AP at each new cycle. The learning statements were developed by distilling the data from the discussion from these sessions. Confirmation was sought from participants individually and collectively regarding the validity of these statements and they became the provocation for the next session. This was to ensure that the integrity of the PAR process of questioning, reflecting and investigating development and refining the data was consistent (McIntyre, 2008). The research design and methodology of PAR facilitated the group of participants functioning as an AP, to validate the emerging themes, confirm key outcomes and propose recommendations for possible solutions.

The panel sessions were a minimum of one hour in duration with flexibility allowed, due to the nature and sensitivity of the information shared. They were conducted in person or by Zoom meetings and no financial or other incentives were provided for participation.

The methodology of PAR is ideally suited to the co-creation process through being respectful and inclusive of the knowledge, expertise, and experiences of the participants (AIATSI, 2020). The cycles of PAR supported this collaborative process through the revisiting and validation of the research being conducted, closing the loop with the participants. Reciprocity was clearly demonstrated throughout by the reliance upon each other's contribution and the equally valued and respected knowledge brought to the table for the co-creation of knowledge based on the combined experience of the AP members.

The process for the collation of the data encompasses the individual interviews and the AP sessions and is described further in the publishable article (see Chapter 5).

3.5. Data analysis

3.5.1. Thematic analysis

Following the data collection, data from the initial interviews, based on the research questions provided in the participant information sheet, were analysed. Thematic analysis was used and entailed organising and interpreting emerging themes. This initial analysis was guided by repeatedly listening to the audio recordings to give consideration to interpreting the participants' intent and meaning

(Braun & Clark, 2012). The following phases of thematic analysis, as described by Braun & Clark (2012), were utilised for the entire process involving the AP:

1. Repeatedly listening to the audio recordings to carefully consider the interpretations of the participants' intent,
2. Collation of the data into themes,
3. Generating clear definitions and names for each theme,
4. Using selected extracts of the analysis that related to the research questions and literature.

The AP agreed to de-identify the names of the participants within the data throughout the entire data collection and analysis process and this is discussed further in Chapter 5. The data collected from the AP sessions were audio recorded and summarised onto spreadsheets. The summaries of the emerging themes were developed and shared at subsequent sessions of the AP as part of the PAR process.

3.6. Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study was provided by the UniSQ Human Research Ethics Committee (H21REA279, email correspondence dated: 20 January 2022, Human Research Ethics, USQ). The aims of the study were explained as part of the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix: C). Permission was sought from individuals for their contribution and disclosure of information and the findings would be anonymous and agreed upon with written consent (Appendix: C). As this was a participatory design where participants were interviewed, sharing their experience, and contributed to the development of knowledge, it was important to acknowledge this contribution. However, consideration was given to the fact that some of these individuals may not wish to be identified within the organisation or their field of practice. Therefore, in conducting research interviews, the names and personal details of individuals and the organisation's identity and details were kept confidential unless otherwise requested by the person interviewed.

There was the possibility of past emotions, experiences and traumas arising which may have caused some reflection affecting individual participants and the extent of their contribution to my enquiry. As a precautionary measure, participants were advised of culturally appropriate options for resources available to support them if required, within in the Participant Information Sheet. This consideration of culturally appropriate support applied to me as the researcher also.

The participatory approach respects the individuals and their contribution to the study and their right to opt out at any stage. Further, closing the loop regarding the outcomes of the research in a final meeting helped to foster rapport and build relationships consistent with the AIATSI Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (2020).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

The results are presented and discussed in the publishable article (Chapter 5), highlighting the emergent themes of connection, shared and distributed leadership and yarning, which were subsequently recommended by the AP as guiding principles for the boardroom's mode of operation.

Part of the AP discussion focused on the emergent themes' capability to disrupt the current majority rules and assimilative behaviour in a boardroom. This can be identified by the lack of willingness of some board members to engage in debate, reliance on the rigid meeting rules and progress straight to voting to potentially push predetermined agendas. This was described as "particular perspectives advanced" (Uncle R) in an initial interview when responding to the question about challenges and influences that pale-skinned Aboriginal men face in the boardroom. This is also referred to as the "kidnapping of the agendas" (Uncle W) in response to the same question in his first interview. The AP identified that this can be interpreted as, or make minorities feel, the subject of consensus bullying under a so-called democratic framework in circumstances where its intent has been misused to obtain a pre-defined outcome.

Sections 4.2 Research question interviews and 4.3 Advisory panel sessions have been included to help demonstrate the process of the data collection and refinement within the cyclic nature of PAR used for this research. They consist of the data classified through emergent themes as presented to the panel members. The inserts below are comprised of spreadsheets of the data collected from the research questions and AP sessions, including learning statements (artefacts of the research). They were presented at these sessions to validate the data throughout the progression of the PAR process. The inserts are presented to demonstrate not only the establishment and development of the data but additionally it is important for the reader to gain understanding of the collaborative process for the co-creation of knowledge, based on the combined experience of the AP members. The data inserts should be considered in the context of the Indigenous methodologies of yarning and shared leadership with equally valued input from all participants and the synergies with the PAR process. The data inserts are a record of the yarning sessions throughout this research.

4.2. Research question interviews

Individual interviews/yarns were conducted in accordance with the Participant Information Sheet prior to the PAR panel sessions. The provocation for the initial interviews consisted of the briefing about the research and the Participant Information Sheet with the research questions. Figures 2 to 4 below consist of comments from these interviews by all participants which were grouped by thematic analysis. All the content within these figures are participant quotes and are a distillation of the recorded sessions from the initial individual interviews. Figures 2 to 4 below consist of direct quotes and capture comments from each of the participants and are grouped via colour coding into the main themes that were later submitted for discussion at the first AP session. The three emerging themes of *Connection*, *Leadership Model* and *Yarning* are colour coded as per the following key in Figures 2 to 7.

Key:

Green – Connection

Yellow – Leadership Model

Pink - Yarning

Direct quotes by the panel members have also been cited from these spreadsheets. There were consistently three prominent themes that emerged from the three initial individual interviews/ yarns as listed above.

Figure 2 is a record of responses to the first question from the participant information sheet. *What are the challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership roles on executive and management boards of Western organisations?*

Figure 2

Question 1 Challenges and influences in the boardroom

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning	
Question 1: Challenges and Influences in the Boardroom			
Uncle W	Uncle R	Uncle N	Theme
.40min. lack of understanding about board's role. 11.55 min. Boards not clear about their charter. Not being driven by individual interests			Connection
20.08 min. Kidnapping of the agendas, 22.07 min designed to suit individual agendas			Connection
24.14 min. Understanding clear board principles. 25.13 min Remembering the key principles such as respect. Does it benefit the community, connect blackfellas, how was the decision made.			Connectedness
24.41 min. Making decisions for language groups. " on Country experience"	21.44min. When visiting Aboriginal communities, "I go as a guest and talk to people"		Connectedness
16.01 min. "Who are we"			Connection to Country (pattern thinking)

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning	
		29.50. "Power games". 30.55. "Westminster system is essentially a skewed feudal system". 31.23. "Pope Alexander said to explorers of the day, you discover it, its yours the people and everything". 32.00. "Feudal system in western Europe, English and Americans took this on". 32.13. "Thomas Jefferson fought for the right of discovery over Native American lands and won in the U.S. Congress". 32.18. Australia Terra Nullius " no blackfellas, we had no knowledge"	Respect, leadership, assimilation, disconnection, abyssal thinking
5.19 min. Segregation of board and CEO roles			Shared and distributed leadership model (experts and group decisions)
14.04 min. Domineering chairs			Shared and distributed leadership model
19.08 min. Western system not conducive to valued equal input, does not encourage honest open input without criticism.		12.42. "Setting people up to debate opposites" you don't get any truths from it when you're debating you are just trying to win the debate". 12.54. "You get a hierarchy"	Leadership structure, styles
27.45 min. Boards become an entity in themselves. Agendas become disconnected from purpose.			Shared and distributed leadership
	Quest 3: 2.47min. "Boards tend to follow how things happen"		Tokensim, leadership model

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning	
	Quest 3: 3.23min "Particular perspectives advanced"	13.10. (Burnstein) "there are two discourses Information discourse and the positioning discourse" 13.15. "Positioning builds the hierarchy where someone feels less than others". 13.30. (Freyer) "talks about positioning with literacy we must position ourselves with freedom" Changes results 14.00. "Aboriginal kids (in a classroom setting rose to the top of the pile)	Governance crisis, leadership model, assimilation
		7.46. "Not formal ontology which is Western philosophy Indigenous ontology is that we have a framework that allows us to assume a lot of things". 7.57. "Assumption that the Westminster system makes is that people need to be controlled", "people will not work for the benefit of others unless their controlled to so", "People shouldn't be independent". 9.30. People will be combatively disputing each other to get ahead.	Leadership styles, connectedness, assimilation, abyssal thinking
		14.23. In a group setting, "trying to ensure that all voices are preserved in the discussion". 15.50. " It's part of Aboriginal culture to listen to every voice and the voices can be as different as they want to be"	Leadership, yarning circle
		Aboriginal initiatives derived by Aboriginal people for specific outcomes. Accept funding. 26.15. "Yes but, on our terms"	Tokenism and minority, assimilation, leadership, abyssal thinking
Tokenistic gestures to seek out knowledge to inform decision making	17.40min. "My understanding of the needs of the community", "not necessarily right"		Tokenism
2.40 min. False assumption of universal representation and knowledge. Misunderstood by both Blackfellas and whitefellas	12.27min. "Why do you need two mobs doing this"		Tokenism

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning	
	6.20min. Trying to "influence the political spectrum"		Tokenism
	2.14min. "Challenges are different to non-Indigenous" when dealing with govt		Tokenism
	Quest 3: 2.47min. "Boards tend to follow how things happen"		Tokenism
		4.02. Non-genuine discussion from board members in front of Aboriginal people/community. "They won't say things within earshot of Aboriginal people". 4.15. " I found out what they really thought of Aboriginal people". 5.15. PSA's who "are literate, vocal and your smart and you won't back down you are seen as a troublemaker and not the real Aboriginal who is respectful"	Tokenism and minority
		6.51. "You become objectified as an Aboriginal person". 6.52. "As an Aboriginal person in any context with mainstream there is an objectification and men are usually characterised as violent"	Tokenism and minority
		Aboriginal initiatives derived by Aboriginal people for specific outcomes. Accept funding, 26.15. "Yes but, on our terms"	Tokenism and minority
		Funding for Aboriginal initiatives not used for their purpose: 27.29. "Where did the money go, it went to a wonderful organisation, it went the flying doctors" applying Western methods to deal with First Nation issues. 27.47. "Here are these little kids with psychology degrees, white kids sitting in organisations not knowing what to do"	Tokenism and minority
15.44 min. Physical boardroom setup or structure, nobody is more important than anybody else		14.23. In a group setting, "trying to ensure that all voices are preserved in the discussion". 15.50. "It's part of Aboriginal culture to listen to every voice and the voices can be as different as they want to be"	Yarning circle

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning	
<p>Governmental regulation, regulation drives decisions. Expectations and timelines don't allow for different ways of working or decision making. Immediacy, not flexible.</p> <p>21.38 min. Instantaneous decision making.</p> <p>Western bureaucracy: rules, structure, non-flexible. conform rather than ask questions.</p>	<p>21.00min. "Needs not based on what community I came from"</p>		<p>Assimilation</p>
	<p>12.27min. "Why do you need two mobs doing this"</p>		<p>Assimilation</p>
	<p>Quest 3: 3.23min. "Particular perspectives advanced"</p>		<p>Assimilation</p>
		<p>4.02 non-genuine discussion from board members in front of Aboriginal people/community. "They won't say things within earshot of Aboriginal people".</p> <p>4.15. "I found out what they really thought of Aboriginal people".</p> <p>5.15. PSA's who "are literate, vocal and your smart and you won't back down you are seen as a troublemaker and not the real Aboriginal who is respectful"</p>	<p>Assimilation</p>
		<p>7.46. "Not formal ontology which is Western philosophy Indigenous ontology is that we have a framework that allows us to assume a lot of things".</p> <p>7.57. "Assumption that the Westminster system makes is that people need to be controlled", "people will not work for the benefit of others unless their controlled to so", "People shouldn't be independent".</p> <p>9.30. People will be combatively disputing each other to get ahead.</p>	<p>Assimilation</p>
		<p>ORIC, ATSIC examples of assimilated Western governance and finance models,</p> <p>23.17 ATSIC "we are going to do your financial controlling"</p>	<p>Assimilation</p>

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning	
		29.50. "Power games". 30.55 "Westminster system is essentially a skewed feudal system". 31.23. "Pope Alexander said to explorers of the day, you discover it, it's yours the people and everything". 32.00. "Feudal system in western Europe, English and Americans took this on". 32.13. "Thomas Jefferson fought for the right of discovery over Native American lands and won in the U.S. Congress". 32.18. Australia Terra Nullius "no blackfellas, we had no knowledge"	Assimilation
	10.10min. "Why am I fighting so hard" (Prejudice among Aboriginal people)		Indigeneity or Identity?
	Diverse range of issues when dealing with remote communities		Identity
		1.00. Background small country town light skinned Aboriginal people are still recognised, "a touch of tar" people get pushed around.	Insider outsider
		4.02. Non-genuine discussion from board members in front of Aboriginal people/community. "They won't say things within earshot of Aboriginal people". 4.15. "I found out what they really thought of Aboriginal people". 5.15. PSA's who "are literate, vocal and your smart and you won't back down you are seen as a troublemaker and not the real Aboriginal who is respectful"	Insider outsider
	12.27min. "Why do you need two mobs doing this"		Abyssal thinking

The themes of connection, leadership models, and yarning as presented in the spreadsheets started to emerge from the first question asked of the participants in their individual interviews. Although the conceptual framework was not yet presented to the participants at this stage, there was alignment with some of the topics such as tokenism and minority, assimilation, insiders, and outsiders, that were identified as part of the literature review (In Chapter 2).

Figure 3 is a record of responses to the second question on the Participant information sheet. *How do leadership styles used within Boards align or conflict with the role of representing local Aboriginal communities?*

Key:

Green – Connection

Yellow – Leadership Model

Pink – Yarning

Figure 3

Question 2 Participant Information Sheet

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning	
Quest 2: Opportunities for enhancing the Boardroom considering Indigenous Leadership Models			
Uncle W	Uncle R	Uncle N	Theme
25.13 min. Respect 26.49 min. Encourage open equal input respectfully, equal say, 16.01 min. recognition of connection to country.		Western 22.15. "Boardroom silenced and allows space for others to argue, Pre-conceived structure. 22.46 "Westminster based on supremacy of some minds over others. 22.55 "That is nobility	Yarning circle
17.50 min. Mode of operation: Yarning circle- talking stick or talking piece from country. Physical structure of the Yarning Circle: facing one another, vary the location.	Quest 3: "Yarning Circle, opportunity for different approaches to leadership"	18.40. "Yarning Circle" promotes, 19.57. "Possession of mind, being present in your own mind and not just responding to others or passively listening and agreeing with others. " a time to speak". 22.08. "No presence of mind is believing what you are told and defending it regardless"	Yarning circle
		Physical Structure 23.01. "Greater understanding in the higher chairs than the lower chairs	Yarning circle
4.29 min. people need to come together as one, but there is a need for diversity of opinion		.40. "Sometimes you get a really good mix of people who share their skill and trust each other" .49. "Even when they don't trust each other they are respectful and observant"	Diversity
		1.22 " come together to manage things and look at the dominating system	Cognitive diversity

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning	
24.41 min. The Boardroom needs "on country experience"		11.50. "Connection to something greater than human". 12.10. "Aboriginal people connect to country which is greater than humans". 14.49. "Learning to respect, watch and take care of, take notice of what's happening around you in the country". 15.00. "Whitefellas simply don't have that and when they experience it they see it as new age"	Connection to Country
		15.13 "When I was doing my main learning, I called it having an extended mind, country has intelligence" 15.22. "That intelligence never finds its way into a boardroom"	Connection to Country
	1.00min. "Boards need to be collaborative" (Work with other boards Kahleila, Carbal)		Connection collaboration
	1.30min. "Culturally appropriate setting"		Connection to surroundings
	Quest 3: 8.51min. Community engagement, community spirit	Be ready to give account. 5.05 "It doesn't change who I am"	Connection to community
	5.13min. "The community may not see the benefits" so simple tools" should be used for them to gain understanding to minimise "pushback" (oratory, visual, speak communities language)	15.30. "(Rod Williams the Congan Model), that works for bringing culture and spirituality into an Aboriginal boardroom". 15.43. "It enhances the bottom line"	Connectedness
	Insider/outsider experience to "give the best advice" and "give info about the needs of the community"		Insider outsider
		1.42. Among some "Aboriginal leadership there is a definite hierarchy, and some are privileged". 2.16. inequities in pay for doing the same work.	Assimilation

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning	
		Accommodating people and circumstances. 6.57. "Valuing and dealing with what you have to deal with"	Leadership
		15.30. "(Rod Williams the Congan Model), that works for bringing culture and spirituality into an Aboriginal boardroom". 15.43. "It enhances the bottom line"	Leadership
		24.22. "Using normalcy and support to promote good thinking"	Leadership
		Be open to be challenged and tested, 7.30. "Being challenged by elders, that is something to be valued in our community. Being tested 7.43. "On big and important things, it should happen". 9.45. "It's a test not an attack"	Leadership shared and distributed

The topics highlighted in colour from the first question continued to be considered as a way forward for boardrooms to consider as models to enhance their operations. There was agreement as per the individual participants responses that the three emerging themes were important and there appeared to be no divergence from the idea that these themes were of central importance to impact the boardroom environment.

Figure 4 is a record of responses to the third question on the Participant information sheet. *What strategies can be developed to accommodate Aboriginal leadership styles within Boards of Western organisations?*

Key:

Green – Connection

Yellow – Leadership Model

Pink - Yarning

Figure 4

Question 3 Participant Information Sheet

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning	
Quest 3: Possible initiatives that could be developed to build knowledge			
Uncle W	Uncle R	Uncle N	Theme
15.44 min. Physical boardroom setup or structure: "nobody is more important than anybody else"	Yarning circle: 1.13min "opportunity for different approaches". Allows for 2.10min "different backgrounds and collaboration", "A much more positive experience", "advances in different outcomes" in the boardroom		Yarning circle
17.50 min. Mode of operation: Yarning Circle, talking stick or piece. 26.49 min. equal say.			Yarning circle
18.21 min. Balance on boards, women on boards: influences the behaviour of the board.			Diversity
16.01 min. Recognition of connection to country	10.32 min. Supporters/volunteers, be clear about "the concept of what the organisation is trying to do", (reference to the Lifeline board)	8.26. "Colleague Will Davis and I developed a set of guiding principles - Ginaby Wandaran Elders Principles. 9 principles to guide the rebuilding of the Ginaby College in the university	Connection
	Yarning circle: 1.13min. "Opportunity for different approaches". Allows for 2.10min "different backgrounds and collaboration", "A much more positive experience", "advances in different outcomes" in the boardroom	8.26 " Colleague Will Davis and I developed a set of guiding principles - Ginaby Wandaran Elders Principles. 9 principles to guide the rebuilding of the Ginaby College in the university	Shared leadership
	6.15min "Board development days for freewheeling".		Shared and distributed leadership

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning	
	11.52min. "Need to be planning for younger people to come onto boards"		Legacy
		2.51. "Keep a diary, record everything date and time". Be consistent with keeping records. 3.22. "Self-recording for difficult contexts is really important". 3.31. "Shared memory of other people".	Truth telling
		17.00. "I'm portable - going through those things, the way institutions treat Aboriginal people"	Insider outsider, resilience

The discussion about Indigenous themes of connection, leadership models and yarning emerged from the interviews. The responses by the participants individually throughout the interviews suggest that these themes could be utilised as initiatives to be developed further. There is mention of these as guiding principles in these interviews before the first PAR panel session.

4.3. Advisory panel sessions

The AP were prescriptive as to the way in which we moved forward as a group considering the knowledge being developed. My role within the group was to collate and present the data for review by the panel for the next cycle of the PAR.

It's your thesis, so you listen to us, you formulate and come back to us with a proposal, make adjustments and consider them and bring them back to the panel. At least three cycles around the action research and you get a verifiable response. (Uncle N)

Due to the panel members' other commitments and time constraints the third Panel Session was conducted via three separate meetings for each of the members. During these meetings the AP members were each informed of each other's input. One of the panel members was unable to attend the second session but through conversation with me and by reviewing the Panel summation, they felt comfortable to have meaningful input at the next session.

The PAR process was utilised to refine and validate the data throughout the three cycles for this research. Figures 5 to 7 (Spreadsheets) and Figures 6, 8, and 10 (Learnings from Panel Sessions) below in this section are the data as presented to the AP throughout the PAR cycles. These inserts are artefacts of the research and are a distillation of recorded sessions of the initial individual interviews and AP sessions that were approved by the AP with each cycle of PAR. They are merely presented for the discretion of the readers viewing to demonstrate the cyclic process of PAR and are a record of the Indigenous yarning methodology employed for the AP sessions.

The spreadsheets below consist of direct quotes and capture comments from each of the panel members. They are grouped via colour coding into the main themes that were submitted for discussion. The three emerging themes of

Connection, Leadership Model and Yarning are colour coded as per the following key in Figures 5 to 7.

Key:

Green – Connection

Yellow – Leadership Model

Pink - Yarning

Direct quotes by the panel members have also been cited from these spreadsheets throughout this thesis and article.

Additionally learning statements (Figures 6, 8, and 10) were utilised to stimulate further discussion, validation, or additions to the body of knowledge being developed throughout this process. The final summary in the form of a draft of the three panel sessions was submitted to the panel members for approval via email so that the data could be used as the platform for the writing of the thesis and article. The learning statements were provided to the panel after each session and ahead of the next scheduled panel session, except for the final session where a draft summary was provided afterwards for validation. This approach was consistent throughout the three cycles of the PAR process. Agreement was sought as to the accuracy and further validation of emerging themes.

The provocation for the first PAR session was the distillation of the key discussion points in (Figures 2 to 4) consisting of comments from initial individual interviews by the participants. The conceptual framework (Figure 1), was presented at this time, including the topics that emerged from the literature review. Figure 5 is the spreadsheet of comments in the first AP session from all participants including me (Bill) as the researcher, and are colour coded as indicated.

Key:

Green – Connection

Yellow – Leadership Model

Pink - Yarning

Figure 5
PAR panel session 1

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning		
First Panel session 4.8.22				
The panel requested That I distil the data from the three interviews prior to the panel, the recorded panel session to be presented at the next panel session.				
Uncle N: 31.40. "It's your thesis, so you listen to us", you formulate and come back to us with a proposal, make adjustments and consider them and bring them back to the panel. 32.56. "At least three cycles around the action research and you get a verifiable response"				
Uncle W	Uncle R	Uncle N	Bill	Thoughts
1.02. Govt boards: structure driven, Community boards: what is the purpose of this organisation? Why are we here what are we doing, meet on country.	.58. Define the difference between NFP and commercial Boards: different approaches			Preliminary thoughts concerning the operational aspect of a boardroom. The discussion developed further into looking at the principles for a boardroom. These could be considered universal having a positive influence on the tone and culture of the boardroom environment.

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning		
	1.24. without adequate consultation you can only provide personal identification of issues. Without looking to the rest of the community who may have different issues to you. The Yarning circle gives people their chance.	1.25. What sits in the centre for a boardroom	1.20. Without shared and distributed leadership the opportunity to explore is lost	Connection, shared and distributed leadership, yarning
1.27. Nuance: what we don't talk about. Indigenous board setting: silence is a tool for listening. Other board's silence can mean agreement. It doesn't mean that in Aboriginal terms. Agenda dictates: not the means to make an effective decision. 1.28. Data dominates: Data doesn't mean the solution.		1.31. Learn more as you get older, shared leadership not hierarchical more accommodating as you mature. 1.35. Structure relating to country really important		Connection, shared and distributed leadership
1.37, Food used as a connection		1.41. Order and connection are already here, 1.52. Action research: revisitation strong connections made we need to get back together	1.40, Principle based decision making	Connection
The time for meetings should be "based on the reason why we are here for the meeting" not just the agenda". Should be grounded to this reason		20.10. Respect, the greater meaning of respect, 20.19. Centredness of Western society distributed and connected approach that Aboriginal people have. 20.40. "The inside learning is you doing what you are doing		

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning		
		and as long as you're doing that this knowledge persists"		
The language we use, Can be used the wrong way to bully etc: in a board meeting. 20.35. Labelled if you disagree "put in a camp" (majority bullying by democracy)				

The PAR cycles were repeated throughout the research phase of the project. Below, (Figure 6) is the summary developed by me as the researcher of the first AP session, as presented to the panel ahead of the second AP session for validation about the correct interpretation of the data.

Both Figure 6 below and the spreadsheet of the AP session one (Figure 5) were presented in the second AP session for the provocation of discussion.

Figure 6
Learnings from first panel session

Learnings:

After further examination of the data to date, including the first Expert PAR Advisory Panel session it appeared that there were three themes emerging.

Priorities for a boardroom:

Connection (ontological), (**foundational**) for everything, underpins the mode of operation.

The principle of connection and trust appears to be missing in a boardroom today.

Time taken to gain understanding and an appreciation of this co-dependency and connectedness to all around us would no doubt be of great benefit and influence the tone and course of the boardroom meeting.

Leadership models: Shared and Distributed: topics such as tokenism, collaboration, assimilation, abyssal thinking cognitive diversity are all products of and the amount displayed are determined by the leadership model or styles employed in the boardroom. The Boardroom can explore or just analyse. (**The way to**) influence.

Yarning: Operationally this mode is the flux or enabler for better more inclusive board functioning. (**The how to**) operate and facilitate the boardroom functioning.

Session 2 involved further reflecting, developing, and refining of the data as per the PAR process. The validated learning statement and the spreadsheets from session one informed the second session. Attached below, Figure 6 is the spreadsheet of comments made in the second AP session from all participants including myself.

Key:

Green – Connection

Yellow – Leadership Model

Pink - Yarning

Figure 7
PAR panel session 2

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning		
Second Panel Sessions 5 th September 2022 and 15 th September 2022				
Second cycle of P.A.R. Further confirmation and distillation of the topics. The themes of Connection, Shared and distributed leadership and the Yarning Circle were proposed as per the learning statement sheet given to participants prior to the second session as Emerging themes that could impact positively on the boardroom.				
Possible recommendations				

Uncle W	Uncle R	Uncle N	Bill	Thoughts
5 th September 2022	5 th September 2022	5 th September 2022	5 th September 2022	
Uncle W was unable to participate for health reasons at the time	Isolated individuals in the boardroom, often don't have a support group. Aboriginal leader- considers "how will this affect my community", coming from connection. Genuine respect and consideration for Indigenous matters. Cultural awareness training must be continuous. Opportunity to get on country. Country is not just physical it is everywhere. Country owns everyone. Colonials approach: they were given land, "this is mine exclusive this is where troubles start"		Facilitate awareness. How do we cater for minorities in the boardroom? Cultural awareness training. We are part of, not separate to Country. "The level of interaction has to move beyond agency in debate", this is difficult without a sense of connection to all, a sense of purpose.	Human elements the lost skills. Boardrooms seem to have overlooked this in their drive for efficiency and performance. The basics of connection to purpose: the why, what, when, how.
	Leadership focus: produces different outcomes. The mix of the board, acceptance of diversity. Tokenistic measures in boardrooms. "Collaborative looks at both sides of the fence".		"Cognitive diversity is promoted under shared and distributed leadership"	
	"Yarning promotes equal input". Meeting informally before the meeting. Yarning builds confidence of board members. Use of a yarning stick helps with orderly progression. The process is underpinned by respect.		Chairs skills to facilitate and extract input from board members is crucial. Training for chairs and board members "to cultivate and explore ways of arriving at a point and not necessarily within the rigidity of structure"	Principle based decision making underpinned by respect and grounded to country (connection)

15 th September 2022	15 th September 2022	15 th September 2022	15 th September 2022	
Uncle W was unable to participate in the Zoom Session as he was not in coverage but I will seek his input at a future time.		Respect older knowledge. "Other Knowledge is Possible" (Santos DeSousa)	Human element in the boardroom tends to be forgotten when working in the business	
	Appreciate different views.	"Forgive each other, don't take sides". Yarning circle: there is a universal understanding by participants, agreed that it is beneficial, a relational approach.		
	Yarning: story telling in an Indigenous context consisted of "two people beside the storyteller to keep the story straight". These were like prompts or witnesses. There was a respect for listening carefully to accurately record accounts and knowledge.	"See an organisation as a living thing". "Respectful Design" (Norm Sheehan)		Story telling in a modern non-Indigenous sense can end up like Chinese whispers with the account being distorted. The skill of listening does not seem to be as important or as respectful as in a culture that is oratory.
		Yarning circle is always under attack, The essence of the circle needs to be protected. "The truth is always down the track, it unfolds". (Bohm) speaks about dialog and how the yarning circle was the easiest methodology to facilitate his discussion on Quantum Physics.		Yarning circle helps uncover the best outcome: truth

Following the AP Session 2, a statement of learnings was developed by me as the researcher, distilling this discussion. Conformation was sought regarding the validity of this statement (Figure 8) below, which became the provocation along with the AP Session 2 spreadsheets (Figure 9) for the next session.

Figure 8

Learnings from the second panel session

Learnings from the second panel session

The second cycle of the PAR process almost appeared to be repetitious. There was a further refining or confirmation of the themes that are relevant to the research question, **(What are the challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership roles on executive and management boards of Western organisations?)**

The topics of:

Connection to our surroundings as being **foundational** (our ontological belief)

Leadership Models: Shared and distributed is **the way** to influence the tone and culture of a boardroom.

Yarning Circle: is the **how to**, the flux or enabler operationally for the boardroom to be more inclusive.

The aspects that have been unpacked in the panel sessions in an Indigenous context are issues that present themselves considering the core difference between the well understood **extended family model** in the broader Indigenous community and the more familiar **nucleus family** in a Western setting.

These differences seem to be at the centre of some of the issues that present themselves in a boardroom. The topics of connection, shared and distributed leadership and yarning, can be seen as a contribution to improve the practice of a boardroom and assist pale-skinned Aboriginal men who are trying to work within the system.

Session three of the AP involved a further cycle of reflection, development, and refinement of the data as per PAR. The spreadsheet (Figure 6) from the second AP session and the validated learning statement from Session 2 (Figure 8) were discussed. Attached below, Figure 7, is the spreadsheet of comments in the third AP session from all participants including myself as the researcher.

Key:

Green – Connection

Yellow – Leadership Model

Pink - Yarning

Figure 9
PAR panel session 3

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning		
Third Panel Session 1/11/22				
<p>Due to panel members commitment and time constraints the third panel session was conducted via three separate meeting for each of the members. During the course of these meetings, I informed each member of the others input to add to the discussion.</p>				
<p>Presentation of the main themes for confirmation as recommendations relating to my research question. To seek translation of these for boardrooms generally. Suggestion to the panel of these themes as being my contribution to practice in the boardroom and to seek validation of these. Leadership and Yarning.</p>	<p>There was agreement that the three themes and the consideration of these were integral to the improved functioning of the boardroom. Uncle N: 30.20 " all this stuff you have got makes sense to me". Uncle W: 0.13 "I think it's really good", 0.36 "I am totally into the fact that in order to run a boardroom etc, connection is your number one process that needs to be understood".</p>			

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning		
Uncle W	Uncle R	Uncle N	Bill	Thoughts/ Reflection
1 st November 2022	28 th October 2022	Th November 022		
0.44 connection not just about the boardroom	Strive to gain the respect of other board members	17.32 identity will be made political in the up-coming referendum "who are the real blackfellas" to cause division. 23.29 affirmation of the violence and the need for reparation. 24.01 Uncle Norm suggested the remove the term pale-skinned		Possible contribution to theory, the suggestion of a principle-based decision making triangle that consists of principles at the top, law and technical on opposing corners at the bottom, balancing on a pendulum of respect which is grounded to country/everything. This correlates to, and is enhanced by the application of the three themes of Connection, Shared and Distributed Leadership and Yarning.
4.39 suggestion of best practice, electronic records visual and audio for accountability to words that are spoken, transparency	Respect should be the heart of the whole organisation	20.20 "Fly on the wall" Pale skinned Aboriginal exists between. " the Whitefellas will say things in front of him that they won't say in front of us"		Principles are our why and connection are we really focused on that, do we remind ourselves. Do we allow ourselves to be distracted by other parts of the triangle such as the legal or technical argument.

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning		
14.02 Good leadership is where parity is demonstrated treated as equals	Boardroom a safe environment, inclusion and collaboration	25.34 complexities around race are very destructive and powerful.		Technical and legal arguments can polarise each other. Have you ever been part of a boardroom that places too much weight on the experts opinion. (the destination can be arrived at a number of different ways, that's what experts do they solve problems) They can forget the principle of why they are making a decision. they can forget about where they started.
16.21 the Chair demonstrates leadership and reciprocity	Respect not just for each other but for everything around us. Our why	26.46 "Mission mindset, division and control"		How do we build layers of awareness. Consider the human element
17.39 the physical layout of the boardroom can be a barrier to demonstrating shared leadership		29.19 Commitment from everybody present. Focus on purpose		The three areas foundational, how well are we connected to our why, purpose. Are we constantly reminding ourselves of these principles. Do we forget the basics of being a human being, we get stuck in the boardroom.
24.18 shared leadership promotes trust tried and proven		30.00 responsible for actions shows respect. 30.29 lack of integrity can be manifested in different ways, over reach of experts, dollar driven or publicity.	8.52 remain constant to our core purpose	

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning		
39.06 Building levels of awareness about connection can start to change the tone and culture of the boardroom		31.54 "looseness around power is at the centre of Western processes". "An expert's position is seen to have great power". "Principles are: 1. an agreed position they bring the group together, 2. based on respect is how we care for our surroundings, and 3. integrity, these forms relationships".	30.05 hierarchical model agency rather than collaboration	
44.17 the human senses have been depleted (yarning circle the men brushes the ground before commencement. Crushed gum leaves and trod them into the ground and swept again so your surroundings are part of the meeting through the sense of smell) Bring an artefact from country into the boardroom.		"Indigenous culture index to country rather than power or persons"	30.21 democracy can be bullying by majority	
47.28 the extended family model is not understood in a Western setting		32.54 Influences on integrity: don't want to be seen to lose money, publicity with a motive to cover things up.		
51.48 colonial parliamentary process.			55.29 transactional thinking or trade-offs are entrenched in boardrooms	
1.02.26 an artefact from country to help the board focus on purpose and connection. Something that has meaning from country.			57.15 a greater level to formalised training for boardroom members is required.	

Connection	Leadership Model	Yarning		
1.13.51 an organisation is a living thing (Uncle N) encompasses all.			1.08 the degree of things such as tokensim, assimilation etc , that is manifested is dependent upon the quality of leadership displayed	
			1.15.01 what are we doing to nourish the organisation if it is a living thing?	
			30.29 in a boardroom setting an expert consultant is often given a brief or term of reference by which they advise a boardroom. If these are not based on the groups' principles then opportunity for a lack of integrity can encroach on sound principle based decision making.	

4.3.1. Final learnings from PAR session 3

The learnings of the final panel session developed by me as the researcher, (Figure 10) below, were presented for approval by the AP after the third and final PAR session to ensure that they were comfortable with the data to inform the next phase of this research project.

Figure 10

Summary of panel sessions

Summary of panel sessions

Participatory Action Research (PAR) via the three expert advisory panel sessions was a process of establishing, refining and confirmation of the themes that are relevant to the research question, **(What are the challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership roles on executive and management boards of Western organisations?)**

The aspects that have been unpacked in the panel sessions are issues that present themselves considering the core difference between the well understood **extended family model** in the broader Indigenous community, the accountabilities with this model, and the **nuclear family** in a Western setting.

These differences seem to be at the centre of some of the issues that present themselves in a boardroom for Aboriginal people in this setting. The three themes below are aspects that can be seen as a contribution to improve the practice of a boardroom and assist pale-skinned Aboriginal men who are trying to work within the system. Further, they could also be recommendations or reflections for boards to consider or evaluate their performance.

The topics of:

Connection to our surroundings as being **foundational** (our ontological belief).

Nothing happens outside of connection as we do not exist separately. Layers of understanding about connection can be built upon in a boardroom setting.

Leadership Models: Shared and distributed is **the way** to influence the tone and culture of a boardroom. This model fosters collaboration and a willingness to participate and is based on parity rather than hierarchical structure that manifests agency around the boardroom table.

Yarning Circle: is the **how to**, the flux or enabler operationally for the boardroom to be more inclusive. It is adaptable, agreed upon as beneficial, relational. It can cultivate a willingness for a boardroom to explore new approaches and ideas through dialogue rather than just analyse information.

It emerged from the AP discussion that challenges arise for pale-skinned Aboriginal men in board positions when these emergent themes are not operating. These themes are grounded on respect and connected as part of “Indigenous culture indexed to Country” (Uncle N). The data clearly demonstrates the importance of these as guiding principles for the improved operation of the boardroom meeting. These guiding principles are discussed in detail in the publishable article (in Chapter 5).

The discussion section of Chapter 5 expands further on the benefits for boardrooms that are willing to explore these guiding principles over and above the normal mainstream convention of the dominant operating model for the boardroom environment. There was focused discussion by the AP regarding the dominant Westminster model of operation with its hierarchical framework generally utilised by boardrooms. Part of the discussion highlighted the Westminster model’s shortcomings in relation to the intent of the emergent themes and their ability to disrupt the current majority rules and assimilative behaviour in a boardroom. The hierarchical framework of the Westminster system was agreed to be responsible for some of the challenges that pale-skinned Aboriginal men face working within this system.

4.4. Westminster – the status quo

The Westminster system of operation for board meetings can create stumbling blocks for minority pale-skinned Aboriginal men accustomed to a collective leadership culture (Sveiby, 2011). The Westminster meeting rules and the format of debate, of speakers for and against is restrictive. It can be intimidating for some members of the boardroom to participate. The Westminster system is referred to as “power games” or there is an assumption made “that people need to be controlled” and that it “sets people up to debate opposites” (Uncle N). This is apparent by the subtlety of falling into the trap of preparing an argument for a single opportunity to speak, outweighing the priority of actively listening and interpreting. That person can then find themselves in a position of contributing from a narrow perspective to win the debate. The opportunity to explore the topic before the board can be largely depleted given its reliance on narrow ‘for’ or ‘against’ positions taken in debate and used to determine outcomes. Mention was made of this depleted opportunity as “tokenistic gestures to seek out knowledge to inform decision making” (Uncle W).

The panel's collective experience has shown that decisions and actions can become very transactional in their intent under the Westminster system. Uncle N referred to dominant themes that sway decision-making and "little appreciation for other determinants or benefits in arriving at a decision". The situation for stunted or incomplete outcomes may be the end result. This falls far short of the intent of the emergent themes of connection, shared and distributed leadership and yarning, recommended as guiding principles to enhance the mode of operation for boardrooms.

CHAPTER 5: PUBLISHABLE ARTICLE SUBMISSION

5.1. Overcoming challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men on mainstream Western boards

Based on the outcomes of the research, a publishable article titled, “Overcoming challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men on mainstream Western boards” is submitted in this chapter as part of this thesis. Given the apparent dearth of information in the literature about the relationship of pale-skinned Aboriginal men to the boardroom environment and the challenges they face, this publishable paper is exploratory. The paper suggests the possibility of applying the Indigenous models of connection, shared and distributed leadership and yarning as recommended guiding principles for operations of the boardroom to help overcome or mitigate these challenges. The application of the guiding principles within the boardroom are likely to help address some of the challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men, but more broadly assist with how minorities interface with the boardroom in general as well as potentially benefiting all board members. Additionally, an artefact, developed by me as the researcher, is illustrated below in Figure 2 (Conceptual Model) which relates to principle-based decision-making and is proposed as part of this study. The conceptual model puts forward the suggestion that principle-based decision-making is essentially linked to the recommended guiding principles to facilitate sound decision-making by the boardroom. The model advances the idea of true north for the boardrooms focus is based on connection with its foundations built on respect and how these are enhanced by consideration of the recommended guiding principles.

This article is positioned within the guidelines of the University of Southern Queensland’s policy for Thesis by Publication which includes the provision that papers have been published, accepted, submitted, or prepared for publication during the period of candidature. The input of supervisors, Professor Karen Trimmer and Associate Professor Renee Desmarchelier is recognised and appreciated. The researcher’s contribution to data collection, interpretation, analysis, and development of knowledge as part of the PAR process in collaboration with an AP was more than 80%.

**Overcoming challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men on
mainstream Western boards**

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Overcoming challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men on mainstream Western boards

Abstract: This research explores impacts and influences of participation of pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership positions on executive and management boards within mainstream work environments from a first-person perspective.

There is currently a dearth of research regarding knowledge, experience, and insights of these insider men and, therefore, potential ways to overcome negative impacts and influences, and harness positive impacts and influences by investigating alternative approaches to boardroom practice.

A Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach with three pale-skinned Aboriginal men with board experience generated themes of *connection, shared and distributed leadership, and yarning* as foundational guiding principles which might make for more inclusive culture in mainstream boardrooms. These guiding principles have been utilised by First Nations people for centuries and are critical for the wellbeing of communities. However, they are not recognised or validated within the dominant mainstream boardroom environment and this impacts on the perceptions of pale-skinned Aboriginal men as being valued for their contributions within mainstream boardrooms.

A conceptual model for principle-based decision-making was developed to assist in overcoming some of the challenges pale-skinned Aboriginal men face in the boardroom. The elements of the model consist of principles, the law, and technical aspects that are underpinned by respect, which influences the decision-making process. Focus and alignment with the guiding principles could potentially find boardroom decision-making grounded and connected to the community it serves and has potential to positively impact the legacies left by boardrooms.

Key words: boardroom, leadership, Aboriginal, principle-based decision-making, pale-skinned, first-person.

1. Introduction

This paper presents a first-person researcher's view of challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership positions on executive and management boards within Western mainstream work environments. The overarching assumption for this study takes the position of Aboriginal ontology of "the concept of connectedness to all of creation" (Grieves, 2009, p. 200). As a descendant of the Awabakal Nation and currently, a local government elected representative, I am an insider embedded in the system of local government while simultaneously being an outsider (Sanders, 2008) as a representative of a minority population as a pale-skinned Aboriginal board member. Ultimately caught in the middle of representing both community and organisation, negotiating the unique overlay of identity and roles means being constantly mindful of being flexible, "not fixed or frozen as insider and outsider positions must be fluid" (Hurley & Jackson, 2020, p. 45).

1.2 Background

Being situated as a practitioner with lived experience as a board member in public office as a pale-skinned Aboriginal man comes with sometimes competing layers of unique complexities.

I often have the uncomfortable feeling of pressure or temptation to ignore my heritage and responsibilities to take the path of least resistance in the process of decision making, potentially allowing myself to be assimilated as part of the privileged majority. I am often aware of the unspoken idea and a sense that my board colleagues are trying to locate my identity position: 'is he thinking black or white?'. Such experiences engender a feeling of an idealised identity being ascribed to me which may impact on the merit or credibility of what I contribute as an experienced practitioner. Hickey and Austin (2009) refer to this type of identity ascription as failing "to see the racial implications of 'whiteness' itself – it is the way that the racial Other is formulated and ascribed meaning and value" (p. 14). There is a sense that colleagues and other participants in the boardroom do not quite know where I fit with their concepts and try to reconcile this in their own minds. This has manifested on occasions with the question of 'what percentage Aboriginal are you?'. This question highlights the need for the majority to classify "implicitly re-enforcing a white center of normality by comparison" (Hickey & Austin, 2009, p. 14). Looking white because of skin colour and identifying as Aboriginal often causes confusion. Being pale-skinned can mean finding myself in a position of being overlooked for roles or as a practitioner within Western systems.

There can be assumptions made about the extent of your cultural knowledge with pale-skin being equated with a lack of cultural connection due to not looking ‘Aboriginal enough’. Conversely, pale skin may not meet the corporate needs of an organisation as it does not fit the quintessential view of what an Aboriginal should look like (Paradies, 2016).

The challenges of a sense of not fully belonging or being recognised as an Aboriginal person because of skin colour leads to complexities in board participation not often recognised in literature. It can be a constant battle of evaluation by others and feelings of isolation that at times can challenge my core values. It can seem like a constant erosion of the very integrity of identity. There is mention about Indigenous experience more broadly in other areas in the literature. However, there is a scarcity of specific mention about this topic in the boardroom setting and even more so about relating to pale-skinned Aboriginal men in this environment.

The aim of this research was to not just identify the challenges faced by these men but to explore solutions to these problems by recognising the fundamental value and possibilities that Indigenous models offer as a way forward for improving boardroom operations to assist pale-skinned Aboriginal men and more broadly for all participants in this environment. Considering some of the gaps in the literature there is need to explore the following questions as the basis for this research to better understand the challenges for pale-skinned Aboriginal men in the boardroom.

1.3 The principal research question for this study was:

What are the challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership roles on executive and management boards of Western organisations?

Sub-research questions

1. How do leadership styles used within boards align or conflict with the role of representing local Aboriginal communities?
2. What strategies/models can be developed to accommodate Aboriginal leadership styles within boards of Western organisations?

These questions assisted in the development of a Conceptual Model for Principle-based Decision-Making.

To seek to understand the unique inherent challenges for similarly placed pale-skinned Aboriginal males, a conceptual framework to guide the project was developed by examining relevant literature. The framework, illustrated in Figure A, acted as a provocation for an Advisory Panel (AP) as part of PAR. The AP was established to reflect on the challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men in the context of a boardroom setting and make recommendations for guiding principles to assist boardroom operations. The framework in Figure 1 has four parts: (1) Aboriginal men in leadership on mainstream Western boards; (2) tokenism and minority; (3) insider and outsider; and (4) assimilation.



Figure A: Conceptual framework – Challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men on mainstream Western boards.

2. Literature review

Topics 1 to 4 below reflect challenges that pale-skinned Aboriginal men face in the boardroom setting. They were presented as supporting information from the literature to the AP to provoke discussion and subsequent reflection about possible solutions to help address some of the challenges these men face.

2.1. Aboriginal men in leadership positions on mainstream Western boards

Aboriginal men in leadership positions can experience disconnect within the boardroom environment as boardrooms and Indigenous society are founded on different operating models of leadership. There is a lack of critical understanding of the cultural differences between the extended family model with broader accountabilities to elders and

community (Sveiby, 2011) that is familiar to Indigenous circles compared to the nuclear family structures commonly recognised in Western society. Traditionally, “Aboriginal circles of knowledge did not allow for a single dominating leader” (Foley, 2010, p. 138) like that identified within hierarchical leadership models that typically form the basis of operations in boardrooms. Hierarchical models imposed on Aboriginal societies, or their representatives in the boardroom, create challenges for these Aboriginal leaders operating in the middle (Stewart & Warn, 2017) of these two models of leadership. Sveiby (2011) concurs that hierarchical leadership styles, when imposed, cause problems for collective leadership. In contrast, a shared and distributed leadership model “... acknowledges the work of all individuals that contribute to leadership practice” (Harris & Spillane, 2008, p. 31). These types of collective leadership models were developed by First Nation peoples (Sveiby, 2011) and are still culturally appropriate today. Opportunity can be lost for the boardroom to harness collective wisdom and diversity to help shape its decision-making process, where a hierarchical model dominates.

This can be exacerbated by the complexities of identity for pale-skinned Aboriginal men in the boardroom of being “too white to be black or too black to be white” (Foley, 2000, p. 47). Paradies (2016) describes the issues of identity as the bias of a quintessential view of what Indigenous people should look like which is projected by the majority non-Indigenous population toward the Indigenous minority. This finds “an increasing number of Indigenous people vulnerable to accusations of inauthenticity” (Paradies, 2016, p. 355), particularly pale-skinned Aboriginal men in the boardroom setting.

2.2. Tokenism and minority

Tokenism and being a minority on a board manifest in several ways. Tokenism is often manifested by way of superficial appointments of minority members on boards to tick a box as part of the criteria to meet a diversity quota. The far more important issue that presents itself for pale-skinned Aboriginal representatives on boards is the situation of finding themselves at odds with Western governance models because of the general disregard for the validity of Indigenous governance models (Lee & Tran, 2016). Incomprehension of these Indigenous models and a lack of willingness to explore them to discover potential benefits for the governance and operations of the boardroom beyond conventional Western models are the obvious issue for pale-skinned Aboriginal men working in this environment. Intent displayed by a board beyond superficial appointments is often lacking congruency by the absence of a

desire to understand and place credibility on these models. Additionally, tokenism displayed either unintentionally or intentionally has resulted in Indigenous people experiencing the feeling of disconnection, being overlooked, and not considered to have valid and equal input. There are a range of topics discussed in the literature relating to the boardroom and workplace environments regarding the need for diversity. The lack of focus afforded to this in the boardroom can be manifested by tokenistic gestures as well (Abdullah & Ku Ismail, 2017). Opportunity is lost without any genuine intention for inclusion and diversity in the boardroom to facilitate engagement in different ways of knowing and doing and explore options, rather than just analysing the information presented (Reynolds & Lewis, 2017).

Beyond tokenism, is the potential for the Indigenous principles of shared and distributed leadership and yarning to facilitate a safe and respectful environment (Donovan, 2016) that fosters a diverse contribution which is valued as equal by all participants (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). These principles are likely to mitigate the effects of tokenism and cultivate conditions for cognitive diversity (Reynolds & Lewis, 2017), where participants feel safe to contribute and bring forward different ideas within a boardroom that is willing to explore leadership and decision-making beyond normal methods of operation.

2.3. Insider and outsider

There has been constant narration and classification of Aboriginal people since colonisation (Dodson, 1994). It is important for Aboriginal people to embrace their diversity and not subscribe to narrow assimilative views of the prescribed titles of insider and outsider positions within a Western structure. Alongside this, the focus should be on the value that is contributed from relationships and connectedness to all (Hughes & Barlo, 2021), rather than being classified by others' views. Insider and outsider viewpoints are described as positions that are dependent upon each other and are referred to as “complementary leadership styles” (Sanders, 2008, p. 145) which coexist in public life. Taking a narrow view of these positions can impact the way Aboriginal people view themselves and are viewed by others (Bennett, 2015). These positions “are not fixed or frozen and hence insider and outsider positions ...” (Hurley & Jackson, 2020, p. 45) can be viewed as simultaneously dependent upon an individual's experience in contrast to the limiting perception ascribed to Indigenous leaders through the prism of assimilative classification.

2.4. Assimilation

Keskitalo (2020, p. 23) uses the example that “conscious and unconscious assimilative practices” have been forced upon Indigenous Sami people by mainstream culture. Similar results due to colonial practices are in effect for Indigenous peoples in Australia. These practices are reinforced by the inappropriate use of majority rules in the boardroom as “conscious unconscious assimilative practices” (Keskitalo, 2020, p. 23). Boardrooms need to move beyond projecting bias upon others of minority and the propensity to classify Aboriginal people in essentialised ways that are referred to by Paradies (2016). Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike have subscribed to mainstream assimilative thinking regarding the topic of Indigeneity. The view of “essentialised Indigeneity ... is formed ... around specific fantasies of exclusivity” (Paradies, 2016, p. 355). Essentialised views put at risk many Indigenous people, for example, pale-skinned people as being “vulnerable to accusations of inauthenticity” (Paradies, 2016, p. 355).

Neo-colonialist assimilationist thinking that Aboriginal people need to conform to the dominant majority beliefs (Hart, 2018), is still present in mainstream society today. However, others argue that these assimilative paradigms need to be resisted (Keskitalo, 2020). Many Aboriginal people, and more specifically pale-skinned Aboriginal men, do not have the knowledge of their lineage, which is attributed to their disconnection from family and culture due to colonialist policies and interventions.

3. Methods

This research was conducted within the Indigenous context of the ontological position of being connected to all and everything (Grievess, 2009). PAR was chosen for this research and utilised in conjunction with an advisory panel who collaborated at each of the panel sessions by questioning, testing, and refining the developing data through yarning within each cycle of PAR as a “recursive process that involves a spiral of adaptable steps” (McIntyre, 2008, p. 6). The methodology of PAR was chosen, allowing me as the researcher to be embedded in the research as a co-author (Evans et al., 2009). PAR “is built upon the notion that knowledge generation is a collaborative process in which each participants’ diverse experiences and skills are critical to the outcome of the work” (Brydon, et. al., p, 387). The utilisation of the AP was ideally suited to the process of PAR methodology for this research by emphasising the co-creation of knowledge which complimented the cyclic nature of PAR. The attributes of PAR highlighted here reinforce the Indigenous ontological position of

connection, according to Grieve (2009) and that “PAR is in keeping with Indigenous cosmologies where relationships are at the center” (Brydon, et. al., p. 395) of the research. PAR facilitates a genuine platform for the research to be conducted, in keeping with Indigenous principles of knowledge creation and connection.

The AP consisted of four pale-skinned Aboriginal men with boardroom expertise, including me as the researcher. This allowed a focus on the lived experiences of the panel members allowing them to narrate the research consistent with the objectives of PAR (Evans et al., 2009). The AP met three times after initial individual interviews.

The AP agreed to de-identify the participants due to possible sensitivities with previous roles held by AP members. The AP members, excluding me, are all respected elders and are referred to as Uncles. The first letter of their first name was used to identify their individual voices.

The participants’ broad range of combined experience and skills were valuable, adding depth and richness to the research. These spanned across different sectors including Boards in the not for profit sector, (all panel members), education, (Uncles W, R, N), Universities, (Uncles W, R, N) health including Aboriginal Medical Services, (Uncles W, R, Bill), primary health networks, (Uncle R), Tribunal Review Panels, (Uncle R), Aboriginal arts, (Uncle N) Ministerial Advisory Boards, (Uncle N, Bill) local government, (Bill), Commonwealth Regional Development Board, (Bill). Alongside these sectors there exists experience in associated career paths covering considerable periods of time.

The method of yarning was used to facilitate PAR throughout the three cycles conducted for this research, and included all interviews, and AP sessions. Yarning is readily adaptable where protocols and procedures can be designed for different settings (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010). The method of yarning was chosen as the principles applied are consistent with being part of the research and not being isolated from it. Yarning in the circle format allows for equality and connectedness (Barlo et al., 2020). Yarning involves equally valued input (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010) which encourages participation, contribution, and connection by cultivating “a relationship of respect and accountability with the places you live and work and research” (Hughes & Barlo, 2021, p. 361).

Ethics was approved by the regional university HREC (H21REA279) and provisions included a participant information sheet and consent forms. Consistent with the Australian

Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS, 2020), ethical research was conducted respectfully of the knowledge, expertise, and experiences of all participants.

4. Data collection and analysis

The method of snowballing was used to recruit the participants. The first participant was known to me as the researcher and in turn made referrals to other potential participants (Sadler et al., 2010). Another two participants were selected specific to the central research questions' criteria of pale-skinned Aboriginal men with board experience.

Collection of data from the initial participant interviews was via audio recordings. Initial thematic analysis was conducted and summarised into spreadsheets prior to the first AP session. Braun & Clark (2012) refer to six phases that can be employed as part of thematic analysis. They highlight the importance of choosing a method that is appropriate to the research question and that it is flexible. The chosen process utilised these phases below:

- Repeatedly listening to the audio recordings of the interviews to carefully consider the interpretation of the participants' intent when analysing and capturing the data.
- Collating the data into themes.
- Generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
- The use of selected extracts of the analysis relating to the research question and literature. (Braun & Clark, 2012)

Summaries of the data in the form of spreadsheets were submitted as provocation for the first AP session, as part of the PAR process. Consistent with the cycles of PAR, subsequent collection, development, and analysis of the data was captured and processed the same way for each of the AP sessions. The summary data was then resubmitted at the next PAR panel session along with a statement of learnings to assist the AP to validate any possible emerging themes as the data was developed and refined within the PAR cycles. These statements were a brief summation of the main topics or themes of discussion of the previous AP session to provoke the assessment and further refinement of the data within the spreadsheets presented to the panel.

5. Results

The data collected from the PAR advisory panel highlighted the differences between the societal structures of Western and First Nations people such as the extended family model

in an Indigenous setting and the associated accountabilities with this model, in contrast to the nuclear family in a Western setting. These differences were agreed to be the cause of some of the issues that present themselves in the boardroom for pale-skinned Aboriginal men in this environment. The decision-making process within the Western boardroom setting can often overlook or be ignorant to the engagement required within the Indigenous community, compared to single points of contact and decision makers within a hierarchical structure. This difference can cause challenges for Indigenous board members in general, creating questions about the integrity of engagement as part of the decision-making process. “The extended family model is not understood in a Western setting” (Uncle W). This statement is a reminder of the broader accountabilities that a pale-skinned Aboriginal board member will be considering.

The emergent themes of *connection, shared and distributed leadership* and the *yarning circle* and the importance of inclusion of these in the boardroom to mitigate the challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men operating in this environment were the focus of the AP discussions.

5.1. Key emergent themes

5.5.1 Theme 1: Connection

Exploration of this theme by boardrooms and leadership in general could usher in greater awareness and accountability, potentially influencing the culture, behaviours and decisions of boardrooms and leaders. Awareness about the topic of connection can be built upon in layers by setting aside time to explore the idea that we are all co-dependent and reliant upon each other. “Building levels of awareness about connection can start to change the tone and culture of the boardroom” (Uncle W). An individual board member is not the board and there can be no boardroom without the group of members who are dependent upon each other to function as a board. While this concept seems basic, it is a fundamental position from which to start to create awareness of the importance of good relationships, motives, and agendas in this environment. This basic construct is the platform to build awareness that we do not exist outside of all and everything around us. This is illustrated by a quote from the second AP session, “Country is not just physical it is everywhere, it owns everyone” (Uncle R). We are not above but part of everything. When contemplating this position, a shift in our thinking, actions and participation is moved from a position of self or agency to collaboration.

The research highlighted via the personal testimonies and life experiences of fellow panel members, that awareness of our connection to all around us is vastly different to hierarchical workplace structures. The connection to Country/everything around us and the lack of awareness thereof in a Western boardroom setting appears to be a cornerstone to the challenges faced by these pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership and boardroom positions within the mainstream Western environment.

Connection was considered by the AP to be the fundamental platform upon which all else is built. Nothing happens outside of connection as we do not exist separately. Connection is based on respect for the concept of co-dependency on everything that surrounds us. A quote from an AP session, “See an organisation as a living thing, respectful design” (Uncle N). This indicates that connection is seen as not just superficial in nature but more, a holistic connection based on respect for the world in which we live. “Respect involves a generationally deep observation of relations between humans and the movement of natural systems” (Sheehan, 2011, p. 69). A quote from an AP session, “I am totally into the fact that in order to run a boardroom etc., connection is your number one process that needs to be understood” (Uncle W).

5.1.2 Theme 2: Shared and distributed leadership

The AP discussion highlighted that a shared and distributed leadership model fosters collaboration and a willingness to participate. “Good leadership is where parity is demonstrated, where all are treated as equals” (Uncle W). In contrast to this is a dependence on the skills of individuals and the consequence of a deficit in these individual’s skills that can lead to a “crisis of governance” (Bailey & Peck, 2013) within a hierarchical structure of leadership in the boardroom. This can be displayed by behaviours of “transactional thinking or trade-offs” that can be “entrenched in the boardroom” (Bill) with a tiered leadership structure. “Shared leadership promotes trust and is tried and proven” (Uncle W). The central focus of “respect should be the heart of the whole organisation” ... and the ... “boardroom a safe environment for inclusion and collaboration” (Uncle R) in the context of shared leadership. The shared and distributed leadership model was considered by the AP to be the way to influence the tone, culture, decision-making and operation of the boardroom. This would be beneficial in creating opportunities for a greater level of participation from Indigenous members to operate in a setting that is more akin to an environment that they are familiar with under the shared and distributed leadership model. This is not just exclusive to Indigenous people but fulfills the basic need for all to trust, be trusted and co-exist.

5.1.3 Theme 3: The yarning circle

The AP determined that the “yarning circle structure was always agreed upon by all participants as to the protocols and that it is to be beneficial and relational” (Uncle N).

The AP agreed that the yarning circle can be seen as the flux or an enabler operationally for a boardroom to be more inclusive. It was ‘how’ a boardroom could compliment the way it conducted the meeting. Each member of the circle is given an opportunity to contribute to the discussion as time to speak moves around the circle without interjection from other members. Utilisation of a talking piece or a yarning stick can facilitate this progression in a respectful manner, recognising the only person to speak is the one who holds the yarning stick as it is passed around the circle. This was highlighted by Uncle R that “the use of a yarning stick helps with orderly progression”. The topic that is being dealt with can be built upon in layers respectfully as collective knowledge is developed. “Yarning promotes equal input” (Uncle R) and “the process is underpinned by respect” (Uncle R). The rotation of the speaking order may continue more than once around the circle. Participants find that their questions or input may alter during this progression as answers have already been provided before it is their turn to speak. Listening actively with respect is an integral part of the successful outcomes and deliberations of the yarning circle. This method “helps to build confidence of boardroom members” (Uncle R).

At the conclusion of the AP PAR sessions, these themes were identified as guiding principles which could be utilised operationally for boardrooms to consider. They can be viewed as foundational as they have been utilised by First Nations people globally for centuries (Sveiby 2011). The research showed that these emergent themes are interrelated and that pale-skinned Aboriginal men understand their relationship and the importance of them being utilised as a collective to potentially add value to the boardroom operations. The dichotomy of operating in a dominant hierarchical environment in boardrooms where these themes are not considered or perhaps even comprehended (de Sousa Santos, 2007), contributes to the challenges these men face. This is further highlighted in the next section.

6. Model development – Principle-based decision-making model

The AP discussions regarding the three Indigenous guiding principles of connection, shared and distributed leadership, and yarning, was developed collaboratively which led to recommendations for these to be utilised as guiding principles for boardrooms to help overcome some of the challenges for pale-skinned Aboriginal men, and to be inclusive of all

board members. In addition, a conceptual model for principle-based decision-making illustrated in Figure 2, was developed by me as the researcher based on the research results that highlight the synergies with the three guiding principles to potentially enhance boardroom operations. Opinion was sought collectively from the AP to test the veracity of these concepts and their relationship to the Indigenous guiding principles.

The critical focus for a boardroom is the ability to understand the principles of connection as their primary purpose which governs why they (the board) exist, hence the position at the top of the model. Elements such as legal and technical reasoning were identified as primary factors for consideration. Both the legal and technical elements were mentioned in the AP sessions from the perspective of having an “overreach” (Uncle N). Both are presented in the model to show that they are agents who, while not exclusive, that influence the process and to demonstrate that balanced decision-making consists of multiple influencing factors.

However, it was clear that the central reference point should always be about the principles of connection to why the boardroom exists and the purpose it serves. The AP was of the view that essential linkage and understanding of the recommended guiding principles could facilitate relevant and connected outcomes. Like these principles, that operate from a position of respect, the model is congruent and balances on this position that is grounded on respect. Consideration of the Indigenous ontological viewpoint of the respect for the principle of connection to all about us (Grievés, 2009) was agreed to be the true reference point to aim for. This is highlighted by (Uncle W) as “Remembering the key principle of respect” in the data. There will always be multiple factors that weigh in on the boardroom’s decision-making. The model and its relationship to the guiding principles are presented and discussed below.

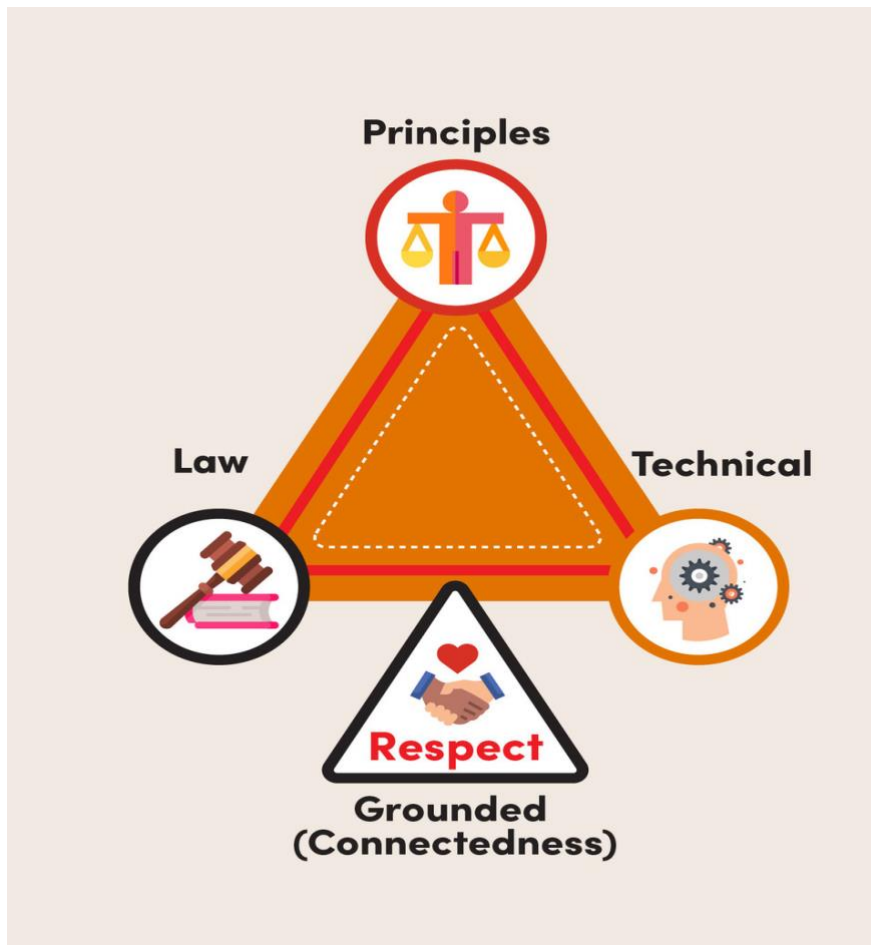


Figure B: Conceptual Model – Principle-based decision-making developed for this research (Cahill, 2023)

6.1 The concept of principle-based decision-making

As an insider researcher, I used a reflexive process, alongside the PAR panel discussions, to develop this model that relates to the boardroom and includes the following three elements: Principles, the law, and technical aspects (refer Figure B). As the researcher I propose that each of these elements influence decision-making as the main topics identified from the AP’s collective experience and knowledge included the over-reach and consideration given to both the legal and technical arguments in boardroom decision-making. These elements may be considered to cloud the importance of aiming at a principle-focused emphasis for setting the strategic direction in the boardroom. This was perceived to arise from either a passiveness by the members to investigate or that they are risk averse to several influencing factors such as finance or reputational risk. “A lack of integrity can be manifested in different ways. The overreach of experts that heavily influence the decision-making” (Uncle N). However, it is recognised that the pressures experienced in boardrooms as part of

the decision-making process are far more expansive than those suggested in the model and should not be viewed as exclusive. Additionally, careful balanced consideration of the elements collectively should be normal practice.

This triangle balances on a fulcrum of respect. Respect in this sense is much more than a stated set of values presented at a boardroom meeting. Respect should have its foundations linked to an understanding of the Indigenous themes where respect refers to connection to all around us as presented in this research. Uncle R stated that “respect should be at the heart of the whole organisation and that respect is not just for each other but for everything around us”. In practice, the legal and technical arguments can often be permitted to over reach and add imbalance to how decisions are made within the boardroom. Further, the triangle balances on a fulcrum of respect which is grounded or connected to Country as the AP was of the view that the way a boardroom operates cannot be separate to the environment it serves. The degree of understanding of this connection to everything will have a direct bearing on the effectiveness of any boardroom’s functioning.

6.1.1 The principles focus

As the researcher developing the conceptual model reflecting on why boards exist, the following questions are reasonable questions for boards to consider: *Are we in tune or connected with our surroundings and each other? How do we move beyond transactional interaction to genuine collaboration and partnership?* These questions are foundational for trust and relationships to be built between each other and the community the board serves. The themes of connection shared and distributed leadership and yarning that emerged from the research and their potential to promote good relationships within boardrooms were stimulus for these questions. Hughes and Barlo (2021, p. 361) elaborate on this by asking the question, “What might it mean for you to cultivate a relationship of respect and accountability with the places you live and work and research?” In contrast, the AP members’ experiences and observations indicated these foundations have not existed in the majority of boardrooms or organisations they have been involved in. Within a hierarchical model of leadership, they have often seen the other corners of the triangle, such as the law and technical arguments, outweighing decision-making based on core principles.

The balance of the triangle is often destabilised through adversarial debate. This is described (by Uncle N) as a “lack of integrity that can be manifested in different ways by the over-reach of experts or dollar driven or the fear of publicity”. This statement was made

when the AP was asked to comment on the principles-based decision-making conceptual model. Part of my data collection process entailed the participant's individual interviews where the research questions were covered. Here mention was made of a hierarchical structure as "setting people up to debate opposites, you don't get any truths from it when you're debating you are just trying to win the debate, you get a hierarchy" (Uncle N). In this operating environment, board members may not feel safe or confident to present new ideas or ways of thinking. The model indicates that this can be caused by the members feeling polarised by legal and technical arguments presented in the boardroom. The AP discussed how this can become the status quo. In such cases, when the emergent themes recommended as guiding principles for boardroom operations are not considered, it is unlikely that the full potential of the conceptual model can be realised. Principle-based decision-making requires all members to be able to decipher these competing arguments and contribute collaboratively to focus on potential outcomes and how problems may be reframed to achieve the best path forward.

6.1.2 The legal argument

The legal focus often heavily influences the course of decision-making, debate, or discussion in the boardroom, due to legitimate concerns around risk and litigation. Passive involvement on the part of board members can potentially result in an over reliance on the legal view to solve the issues confronting the boardroom. The level of active engagement in solving problems can also depend on the risk appetite of the boardroom and how much influence the legal argument has bearing on the outcome. Brown (2016) highlights how the pressures upon policymakers can lead to a narrow focus of "ideological ideas which will, by definition lead to policymakers failing to hear alternative views which might add value when attempting to solve a particular issue" (Brown, 2016, p. 19). The legal experts are engaged to protect the interests of the board/ organisation and to provide information about these risks. However, the solutions presented by them may be often focused on this perspective to the exclusion of other possible solutions. The data highlighted this depleted opportunity as "tokenistic gestures to seek out knowledge to inform decision-making" (Uncle W). The AP's collective experience underlined that decisions and actions can become very transactional in their intent under the Westminster system. Where there are passive board members this can lead to taking the 'path of least resistance' or effort to achieve the desired outcome in line with legal advice. However, just because legal advice is given does not necessarily make it the best possible principle-based position for a board to take or aspire to. Uncle N referred to

dominant themes swaying decision-making and “little appreciation for other determinants or benefits in arriving at a decision”. Allowing over-reach of the legal perspective to dominate the discussion can then result in a minimalist position of doing only what must be done.

6.1.3 The technical argument

The opposing corner of the triangle (technical) is just as capable of overreaching with the possibility of heavily influencing the decision-making process in a boardroom. This can also be because of passive participation by board members in problem solving, and the desire for someone to present the magic pill or the silver bullet (Dervin, 2016). Dervin clearly highlights the desire for the majority to take the easy path. Based on the experience of the AP members this statement can be applied to the boardroom as well. The ability to think critically is an essential component for the boardroom. To engage in reflective and independent thinking, construct and evaluate arguments, prioritise the relevance and importance of ideas are highly dependent on the confidence of the individuals in the boardroom to take a different view from the technical expert in the meeting. Dervin (2016) highlights also that it “takes courage to question this narrative” when referring to the majority view position. He goes on to say that he “prefers to question assumptions, things taken for granted and to shake habits rather than play the political game of marketization and branding” (Dervin, 2016, p. 92). Devin’s comments are relevant to the boardroom and it’s critical for board members to take courage and be reflective about participation. The shared collective experience and discussions of the AP raised the potential for hierarchical leadership styles to facilitate the tendency for experts to weigh in on the discussion outside of their area of expertise within a Western model of leadership and over time for the leader/expert to be the single point of contact (Foley, 2010).

The hierarchical leadership model and meeting format are not necessarily conducive to exploring the best options or solutions. There can be various ways to arrive at the same point with collective knowledge and problem solving often being overshadowed by the experts’ view or interpretation as part of a rigid Westminster-style meeting format.

There is potential for the intent of the emergent themes from this research to disrupt the current hierarchical, majority rules and assimilative behaviour in boardrooms. Evidence of these behaviours has been noted by the AP in a lack of willingness of some boardroom participants to engage in debate, reliance on rigid meeting rules and progression straight to voting to potentially push predetermined agendas. Uncle R described these actions as

“particular perspectives advanced”. This was also referred to as the “kidnapping of the agendas” (Uncle W). Furthermore, Sveiby (2011) speaks about Aboriginal leadership, highlighting that task experts find themselves in short-term roles rotated according to the task or situation. The collective is responsible for the long-term view of the group. Rotation of task experts continually reinforces the practice of valuing and treating others with respect (Sveiby, 2011). The awakening to the ability of Indigenous frameworks, such as shared and distributed leadership, yarning and connectedness is essential to facilitate a higher degree of good decision-making and active participation from board members, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. Exploring these modes of operation from a principles-based approach could add value to the boardroom setting.

7. Discussion

This research project has identified themes of *connection, shared and distributed leadership, and yarning* as guiding principles that can be applied to aid the functionality of boardrooms. Indigenous principles that have been developed and utilised by First Nation people for centuries could add value to the boardrooms. The recommended guiding principles and the conceptual model for principle-based decision-making, developed from these, when coupled together, can potentially revitalise the boardroom’s operations and relevance. The obvious synergies of connection to, and respect for, each and all around us as described earlier and are referred to by Grieves (2009) as “the concept of the connectedness of all of creation, animate and inanimate, that is the basic tenet of Aboriginal philosophy” (Grieves, 2009, p. 200). These guiding principles and the model may well be beneficial to other working environments and are foundational to connection in boardroom relationships and the relevance of the board to community they serve.

Further, the primary challenges that are experienced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership roles on executive and management boards of Western organisations relates to the lack of awareness in a Western boardroom of their connectedness to all around them. This position compounds other issues of the inability to comprehend the validity and benefits of foundational principles within these Indigenous frameworks as vehicles to connect boardrooms to their purpose and realise greater potential. This is referred to by de Sousa Santos (2007) as ‘abyssal thinking’ or something that exists outside the realm of mainstream conception therefore is not comprehensible. These challenges are further discussed in relation to each of the emergent themes in the following sections.

7.1 Connection

Connection is the fundamental platform from which all else is built upon (Grieves, 2009). We are not above but part of everything. We do not exist separately outside of this connection. This was highlighted by David Mowaljarlai, a senior lawman of the Ngarynin people of the west Kimberly, when he introduced in an ABC Radio interview the concept of “pattern thinking”. “It’s the culture, which is the blood of this country, of Aboriginal groups, of the ecology, of the land itself” (ABC Radio, The Law Report: Aboriginal Law, David Mowaljarlai, 1995) which further exemplifies the concept of connection. Awareness about the topic of connection can be built upon in layers in the boardroom environment. By setting aside time to explore the concept that we are all connected, co-dependent and reliant upon each other, the opportunity for positive improvement could be realised.

Additionally, the relationship between connection and the model of principled-based decision-making could be enhanced by a board’s clear understanding of their connection to their purpose of why the board exists. The extent of focus devoted to connection could help mitigate the tendency for boardrooms to take the easy option and succumb to the other pressures of the law and technical positions as illustrated in the model (refer Figure 2 above) that contribute to the decision-making process. Connection with and understanding of their surroundings and how they relate to these is essential for a foundation of respect to build trust.

7.2 Shared and distributed leadership model

There is a need for further contribution to the literature regarding the awareness and application of the potential benefits to a boardroom that chooses to explore this model. This model has been used extensively by First Nations people around the world for centuries. According to Sveiby, this collective leadership model is not a recent phenomenon confined to modern organisations, but rather developed by the first peoples on the earth and still practiced (Sveiby, 2011). The shared and distributed leadership model is a vehicle that potentially allows a boardroom to more freely unpack different ways of operation and decision-making rather than just analysing information. This is directly attributable to the trust that can be built by respecting each member’s input as valuable and equal and not qualified by biases such as seniority, former experience, or perceived lack of experience among other topics that may be manifested around the table. Additionally, a conventional hierarchical structure of leadership can find board members to be more likely to be risk averse to bringing forward ideas not

wanting to ‘rock the boat’ or be seen to be unpopular among their peers. Potentially within a shared and distributed model, participants are more likely to feel safe to bring forward an idea, present an opportunity or solution. This leadership model “acknowledges the work of all individuals that contribute to leadership practice” (Harris & Spillane, 2008, p. 31). The cultivation of this environment has the potential to turn passive members into active contributing members that display cognitive diversity to solve problems in a safe place.

Further, topics covered in the literature, such as tokenism, assimilation, abyssal thinking, cognitive diversity, and the degree to which these are displayed, or manifested are influenced by the leadership style or model employed in the boardroom. The boardroom can be constrained or otherwise by the degree of rigidity of the leadership model they operate under to adequately address these topics. Under a hierarchical structure there is a dependency upon individuals’ abilities to facilitate good outcomes. Deficits in their abilities under this structure potentially finds a board and leadership without “aligned interest” or a “common definition of purpose” ... resulting in a ... “crisis of governance” (Bailey & Peck, 2013, p. 144).

The model of principle-based decision-making is enhanced by the guiding principle of shared and distributed leadership. This leadership model facilitates openness and trust and is built on the respect for all having an equal standing as leaders and decision-makers. There is greater potential for focusing on principle-based decisions and not settling for second best when dealing with the business of the boardroom. Participants are less likely to be second guessing agendas of others in the boardroom under shared and distributed leadership, than in an adversarial environment of debate within a hierarchical structure. De Sousa Santos (2007) describes this as distinctions and predispositions in a Westminster system with the ‘pecking order’ of seniority and hierarchical leadership.

7.3 The yarning circle

There is a gap in the literature regarding the consideration/application of the principles and potential benefits of the operation of yarning specific to the boardroom environment. There is a need for greater enquiry into this Indigenous methodology in this setting. Inclusion of some of the operational elements highlighted in the data could help complement the boardroom environment rather than the dominant hierarchical operating model. Deficits in individual’s abilities under an ordered structure potentially find a board/leadership without aligned interests or a common definition of purpose, resulting in a

“crisis of governance” (Bailey & Peck, 2013, p144). Yarning is multilayered and protocols and procedures can be designed and utilised in different settings (Barlo et al., 2020). This research highlighted that “the yarning circle structure was always agreed upon by all participants as to the protocols and that it is to be beneficial and relational” (Uncle N). The versatility of this methodology could be readily utilised by the boardroom. The functioning of the yarning circle is conducive to participation, where everyone’s input is relied upon and equally weighted, and each person must wait their turn for contribution (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010). Yarning can cultivate a willingness for a boardroom to explore new approaches and ideas rather than just analysing information. Willingness to explore is promoted again like the leadership model where a safe space, a space where equally valued input is afforded to all participants in the yarning circle. Additionally, knowledge can be built in layers respectfully and collectively by the normal rotation of speakers around the circle. The research highlighted the yarning circle was seen as the flux or an enabler operationally for a boardroom to be more inclusive. It was ‘how’ a boardroom could compliment the way it conducted the meeting.

The model of principle-based decision-making has direct links to yarning given that in Aboriginal culture yarning connects us with Country. Hughes & Barlo (2021) cite Terare & Rawsthorne (2019) when describing Country as an Indigenous term which encompasses the ground we stand on, the sea, the sky above us, and ancestors, beings, stories, and knowledges held and alive within. Yarning is inclusive, respectful and “the protocols are to be agreed upon and beneficial” (Uncle N). The principles of yarning allow for the boardroom to focus on the objectives of why they are there which is aided by a safe environment rather than being distracted by the mechanics of a dysfunctional meeting structure. Alongside the principles of the shared and distributed leadership model this framework could allow focus on the strategic intent and the boardroom’s connection to their purpose to yield better outcomes. Hughes and Barlo (2021, p. 361) invite us to hone our skills to consider how we relate to the place we are sitting in right now. What do we feel and hear? “What it means to cultivate a relationship of respect and accountability with the places you live and work and research?”

7.4 Conclusion

Boards, whether ASX listed, government, not-for-profit or other, collectively influence nations by the very nature of the business conducted and the communities they

serve. Functions of a board such as, but not limited to, setting strategic direction, policy development, risk management, control systems and accountability, culture of decision-making as mentioned by Gaitskell (2016, p. 131), collectively impact communities. The findings arising from this research project looked at Indigenous principles that may be utilised as guiding principles for boardrooms. The synergies with the model for principle-based decision-making contribute potential to influence how boardrooms impact their community. Such influence is dependent upon the board's willingness to openly investigate the principle-based decision-making model and the intent of the guiding principles that this research has presented.

The sceptic may view these principles as utopian and fail to comprehend outside of the dominant mainstream cultural concepts of the functions of the boardroom. Passive positions taken by leadership to not stray from familiar convention are referred to as "conscious or unconscious assimilation practices" (Keskitalo, 2020, p. 23). Contrary to such a position, boardrooms and members who choose to be open minded and on a journey of self-improvement may well find the true intent of the principles behind these tried and proven Indigenous principles that struggle to be recognised or validated in a Western boardroom setting. They are suggested as guiding principles to be utilised in boardroom practice. This research and collective knowledge have been collaboratively compiled by an AP through a PAR methodology. Additionally, a model for principle-based decision-making was developed from the emergent themes.

The research contributes to a body of knowledge from a workplace perspective. The collective knowledge has been contributed from the perspective of a practitioner's lived experience as pale-skinned Aboriginal men in boardroom positions. The challenges that these men face when viewed through this lens are unique. The reality for these men is further complicated by positions of feeling isolated between two worlds and referred to as being "too white to be black or too black to be white" (Foley, 2000, p. 47). Further research is required on these subjects given the deficiency in the literature about this topic. The research could be utilised to compliment the operations and strategic deliberation in a boardroom and assist in the longer term to help refocus the culture and tone of the boardroom to assist pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership roles on executive and management boards of Western organisations. The above points should be considered in the context that boards influence the broader community collectively and influence the tone and culture for society in general.

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CHAPTER 6: MODEL DEVELOPMENT AND DISCUSSION

6.1. Introduction

Discussion of the results and conclusions of the study were included in the publishable article (Chapter 5). This chapter presents a model developed by the researcher that builds on the guiding principles arising from the PAR sessions and the extant literature. It then provides a summary of the triple bottom line of contributions to theory, professional practice, and personal professional development. Limitations and potential contributions to future research are presented along with a final concluding summary.

6.2. Model development

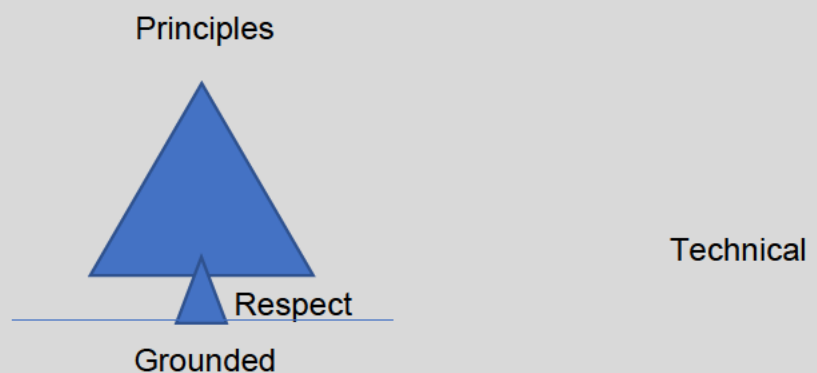
Following further consideration and reflection of the data after the final PAR panel session, a conceptual model of principle-based decision-making pertaining to the boardroom environment Figure 11 below was the research artefact developed by me as the researcher and submitted to the AP participants for comment. Confirmation was sought and given regarding the validity of the model and its relationship to the three guiding principles to ensure cultural respect was demonstrated regarding the formation of new knowledge emerging from their collective knowledge. The aim of this conceptual model development was to verify my interpretations of discussion around the guiding principles to inform development of an artefact from this research process. There was agreement by the panel with my proposal as presented below.

Figure 11

Principle based decision making submission after the final panel session discussions

I propose that that my contribution to theory is the idea of principle-based decision making and how the three elements of the triangle: principles, the law, technical aspects can be enhanced by applying or overlaying these with the core areas of connection, leadership models and yarning circles to produce more relevant and connected decisions from the boardroom for the community or organisation it represents.

Principle based decision making (Triangle)



The principle is ‘our why’, our connection to the purpose of why the board exists. Are we in tune or connected with our surroundings and each other?

The shared and distributed leadership model ushers in inclusion and collaboration rather than agency as part of a hierarchical model. This is foundational for trust and relationships to be built. The panel members’ experiences within a hierarchical model of leadership has often resulted in other corners of the triangle of the law and technical arguments polarising the principle-based decisions.

The yarning circle which has the ability to be tailored to the boardroom specifics fosters a safe environment operationally that encourages equal and valued input.

This is potentially conducive to a higher quality of principle-based decision making and outcomes.

This is in contrast to the potential for a boardroom to find itself in a position of agency and being polarised because of the legal and technical arguments presented to it.

This triangle balances on the fulcrum of respect, which is grounded or connected and is dependent upon a balanced consideration of all components of decision making.

The effectiveness of the proposal of principle-based decision making is directly proportional to the degree of understanding and practice of the three themes of *Connection, Shared and distributed leadership* and *Yarning*.

Both my proposed **contribution to practice** based on the three areas of connection, leadership, and yarning and my proposed **contribution to theory** relating to my proposal are about principle-based decision making.

The concept of principle-based decision-making is illustrated with the finalised conceptual model (in Chapter 5, Figure 2)

The outcomes of the PAR panel sessions in this study have introduced the possibility of considering the three Indigenous principles of *connection, shared and distributed leadership* and *yarning* as key to positively influencing boardroom operations. These three principles should be viewed as a complete model and not dissected as there is a synergy between them that needs to be understood and appreciated. There may be a propensity for boards to treat each principle individually without understanding the essential connections between them. For example, this occurs when people make judgements about a person or a situation and what is important before there is an understanding or appreciation about the full circumstances or needs. These three Indigenous principles are integrally linked and cannot be dissected.

The first principle of connection is central to Indigenous ontology (Grieves, 2009) and is the foundational platform that informs the concept that we cannot exist separately outside of the realm that we see, feel and sense about us. There is a need in the boardroom, specific to this research, for layers of understanding about these three principles to be built upon. It is important for a boardroom to be connected and relevant to the community they serve, perhaps a core purpose of why the boardroom exists. Greater awareness of our co-dependency gives rise to the need for understanding about the model of leadership employed in the boardroom.

Ownership of leadership for an organisation beyond the boardroom could be facilitated to a greater degree by the Indigenous model of shared and distributed leadership where community is empowered to be involved in the decision-making process. There is a natural synergy with the first principle of connection given the shared ownership and connected decision-making that is facilitated (Harris & Spillane, 2008). This style of leadership is a way to foster collaboration, connection, and a willingness to participate for improved outcomes in boardrooms and for the broader community.

Yarning is the third principle of how a boardroom could operate which compliments the shared leadership model. Yarning is like the flux for inclusiveness based on parity for participants (Donovan, 2016). It is highly adaptable to different situations and is agreed upon as beneficial (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). The principle of yarning is potentially a very powerful enabler for improved operation and outcomes for the boardroom when applied within the context of the other Indigenous principles.

The three Indigenous principles as discussed are intrinsically linked and there is a further need to unpack the potential benefits of these for the boardroom environment. The concept of these benefits is discussed further in the article in Chapter 5. The application of these three principles, together, could potentially increase awareness for pale-skinned Indigenous men of how to interface with mainstream boardrooms and encourage the pursuit of leadership board positions. The potential significance of these outcomes could see:

- The boardroom environment become more empathetic in arriving at decisions relating to Indigenous and minority groups through raised awareness and understanding.
- Guiding principles for boardrooms to utilise by way of affording time to investigate how they understand and connect with their purpose, 'their why' they are there as a boardroom.
- The leadership model they employ and the extent that this facilitates 'the way' a boardroom explores or just analyses. Is the environment conducive to ideas being put on the table?

- The operational functioning of the board meeting by utilising the method of yarning as ‘the how’ to or flux that fosters collaboration and equally valued input from all board members.
- Possible further development though may be beyond the scope of this study, presentation to peak representative bodies for consideration to guide future governance and policy recommendations.

6.3. Triple dividend

Johnson refers to what is known as the triple dividend (Johnson, 2001), where learners, the university and employers gain from the work-based learner being engaged in a research project. The learner can increase their personal potential and develop their professional capabilities, while the university benefits from the research that is contributed to the body of knowledge and employers or the organisation have problems solved in the workplace which can result in innovation or perhaps methods and practices changed to improve productivity. Contributions to the triple dividend as required for this professional studies thesis are outlined in the following discussion.

6.4. Contribution to theory – the conceptual model

Building upon the concept of principle-based decision-making, a conceptual model was developed and proposed by me as the researcher reflecting on the data and guiding principles that emerged from the PAR sessions. Confirmation of the veracity of the proposed model was sought from the AP regarding its relationship to the emergent themes that were recommended as guiding principles. The model is grounded on “respect, not just for each other, but for everything around us” (Uncle N) for boardroom operations. This model is presented and discussed in detail in the publishable article in Chapter 5.

This research contributed to the theory by submitting a principle-based decision-making model. This model was developed by me as the researcher in tandem with with the emergent themes that were recommended as guiding principles which were developed by the AP to overcome some of the challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men. The conceptual decision-making model was validated by the PAR AP as it had relevance to the overall research and was likely to have a real impact in the formulation of policy amongst other functions of the boardroom. The potential benefits from this model would no doubt be enhanced

when understood and applied in conjunction with the emergent themes as recommended guiding principles. The decision-making model embodies the concepts of connection and accountability to all and everything around us, grounded on respect and recognising equally valued input as part of a safe environment. However, this model has the capacity to stand alone as a framework for boardrooms and their members to reflect on how they arrive at decisions, the processes that precede this point and the various contributors along the way. The conceptual model illustrates other determinants such as the law and technical aspects of decision-making. The focus on the guiding principles with their foundations grounded on respect and connection can be unduly impacted when there is an “overreach by experts” (Uncle N), as part of the decision-making process in the boardroom. These topics are discussed in the publishable article in Chapter 5.

6.5. Contribution to professional practice

This research has focused on the concept of guiding principles founded on First Nation methodologies and how they may be utilised to enhance the boardroom environment in general and positively influence relationships to enable a greater level of trust. The desire to explore options and new knowledge in the boardroom from a baseline of equal and valued input is facilitated by the leadership framework and mode of operation. These principles are the result of the collective knowledge of practitioners who have a desire to positively influence theirs and other workplaces, be they boardrooms or other.

Some desirable outcomes for practice in boardrooms that could flow from this body of work could be, but are not limited to the following areas:

- Raised awareness for boards of the implications of decisions on at-risk and minority groups,
- Self-assessment and evaluation of the decision-making process.
- Robustness of the procurement process of knowledge and data in relation to these sectors,
- Cultural awareness development and training to enhance the quality interaction of organisations and minority sectors, and
- Inform policy development to influence the tone and culture of an organisation.

6.6. Personal learnings

Throughout the PAR cycles I used my personal learning to adapt how I conducted myself as a panel member and to apply the emerging principles in my workplace. The first Panel Session did not unfold as planned. It became obvious the panel members wanted to engage in a period of acquaintance with each other. This entailed what I thought to be covering old ground by the stories and accounts that were shared and that I had captured in the first round of interviews/ yarning. This highlighted to me the assumptions we can make as board members of where others are and what space they are in. Allowing sufficient time to build trust and rapport prior to the business of the boardroom is important.

The panel raised the idea that time for meetings should be "based on the reason why we are here for the meeting" (Uncle W), not just the agenda, and that the boardroom meeting should be grounded to this reason. This speaks clearly of the necessary importance of connection for boardroom members.

Despite my best efforts to stick to the agenda which was distributed prior to the meeting, the order of the topic or themes from the individual sessions did not proceed as planned. My intention was to further discuss the topics in the literature review of Aboriginal men in leadership, tokensim and minority, assimilation, and insider and outsider as set out in Figure 1, Conceptual framework . The discussion was formed more around overarching themes, although inclusive of these topics. The focus was on principle-based themes of connection, shared and distributed leadership, and yarning that could possibly guide the boardroom, its operations and how it connects with the community it is responsible for. The realisation for me of wanting to control the process included having to grow further in applying myself to actively listen, and to be a functioning member of the panel rather than direct the yarning process. Reminding myself throughout the panel sessions of my core connection to all those around me and having to trust that we were moving in the right direction was essential. Through further examination of the data, it became evident that the connection between the panel members was evident by the underlying themes that began to emerge from the yarning sessions.

In my experience in the boardroom today, the principles of connection and trust appear to be diminished. Time taken to gain understanding and an appreciation of this co-dependency and connectedness to all around us would no doubt be of great benefit and influence the tone of the operating environment for the boardroom.

6.7. Self-development

The opportunity to conduct this research has been a personal privilege. Being immersed in this process has caused me to reflect on the way I participate in my place of practice in the boardroom. There have been opportunities for me to modify and apply my approach differently to different situations, both within and outside the boardroom, as the result of uncovered new collective knowledge. There has been a deeper recognition and understanding of the discussion and the decision-making process being influenced by agents such as legal or technical input from experts. Greater recognition and reflection of the need for a principles-based has been focused on 'why' I am here and what is my purpose as a board member. What is the highest and best path to take when deliberating upon the business before me?

6.8. Limitations and opportunities for further research

Some limitations that were identified as part of this research included topics such as the small number of participants to draw from for the research. This is no doubt due to the small numbers of pale-skinned Aboriginal men in senior board and executive management positions. This was somewhat offset by the cross section of personal experience of the participants which were highlighted further in the publishable article, who were part of the AP and responsible for contributing to the collective knowledge and examination of the data. There appears to be a dearth of information in the literature about the relationship of pale-skinned Aboriginal men in the boardroom environment and the challenges they face.

This research topic is emergent and is limited beyond beginning to understand the possibilities of applying these guiding principles to the boardroom operations. More detailed and specific research is required on the individual elements of the emergent themes as guiding principles along with the conceptual model for principle-based decision-making specific to the boardroom. There is further research needed to assist in the implementation phase of a principles-based approach aligned to the Indigenous themes of connection, shared and distributed leadership, and yarning. There are likely benefits for those boardrooms willing to explore and utilise these to help overcome not only challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men but also for minorities generally. There is a need for practitioners to contribute to both new research and implementation via mentoring and training of boardrooms, their participants, and organisations to realise their potential.

Opportunity exists for research to be conducted about Aboriginal women in mainstream Western boards at senior and executive levels. There are some culturally significant parameters to consider, in the position of a pale-skinned Aboriginal man, hence the limitations of this research topic of it not being appropriate to speak of issues for such women. Some of the areas covered would likely be relevant and opportunities to gain insights through new research will be of great benefit to address the issue of gender inequity in executive positions.

Additionally, the need for diversity in mainstream boardrooms under the dominant Westminster framework necessitates the accommodation of greater inclusiveness of minorities. This research can be a platform for others to build on for greater awareness to facilitate better outcomes for diversity and inclusion. These are not exclusive to gender or race but are also relevant to topics such as cognitive diversity, assisted by greater awareness made possible by this research being added to the literature.

6.9. Conclusion

The effectiveness of principle-based decision making is directly proportional to the degree of understanding and practice of the three principles of *connection*, *shared and distributed leadership* and *yarning*. The decision-making process can be enhanced by applying principles of the core areas of these Indigenous themes to facilitate more relevant and connected decisions from the boardroom, for the community, organisation, or stakeholders it serves. Exploration, understanding and application of these guiding principles have a direct bearing on a principles-based approach or 'higher purpose' to a boardroom's decision-making. The higher and more wholistic strategic intent of the boardroom could be realised by a willingness to utilise the recommended guiding principles developed in the research by the Advisory Panel as discussed in the publishable article (Chapter 5) within the discussion section. Further, the concept of principle-based decision-making, which is expanded upon in Chapter 5, would be beneficial to board members, for those who are specifically new to the functioning of a boardroom to establish foundational thoughts and habits related to the decision-making process. The more inclusive collaborative styles of operation as proposed by the guiding principles and the conceptual model of decision making would assist a broader component of the community to relate to the board's leadership. People from minority groups both

within and outside the boardroom could potentially feel more connected to the outcomes and decision-making processes.

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APPENDIX A: LOCAL GOVERNMENT PRINCIPLES

- Transparent and effective processes, and decision making in the public interest.
- Sustainable development and management of assets and infrastructure, and delivery of effective services.
- Democratic representation, social inclusion, and meaningful community engagement.
- Good governance of, and by, local government; and
- Ethical and legal behaviour of councillors, local government employees and councillor advisors. (Department of Local Government, Racing and Multicultural Affairs, 2020)

APPENDIX B: LEARNING PROGRAM

Introduction and context

As an identified Aboriginal descendant of the Awabakal People, I am currently a local government elected representative who will have served my community for twenty years at the end of this current term in this role. In a position of leadership in mainstream society there are often challenges being faced, particularly when coming from humble beginnings, struggling with one's own identity, suppressing heritage as an Aboriginal person whilst often dealing with institutional racism, having no higher educational background, and dealing with the associated lack of confidence.

The ability to be gracious in the face of ignorance often needs to be called upon by reflecting on those who have gone before us and who have endured racism and other challenges, yet have shown resilience and been an example for others to follow. The dependence on others is of particular importance to help achieve success in a leadership role. There is a need for courage, to build relationships and the trust and respect of these groups or individuals to assist with quality input for a decision maker to be effective.

As someone who has experienced each of these challenges, I feel compelled to help others who are facing similar leadership barriers to achieve success. The focus of my study will be on pale-skinned Aboriginal males in leadership, their personal journeys, and experiences in mainstream communities. This includes their ability to deal with things such as overcoming dysfunctional environments, being authentic and true to themselves, having the courage to challenge and ask questions and being open to explore new opportunities or take advice.

Theoretical support for doing Professional Studies

The nature of learning

Understanding oneself is critical to how well we learn and how our paradigms are conditioned from a very young age. The environment we find ourselves in contributes to this conditioning of paradigms. "A paradigm is like a map in our head. We assume that the way we 'see' things is the way they really are or the way they should be" (Shisanya, 2019 p40). Things such as our social environment, family relationships the physical environment or the opportunities, or lack of, are all contributors to this conditioning. As a young child we are open and receptive to all

those influences and the conditioning arises as we experience and react to those forces of influence that are part of all our lives. From the very start of a child's life the five senses of sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing are the influencing factors on their subconscious mind before the ability of cognitive reasoning or conscious mind has developed. My central ontological belief of being connected with everything, is in keeping with my Indigenous heritage, both the physical and spiritual surroundings often influence the way I process new experiences, information, or knowledge. Grieves refers to this being described as "pattern thinking explained by David Mowaljarlai, senior lawman of the Ngarynin people of the west Kimberley "(Grieves 2009, p. 200) or the concept of being connected to all of creation, animate and inanimate, which is the core principle of Aboriginal philosophy. I tend to evaluate this new knowledge or learning according to how it makes me feel or how I can connect it in my mind with my surroundings both in the physical realm in which I can see but also in that other spiritual dimension which we cannot see with the physical eyes. It is this thinking of connectedness to the environment around me which I find fascinating and warrants further exploration. The thought that what we see in total is far smaller than what we cannot see and what exists between what we cannot see. Quantum physics or liminal space is a topic I think my Aboriginal forebears understood, according to their ontology of being connected to everything around them and the intrinsic relationship of all.

Observing is learning how do I learn? I learn by sight, taking notice of things demonstrated to me or observing them in the context of my surroundings. Being involved in the learning process with others like my forebears in a yarning circle. Auditory learning is a powerful method by giving accounts and telling stories of events that have happened in our environment in the past. This method presents a pragmatic approach to problem solving via group interaction and sharing for both past established knowledge or in Western terminology (the literature) and presenting proposals or options for possible solutions for learning and new knowledge gained.

As a person who identifies as Aboriginal and as a leader in mainstream community I have struggled with the decision-making process. At times I have observed my colleagues around me in a boardroom setting base their decisions in a way that is somewhat disconnected from the environment they are responsible for. Without realising, this has caused me to withdraw from the very nature in which I learn, that is to be involved in discussion or in traditional circles known as yarning.

Talking and sharing stories I find is a very powerful way of understanding others' challenges and the opportunities they have taken to overcome them. You cannot help reaching a conclusion from those stories that are shared – that if they can do it so can I, and if I can do it, so can you. This power that is within storytelling and accounts for an effective methodology for learning. The occasions in which I have been able to participate effectively in debate in the boardroom are those where I feel that the decision-making process has been connected to people and their surroundings, therefore my input has been one of a positive experience. In other words, I enjoy being a problem solver in this type of environment.

Conversely, I have had to inject myself into my leadership role in the boardroom when the decision-making process is not connected to people, community, or stakeholders or better described as the environment around us in a transparent manner. It is then that I become a disruptor in the decision-making process by enquiring or asking questions about the validity of the process or outcomes. This is in keeping with my ontology of what I know to be my truth and that is that we are intrinsically connected to our environment, as my Aboriginal forefathers knew well and understood.

Theoretical foundations of work-based learning pedagogy

Research methodologies are at the core of work-based learning. They ensure a systematic and academic approach to the study of issues or problems relating to work-based practice. There is a high degree of flexibility in the choice of methods used to undertake research which facilitates complex work-based problems to be solved. This is known as an interdisciplinary approach for undertaking research – as opposed to the conventional silo approach of single discipline studies. Work-based learning provides for high-level learning that supports both the individual as self-managed practitioners and self-directed learners (Lester & Costley, 2010). A distinctive feature of the work-based learning program is its emphasis on reflecting and enquiry into work activity. The development of practitioners is self-managing those who are committed to their own development. As a practitioner who brings work experience or expertise to the table, one must be aware of possible research bias and subjectivity. This can also be balanced by reflective practice and a review of the literature. This is an important reason for reflective practice and how it is strongly

encouraged as part of the workplace learning curriculum. Armsby (2000), says “the activity of the researcher always influences what is known so nothing can be known except through those activities. Therefore, we are researching the world through ourselves as makers of knowledge claims” (Armsby, 2000 p. 40). She quotes Usher and Edwards (1994), who remarked, “Can research ever be anything more than a subtle form of writing the self?” “As such we regard reflective practice as a resource rather than a problem and recognise that we are part of the picture of the world constructed by research” (Armsby, 2000, p. 40). The point she makes about us being part of the picture of the world constructed by research causes me to think about my Aboriginal forefathers and researchers in the context of the central ontology of being part of everything around us. Could in fact those forefathers be forerunners of today’s research who utilised pragmatic methodologies that began centuries ago? Tools such as discourse analysis alluded to by Edwards and Potter in Armsby’s paper consider how it can be used to investigate dominant validated knowledge. Armsby (2000), says this can be very important when the focus of the work-based project surrounds a specific organisational or communication process that requires development. I refer to my earlier comments about Indigenous yarning circles. In this forum discourse around images, symbols and culture took place via conversation. Johnson refers to what is known as the triple dividend (Johnson, 2001), where learners, the university and employers gain from the work-based learner being engaged in a research project. The learner can increase their personal potential and develop their professional capabilities, whilst the university benefits from the research that is contributed the body of knowledge and employers/the organisation have problems solved in the workplace which can result in innovation or perhaps methods and practices changed to improve productivity. Ethical awareness is an integral part of research in a work-based learning program or agreement. Professional ethics must be applied to help ensure that research is wholesome by nature.

Professional studies and why it suits the enhancement of your professional practice and personal development

The exciting part of being involved in professional studies is gaining an increased understanding of how one learns in their area of professional practice. My mentor reminded me that learning in the context of professional studies is being able

to link the literature with my situation or what I believe is a hinderance to my learning and gaining new knowledge to overcome and grow. Part of being involved in Professional Studies enables me to develop my ability to understand the theoretical foundations for gaining new knowledge, learning and the perspective of a new outlook and future. The irony of what I am beginning to learn and unpack as part of professional studies is the false assumption that I have problems with learning or limitations which undoubtedly stem from some of the conditioning or limiting paradigms held as part of my subconscious thinking. Possibly a more appropriate way of describing this is my fear of learning and research or limiting beliefs.

The key concepts and capabilities for effective work-based learning.

Research projects as part of work -based learning offer a pragmatic timely and real-world solutions to work problems. They are also practitioner led which results in meaningful and deep learning as part of this work produced. Work-based learning helps bring formal accreditation to organisational learning. Collaboration and partnerships as part of the work-based learning can help solve issues for organisations. Armsby (2000) states the following which succinctly captures some of the benefits and capabilities of work-based learning. "In workplace learning research and development and reflective practice are located within a real social and work-based community that gives them meaning rather than a hypothetical or devised scenario. The focus on 'real' research and development projects and reflection on 'real' pragmatic and applied activities is what makes work-based learning meaningful to the practitioner researchers. The meaningfulness and the implicit understanding of the context are starting points for them to theorise and become more reflective, innovative, and critical in their practice, to enable a 'real' outcome or product to emerge" (Armsby, 2000 p42). Work based learning as part of the Professional Studies program is a real opportunity to help change the culture of our workplace and the broader community over time. By empowering leaders to be agents of change through a greater awareness and realisation of one's personal potential via the facilitation of reflection and meaningful personal learning.

Reflective practice and professional practice

Professional Studies is helping me to further understand the nature of reflection and the power there-in. The awareness to develop my personal potential and professional practice. The opportunity to explore new knowledge and how this relates to the inherent methods or epistemology of learning that I am familiar with and relied upon to this point albeit unconsciously and how I can develop these into the future are exciting. This continuous cycle of deliberately taking the time to reflect, critically consider, learn, explore and experiment is succinctly set out in Kolb's four stage model as referred to below by (Fergusson, Van Der Laan & Baker 2019 p292) who further describe this cycle as a 'micro-reflective cycle' when this practice occurs on a personal level "within the domain of the 'self' of an individual learner, on the level of thinking and doing". This is central to an individual's personal beliefs and assumptions and intrinsic with the individuals personal learning. "Kolb's (1984) four-stage model thus shows the four main iterative steps of reflective practice as it has evolved. These four stages are: (1) have a concrete, real-world personal experience; (2) reflect on the experience by reviewing it critically and thereby possibly learning from it; (3) conceptualise the experience, including its elements, concepts, and themes; and (4) plan and try out something new on the basis of what one has learned from the experience" (Fergusson, Van Der Laan & Baker 2019 p292). Considering Kolb's model carefully is cause for a renewed energy when navigating the future. The concept of a continuous cycle of reflection and learning may not always be easy however, if legacies are to be left to be built upon effort is required. Boardrooms at all levels would benefit greatly from prosecuting his model of reflective practice to realise greater potential and their relevance to a fast-changing world.

Link work-based learning with your purpose for doing the Master of Professional Studies (Research)

Conducting a literature review as part of work-based learning will help inform my project of investigating the current situation with regards to issues and barriers experienced by leaders who identify as pale-skinned Aboriginal men, who are working in a mainstream role or organisation that is governed with Western leadership styles and models of leadership. Comprised of a hierarchical layered

structure that tends to operate in a siloed manner and is not necessarily conducive to collaboration or a consensus approach when solving problems. In researching the literature to find accounts or testimonies of these leaders I hope to identify some possible themes relating to the barriers experienced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men in achieving success, personally and professionally, in Western style leadership roles. My own professional experience suggests that pale-skinned Aboriginal leaders in such leadership roles may possibly experience what could be described as caught in the middle of being black but white. My professional purpose is to determine if and how this has been addressed in the current literature. Through my proposed project I will explore the challenges that have been faced, how they have been overcome and the extent of any impacts that it has had on individuals as leaders. Strohine and Brandl (2011) discuss the impacts on minority representative groups of officers within the police force such as feelings of heightened visibility, isolation, and limited opportunities for advancement. They refer to the term, “tokenism theory”, where “tokens” (those who comprise less than 15% of a group’s total) “are expected to experience a variety of hardships in the workplace” (Strohine & Brandl, 2011 p344). This theory is first mentioned by Kanter (1977) and again in a further revised edition of her book in 2008, that considers proportional representation, where she highlights three issues of visibility, polarisation and assimilation experienced by minority representatives.

Further exploration of this topic will hopefully highlight some areas that can be identified to bring a raised awareness of some of the experiences of pale-skinned male Aboriginal leaders practicing in the identity gap. The area I describe as feeling disconnected from Aboriginal culture and community due to the presumptions made by Aboriginal people about being assimilated as a leader in a Western corporate position as an insider. Additionally, in a non-indigenous setting sensing your colleagues being detached or unresponsive when advocating for improved outcomes for Aboriginal people or related issues.

A more aspirational goal for this project would be to encourage young leaders to be inspired to pursue and achieve their own goals. Additionally, this research can add to the body of knowledge to help inform policy and governance in Western style organisations and potentially be a catalyst to help more Aboriginal leaders to embrace the notion of being an insider within the mainstream system. Personally, I wish to contribute as a practitioner as part of the Master of Professional Studies

Research project, some of my own experience of this phenomenon. Not only to encourage others but to gain a higher level of awareness and understanding about my personal potential and how I can gain new knowledge to contribute. Ultimately with increased participation and involvement in leadership roles both Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations and broader society will benefit alike.

Illustrate the benefits and challenges associated with doing a Professional Studies higher degree

The principle of the triple dividend is central to work-based learning pedagogy with its benefits to both the individual with improved professional practice. The organisation potentially having problems solved. The university gaining from further research and possible collaboration (Johnson, 2001). Some of the recognised benefits are learners can be self-directed or learner led given the body of expertise they can bring to the table as a work-based practitioner. Therefore, the learning is relevant and more able to be contextualised. The learning can be continuous via reflective practice along with professional development and lifelong learning. The organisation or employer can benefit from things such as less disruption to the workplace and inhouse consultancy from both the student and tutor. The employer can realise significant returns for low investment as part of work-based learning. Universities can benefit from a focus on learning rather than teaching as opposed to conventional course structures and delivery methods which cannot possibly keep abreast of the rate of growth in knowledge. Teaching staff are afforded the opportunity to become facilitators of learning. and universities can realise opportunities for collaboration and consultancy with corporate partners, (Johnson, 2001).

Some of the challenges that are recognised include questions that arise from more conventional sectors of single disciplined learning silos within academia regarding the multidisciplinary approach to the work-based learning pedagogy, (Lester & Costley, 2010). The reality is that wicked problems require consideration and input from a range of disciplines and from different practitioners to help tackle these moving forward. Depending upon the workplace there can be some sensitivities to ethics and confidentiality which need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis, (Johnson, 2001). Learning to become a scholarly professional can also

present several challenges on a more personal front. Some of these that I am currently experiencing as part of this journey are, grappling with work life balance, becoming familiar with academic referencing and writing. In addition, a key challenge is to find my voice to both record and increase my learning, given my previous stated circumstances of no higher formal educational qualifications and associated feeling of a lack of confidence.

Statement of prior learning

Bloom's taxonomy guide helped me to identify my capabilities and methods of learning by assisting me to identify my strengths and identify gaps in my previous learning. The strengths highlighted were:

Emotional intelligence, communication skills, industry knowledge, critical and objective judgement.

The identified gaps or areas to enhance my learning were in the areas of:

Systemised information gathering, technology adoption, creativity and innovation, and personal potential and professional knowledge.

My desired learning outcomes are:

To empower my personal potential by completing the Post Graduate Qualification as recorded in a literature review.

To develop my professional knowledge of pale-skinned Aboriginal males in leadership roles within mainstream society. To understand some of the issues and barriers.

To learn about systemised information gathering and interpretation of the information by researching the current literature to identify opportunities to expand on this body of knowledge.

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APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

	University of Southern Queensland
	Participant Information Sheet Interview
USQ HREC Approval number: HXREAXXX	

Project Title

If I can do it so, can you: Challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men on mainstream western Boards.

Research team contact details

Principal Investigator Details

Mr Bill Cahill



Supervisor

Prof Karen Trimmer



Description

This project is being undertaken as part of Master of Professional Studies Research through the University of Southern Queensland.

The purpose of this project is to better understand impacts and influences on pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership on executive and management boards within the mainstream work environment. With a motive to empower others guided by a notion of 'If I can do it so can you', the proposed study aims to navigate a pathway forward by contributing further to a body of knowledge on strategies for promoting leadership potential for Aboriginal men that others can subsequently build on. Research is needed to access knowledge of the experience and insights regarding challenges, possible conflicts with core beliefs and values, gained by these men as insiders within the mainstream system.

The principal research question for this study is:

What are the challenges faced by pale-skinned Aboriginal men in leadership roles on executive and management boards of western organisations?

Sub research questions

1. How do leadership styles used within Boards align or conflict with the role of representing local Aboriginal communities?
2. What strategies can be developed to accommodate Aboriginal leadership styles within Boards of western organisations?

Artifact: Develop a set of recommendations to assist Boards.

Participation

Your participation will involve partaking in an initial information briefing for approximately 1 hour.

You will also be an expert advisor on a participatory action research panel of approximately 4 members. These panel sessions will take the format of a yarning circle and will run for 1 to 2 hours. It is proposed that 2 to 4 panel sessions will take place, dependant on agreement of the panel members and necessity under the participatory action research framework.

Questions will include:

1. Can you share what your own experience has been in relation to the challenges and influences on you as a leader in a boardroom setting within the mainstream work environment?
2. What are the opportunities you see for the boardroom environment to be enhanced when considering Indigenous leadership models and practices?

3. From your experience, are there possible initiatives that could be developed collaboratively as part of a research panel in a yarning circle setting to build knowledge and provide future direction for others.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you are not obliged to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage.

You will be unable to withdraw data collected about yourself from the start of phase two of the research project. It is important that the PAR expert panel are able to consider all of the data collected from each of the participants to decide the priorities and parameters of the project.

If you do wish to withdraw from this project, please contact the Research Team (Professor Karen Trimmer [REDACTED]).

Your decision whether you take part, do not take part, or take part and then withdraw, will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the University of Southern Queensland.

Expected benefits

It is expected that this project will directly benefit you via acknowledgement of your experience and knowledge as part of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) panel of experts. Recognition of your Co-contribution to a body of knowledge. Potential for raised awareness via collaboration and co-authoring of knowledge and strategies consistent with PAR. This may result in the application of these in your place of professional practice potentially resulting in realised enhanced capacity for your workplace.

Risks

In participating in the briefing and panel sessions, there are minimal risks such as, balancing time demands amidst busy work schedules for the participants.

In the event of Covid compliance issues, Zoom meetings can be utilised to help manage the associated risks.

To minimise risks associated with the project meetings will be conducted in an agreed safe place where you feel free to openly share your experience and knowledge in a confidential setting.

Busy work schedules/ time constraints will be managed by pre-prepared and agreed agendas for the yarning circle topics/ themes to be facilitated and discussed.

In the event that emergency services are required there will be a list of contact numbers for these services if required available at each meeting.

Potential for past memories to cause some emotional stress although this is unlikely as we are sharing our work experiences specifically. However Sometimes thinking about the sorts of issues raised in the initial information brief and panel sessions could create some uncomfortable or distressing feelings. If you need to talk to someone about this immediately, please contact services such as Carbal Medical Services, Beyond Blue, Lifeline or Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) as potential options for support.

There will be regular check-ins in the context of the yarning circle and reminders about options available to you for support.

Privacy and confidentiality

All comments and responses are confidential unless required by law.

- The initial briefing and subsequent panel sessions will be audio and/or video recorded for the purpose of transcription
- You will be provided with a copy of the transcripts from all sessions for review and endorsement prior to inclusion in the project data.

- A minimum of two weeks prior to the next meeting of the panel is required to review and request any changes to the transcript before the data is included in the project for analysis.
- The recordings/data will not be shared as they are owned jointly by the PAR panel participants unless agreed otherwise by the PAR panel participants. This is to protect the confidentiality of information shared by participants that could potentially be considered sensitive because of its personal nature.
- Consistent with Participatory Action Research (PAR), all participants will have a copy of all data and this is confidential to the panel and this data is required to be destroyed at the end of the project.
- Upon agreement from the PAR panel, a suitable third party person, external to the panel and myself as the researcher may be selected to assist with transcribing the data.
- Subject to written consent of the Individual panel members data may be requested by myself alone, as the researcher, in the future to be considered as part of an extension to this project or similar projects only.
- It will not be possible to participate in the project without being recorded and photographs will be consensual.

Your consent is required to identify you as a co-creator of knowledge. If you choose to be anonymous this will be agreed by all participants and you will not be identified in any publication.

As per AIATIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) guidelines, all participants will be provided with feedback and can access the results of the project.

Any data collected as a part of this project will be stored securely, as per University of Southern Queensland's [Research Data and Primary Materials Management Procedure](#).

Consent to participate

I would like to ask you to sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate in this project. Please return your signed consent form to myself prior to any further involvement.

Questions

Please contact me as part of the Research team as indicated above, if you have any questions or would like to request further information about this project.

Concerns or complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project, you may contact the University of Southern Queensland, Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics on +61 7 4631 1839 or email researchintegrity@usq.edu.au. The Manager of Research Integrity and Ethics is not connected with the research project and can address your concern in an unbiased manner.

Thank you for taking the time to help with this research project. Please keep this document for your information.