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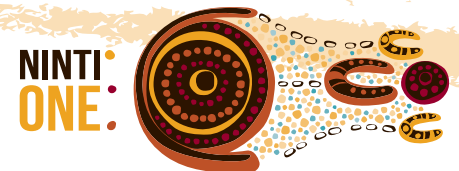
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2011

Learning Journeys

Seven steps to stronger remote communities

Michael LaFlamme

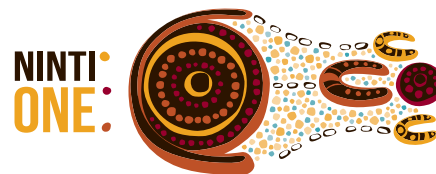


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Seven steps to stronger remote communities

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I am a CSIRO scientist and planner from the desert of North America, where I worked with tribes to develop Indigenous scientific approaches to community-based conservation of threatened species, and to develop environmental health policy to reduce risks to people and wildlife from environmental toxins. In 2006 I migrated to central Australia to partner with Aboriginal leaders and develop cross-cultural strategies to sustain better health for desert lands and peoples.

I have a PhD in community-based conservation, an MCRP in community and natural resource planning, an MA in cross-cultural learning, and a BA in multimedia communication. I can be contacted at: michael.laflamme@gmail.com.

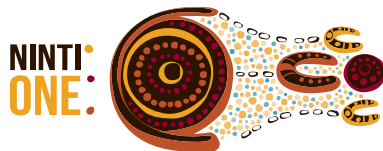
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Developing a tool for two extremely different cultures to work together equitably requires the help of many colleagues. I began this project at the request of several Aboriginal leaders who regularly work between cultures. Their judgement has always been accurate, and their friendship warm. I particularly thank the families of Jerry Jangala Patrick, Steve Jampijinpa Patrick, Kado Muir, Rex Japanangka Granites, Joe Japanangka James, Cyril Japanangka Tasman, Kumanjayi Martin, Kumanjayi Johnson and Kumanjayi Kennedy. I also received strong encouragement from senior staff in the Northern Territory and Australian Governments. All groups wanted to show how Aboriginal-designed approaches can ‘close the gap.’

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To help this report make sense to different groups, I am indebted to the reviews of Ashley Sparrow, who helped clarify the overall contribution of this report, and identify a structure to show its validity to mainstream readers; Jocelyn Davies, who made many detailed editorial suggestions to make the terms, concepts and evidence clear and comfortable for people new to this field; Jim Walker, who emphasised making this report useful for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents of both remote and urban communities; Guy Singleton, who shared the final draft of this report with a local community who was involved throughout this process; Lance Box, who shared his perspective as a remote resident and worked with elders to draw key diagrams; and Rex Granites, who drove with me to a half dozen communities to talk about and draw this framework in the dirt for senior people.

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Executive summary

This report presents a method to clarify how remote Aboriginal groups want to build on their strengths and talents to design better communities for themselves that properly bring together country and culture as one system.

Remote residents are full of creative ideas and plans for their country and community, but are rarely given the decision-making power to develop those ideas. Most management positions in communities are held by outsiders, who manage the resources (funding sources, knowledge networks, political contacts and material flows) that influence a community.

These limitations placed on Aboriginal residents' ability to significantly manage their own circumstances have contributed to 'gaps' in health, education, employment and other outcomes compared to the non-Aboriginal professionals who service them. Local people need skills to systematically try out ways to 'close the gap' between local and outside control. I therefore studied how elders, adults and service providers saw their communities and country, and the methods they used to improve their wellbeing.

Across desert Australia, different remote Aboriginal groups follow a set of seven similar steps in their methods for strengthening their communities, and they share a symbolic language to see the whole system at multiple levels: from individual livelihood activities to how the community and country interact as a single system.

The steps start with elders identifying a central purpose, such as 'one family, one system,' that describes how the community organisations are ideally linked.

Elders then identify the 'right people,' who are often the leaders of the most empowering organisations and who have experience teaching others how they align their actions to that central purpose. Those right people are the best to lead cross-cultural groups in identifying the important cause-effect relations in their organisation, to see how actions and results are linked in causal cycles.

With their help, the group can then stand back and see how their history contributed to creating their current system, particularly the flows of information and resources through community and country. Everyone in the group then understands why the current situation continues to produce similar results over time.

With this in-depth knowledge, the group can then describe what they want to change to improve the situation to sustain better outcomes for country and community. Because it is new, an improved situation has less detail than a current one, and necessarily includes many possible actions that may cause those improvements.

The group needs to identify many possible pathways to each improvement, so each group in the community can contribute its own cultural knowledge and skills. Everyone must have opportunities to participate, so they can help each other fulfil their responsibilities.

To learn how each pathway will cause the desired results, they must be tried out. This is 'adaptive management' and helps build local skills to successfully manage activities in an environment of continual change and uncertainty. After taking each action, people measure the changes they have created, and evaluate what action produced that change. They can then use what they learn to improve each pathway.

The successful pathways are those which engage the most people in effective actions. Success is measured in the short-term by results such as culturally meaningful livelihoods, real two-way education, and improved nutrition. Sustaining those measures through both hard and soft infrastructure (buildings and organisations; policies and programs) is expected to improve long-term indicators, both local and national.

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Preface: the aim of this research

Knowledgeable Aboriginal leaders work to improve results for culture and country as one system of relationships. They understand that peoples and their lands need to be addressed as one integrated whole. However, each Aboriginal group wants to make those improvements in its own culturally meaningful way.

Knowledgeable non-Aboriginal Australians also see that people and land are related, but they have had difficulties putting that idea into practice. It is a challenge to have different people working together to develop a 'whole system' approach, but we simply have no choice. Outside control of Aboriginal communities primarily builds the knowledge and influence of outside groups, including scientists. Community self-empowerment is the only way for local groups to express their cultural identity by solving their own problems in ways that sustain their culture for future generations.

The aim of this research was to develop a flexible planning tool for remote communities. This tool introduces a symbolic language, which is then used to describe seven steps of change. This tool was developed by studying how different groups of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents systematically improve the relationships among their lands, families, organisations and the outside world. I examined livelihoods to understand the activities that produced change, the different places or 'circles' where each change occurred, and how groups visualised those changes within their larger system. I then compared groups to identify those steps that were necessary for success.

It is necessary for all groups to develop a clear vision that can guide the work of the families, organisations, agencies and other groups in their community, so they work together. By working together, groups maintain control over the direction of their lives. This control is necessary for groups living in a changing world to sustain improvements for generations.

Anmatjerre leader Rosalie Kunoth-Monks:

“One of our problems is that everyone else is trying to think of the solutions for us instead of resourcing us to learn lessons and make mistakes on our own.

What I am finding in the shared journey through the Desert Knowledge work is that we are able to learn side by side more.”

(Kunoth-Monks 2006)

Introduction: Learning journeys

From fixing weakness, to building strengths

When mainstream groups look at Aboriginal groups, they often see only weaknesses such as poor health, unemployment and low literacy, and want to 'fix' them. Such dominance behaviours maintain the power imbalance by keeping information and control in the hands of mainstream professionals who provide services, rather than developing methods for agencies to be accountable to local groups, and to develop local skills. This power imbalance makes it difficult for both groups to see each other as equal partners, to 'learn side by side more', and to think outside the square to invent new ways forward.

The focus on weaknesses is based on four false beliefs:

1. **Fixing weaknesses will make everything all right.** It will not. 'Fixes' are designed only to change a measure from below-average to average.
2. **The strengths will take care of themselves.** They do not. People make the biggest gains by developing their strengths.
3. **Success is the opposite of failure.** It is not. Each success has its own unique pattern of behaviour.
4. **Everyone can do anything they put their mind to.** They cannot. Groups must build on their strengths, by doing more of what they are good at and managing areas of weakness (from Clifton & Nelson 1992: 9–18).

When groups focus on weaknesses, strengths become neglected and people cannot discover the important contributions they are able to make. Figure 1 is an example of how linking strengths creates new contributions.



Figure 1: Editing videos to share cultural knowledge

Shane Jupurrula White was trained by the 25-year old Warlpiri Media Association, which had the first television station in central Australia. Shane uses equipment in the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities scheme to edit a video of elders sharing knowledge of plant relationships and seasonal changes. The image on his Final Cut editing software is a stone knife held by an elder Jupurrula.

Those videos are online at:

<http://www.desertknowledgecrc.com.au> (go to keyword search and look for Stories inLand)

and are available for purchase through Warlpiri Media Association's online shop at: <http://www.warlpirp.com.au> (and select 'Shop' from the menu).

Shane is also a Central Desert Shire Remote Media Worker.

Photo by Anna Cadden

The strengths approach

Many communities work to build local authority using a strengths approach (e.g. Kretzmann & McKnight 1993). The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC 2009) recognised the significant need for Aboriginal people to recognise their strengths (Figure 2). In response, they developed a discussion package that identified some strengths:

- Celebrations
- Children
- Colours
- Connection
- Elders
- Health
- Heroes
- Humour
- Identity
- Knowledge
- Land
- Language
- Men
- Mob
- Music
- Past–present–future
- Pride
- Sport
- Stories
- Struggles
- Tucker
- Women

These strengths emphasise people in relationship with their families, communities and country. Desert leaders describe similar strengths, based in land, law, language, ceremony, kinship, plants and animals, but include much more (e.g. Dobson et al. 2009, Hogan 2006, Turner 2005).

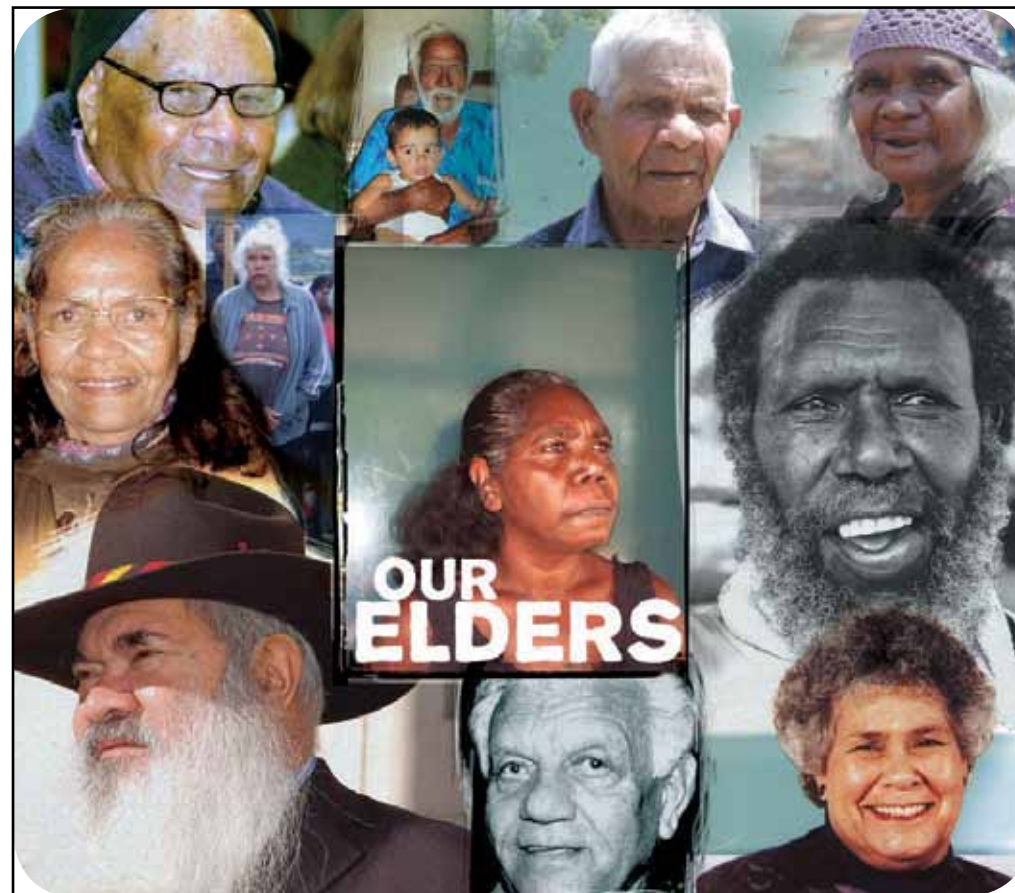


Figure 2: A strength card

This is one of the 22 cards with images of strength and resilience in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. To download or order, visit: <http://srs.snaicc.asn.au>, or <http://www.seriouslyoptimistic.com>.

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However, young Aboriginal people feel they must let go of their own cultural values to work with the outside managers who run most communities. At the same time, their elders' culture seems irrelevant. As a result, the values of neither culture are properly learned. In response, local leaders must focus on building positive cultural identity in youth. One strategy described by a youth program leader is to increase opportunities for intergenerational interactions:

To help young people have a sense of themselves and how great they are. Ninety-five percent of them are extremely capable but don't get the opportunity to apply it, or get practice at applying it. A few go to Kormilda [a boarding school in Darwin], and the change in their development, in their personality, is amazing. Everyone who has gone to a capital city has returned abloom with confidence.

A Shire manager develops local management skills by enabling a group to combine their strengths in their own way:

Present a big idea to a group that is beneficial, and shows how Yapa control is needed. The group will identify who the right people are for the different roles:

The person with the knowledge

The person with social connections

The person with logistical skills

If they like the idea, and can see how Yapa control is necessary, they will work out the plan according to their own strengths. They will start with what they have, and build the project on that.

The strengths of remote communities provide unique cultural pathways to improve national Gap indicators. Table 1 lists several common strengths of remote communities that address some corresponding Strategic Areas for Action within the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage framework (SCRGSP 2009). For example, learning proper language increases community safety because language encodes respectful relationships. When youth are involved in aged care, contact with elders strengthens identity, which reduces the risk of self-harm. Community empowerment is the process by which groups sustain these many pathways, as in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Linking ages, skills and cultures to sustain success.

Top: It takes people of different ages, knowledge, skills and cultural backgrounds to work together for a successful project, as is shown by these participants.

Bottom: (L) A grandmother and grandson read a book produced by the group; (R) together they hunt for goanna and grubs.

From social exclusion to local authority

In the early days of the mining industry, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal miners had similar abilities in manual labour. Both groups could have developed their strengths together as the industry grew (Stafford Smith & Cribb 2009). However, non-Aboriginal people blocked involvement of Aboriginal people in mining, preventing them from learning new skills and participating in the gradual technological modernisation of the industry. This enabled the skill 'gap' to grow, and it reduced opportunities for Aboriginal groups to mentor each other and to develop their own cultural approaches to mining.

The skill gap in mining can now be found in many industries, exemplifying the growing historical and contemporary effects of colonisation on Aboriginal people. The key characteristic of colonisation is that it imposes social, political and economic structures without people's consent. As a result, Aboriginal people are governed by unique regulations that enable social exclusion from the decision-making processes that affect their lives (Altman & Hinkson 2007).

In a major study, the World Health Organisation identified the widespread effect of social exclusion on health (CSDH 2008:36). The Productivity Commission also recognises that this lack of control is the primary context for Aboriginal disadvantage 'when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown' (Banks 2007: 2).

Table 1: Linking Aboriginal strengths to indicators of disadvantage

Column 1 lists a few strengths of remote Aboriginal groups that improve the wellbeing of communities. Column 2 matches some of those strengths to the Strategic Areas for Action within the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage framework (OID) (SCRGSP 2009). Community strengths of Aboriginal groups across Australia are also the basis for the 'Things That Work' case studies in the OID report.

Remote community strengths	Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Strategic Areas for Action
A network of high-quality youth programs	Education and training Safe and supportive communities
A network of self-sufficient art centres	Economic participation Safe and supportive communities
A tradition of community education	Education and training
Ability to speak two or more languages	Early child development Safe and supportive communities
Active, engaged women's centres	Early child development
An active network of media producers	Safe and supportive communities Economic participation
Caring family networks	Early child development
High-quality aged care centres	Suicide and self-harm Indigenous cultural studies
Interest in expanding Ranger programs	Economic participation Governance and leadership
Physically strong young people	Healthy lives
Intact habitats with most native species	Safe and supportive communities
Network of elders	Governance and leadership Safe and supportive communities
Women skilled in bush medicine	Healthy lives
Successful football teams	Healthy lives

Local authority

Social exclusion is sustained in remote communities by many outside managers who directly and indirectly control the majority of information, decisions and funds for remote Aboriginal people (LGANT 2006; Northern Territory Treasury 2006, 2008). Outside managers are employed by governments, businesses and NGOs, and work as agency policy-makers, project managers, program coordinators, consultants, contractors, researchers, planners, lawyers, directors, trainers, facilitators and evaluators. They are often transient and thus cannot mentor local people to gradually grow into their management roles.

All groups in this study want greater local authority, whether that group is a family, an organisation, a settlement, or a town. In this report, the term 'community' describes any group that makes decisions together about a place. Thus, greater authority enables people to learn from the results of their decisions, and improve them (e.g. Matunga 2006).

On many occasions I have seen outside managers fly into remote communities to announce a new decision they have made, and leave within hours. After they leave, women say they are afraid for their future because someone they do not know has control over their lives. Elders are angry because they want to present their own ideas but they were not asked for them. Unemployed adults feel disempowered because there is no role for them to develop their leadership skills, and everyone is confused about the long-term effects of the new program.

During this study, a remote community decision to lease its land to the government for new housing involved three brief meetings with outside managers. The community accepted the lease terms because they did not want another meeting. Yet, they did not understand the concept of a lease, did not know the payment for a lease, and did not know the amount they would pay to rent the new housing. Local strategies were not allowed, but a local manager identified that he had enough skilled workers to construct the housing at lower cost, and one elder suggested a Habitat for Humanity model to build a stronger sense of home ownership through 'sweat equity'.

Some consider outside managers necessary due to a low level of local skills. At the same time, successful programs in remote communities struggle for the sustained funding needed to develop those local skills (Putnis et al. 2007). Indigenous communities in other nations see outside management as only a step on their path to self-management. They tell how they responded to government assimilation policies with their own policies of isolation, and established outside managers to deal with government during that time. Now they must assert their rights to replace those managers with local authority, and establish cooperative government-to-government relations so they represent themselves in all decisions (Zeferatos 1998). Some central Australian examples of self-management include Lhere Artepe, Tangentyere Council and Yipirinya School.

“We have no Aboriginal Shire managers, no kids trained in school to be managers, nothing to bring in the next generation.

We had 30 years to bring kids through, to teach them how to manage. We will have the same conversation in 20 years if nothing changes.

New government policies are incrementalist. They build on same old policies, or just dress up the old policies with new clothes. Their goal is to maintain power.”

(A central desert Aboriginal government manager)

Strengthening local authority through livelihoods

All Aboriginal groups are distinctive, and each wants to keep its own identity. They take a holistic approach to work that recognises the personal, social, cultural, financial, physical and land-based factors involved in making a living. This approach to work is called a livelihood.

Many tribal groups in Canada, New Zealand, and the US design their own culturally meaningful livelihoods (Hibbard et al. 2008). Through this process, each group develops ideas to improve its life, as shown in the livelihood cycle in Figure 4.

Livelihood

All livelihoods are based on what a community has, such as its land, knowledge, skills, social networks and money. A cycle of change begins with a decision to use what a community has:

1. Influence: Who makes decisions to use what people have
2. Rules: What people can do with what they have
3. Actions: What they actually do with what they have
4. Results: The benefit from each Action
5. Assets: What they have built from sustained Results

In Figure 4 the cycle starts when a group decides which ideas to organise into effective policies for using natural and government resources. Leaders develop their own rules to put those policies and resources into action through programs to improve their lives. Thus, there is a 'feedback cycle' in which the knowledge produced by the group cycles back to feed them, so they can build their capabilities to improve their lives.

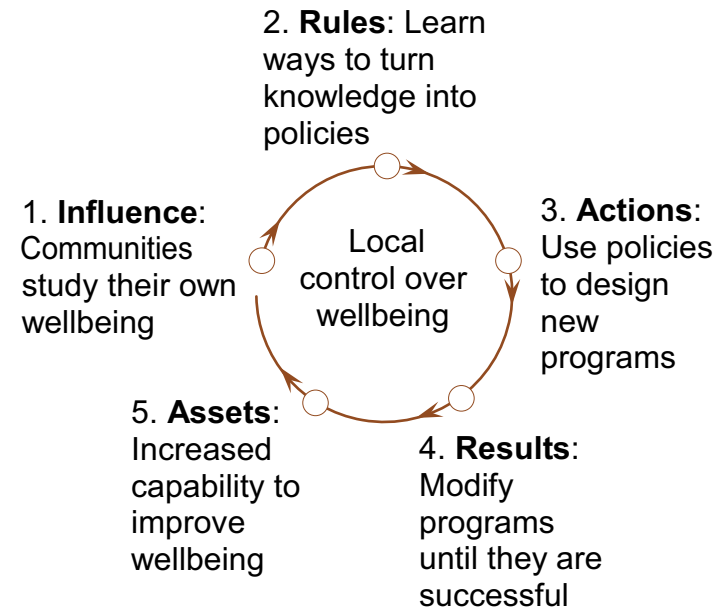


Figure 4: Local control

A cycle that describes how a community develops its ability to use its own knowledge to design culturally meaningful programs, and modify them to be sustainable.

The cycle begins with:

1. the decision
2. the procedure
3. the action
4. the results, which create
5. the lasting change.

This diagram is also included in a handout in the Appendix.

Many remote Australian groups describe a different livelihood cycle, as shown in Figure 5. It often starts with non-Aboriginal leaders deciding which ideas are important. Non-Aboriginal government staff then organise those ideas into policies. Governments then put their policies into action through programs managed by non-Aboriginal people to improve the lives of Aboriginal people (Henry et al. 2002, Dunbar et al. 2004, Brands & Gooda 2006). Through this process, most of the knowledge produced by Aboriginal groups feeds outside people, and very little cycles back to strengthen local cultural identity and skills. As a former ATSIC manager described it to me:

Consultants leach information from Aboriginal communities and do reports. They deliver them to government, and then government tells the community they aren't doing it right.

Does the community know what is in the report? Are we giving the information to the community?

This report meets the need for a tool that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents can use to apply their cultural knowledge to measurably improve their communities.

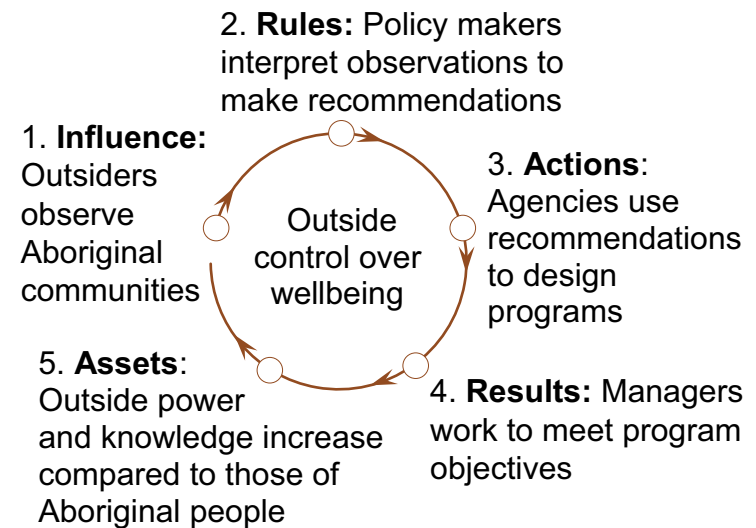


Figure 5: Outside control

This cycle describes how outside groups develop their own ability to use Aboriginal knowledge to design programs. Regardless of the success of the programs, the process does not build Aboriginal capabilities in designing solutions to their own problems. It therefore increases the 'gap' in income, knowledge and skills between Aboriginal residents and outsiders.

This diagram is also included in a handout in the Appendix.

From messy problems to one system

A system is a group of elements in a stable relationship (Bertalanffy 1968). Community planners have long known that only people who are part of a system such as a community can understand and improve that system. Some of those connections are illustrated by the strength card in Figure 6.

If decision makers are not part of that system, but are part of a competing system such as a Commonwealth or State Government or a broker organisation, then a problem becomes 'messy' (Rittel & Weber 1973, Altman & Hinkson 2007, Hunter 2007). Problems become messy when groups (youth, men, women) and organisations (school, clinic, shire, agency) acting to achieve their own goals affect the ability of other groups to achieve their goals, as shown in Figure 7. Such messy problems may never be 'solved' because:

- People from different cultures have different understandings of the problem, so they may not know why their solutions do not work. For example, values of non-Aboriginal healthcare providers often clash with Aboriginal values (Henry et al. 2004:518); mainstream worldviews and cultural values often guide major decisions (e.g. how housing is designed and built), while local decision making is limited to resource allocation (e.g. who will get new housing).
- People in an organisation may be involved in a solution but not understand the problem, so their solution may make the problem worse and they will not know it. For example, short-term clinic staff cannot build the relationships with residents that are needed for good primary health care; Shire planners delay funding for a footy field because they do not understand its immediate importance for family wellbeing.
- Policy makers who are not in the community cannot observe the results of their policies to improve them. For example, a regional education policy developed in partnership with a community significantly increased family engagement in the school. New agency staff then replaced that policy without consultation, which demoralised the community.
- Governments, organisations and residents become accustomed to a condition, such as exclusion of Aboriginal people from information and decision-making. Problems caused by that condition thus create a 'messy' system. For example, residents who are excluded from health care decision making often avoid clinic visits until their illness is severe, which increases the likelihood they will need to travel to a town for treatment. Their children and caregivers often must travel with them, which causes absence from school and work, resulting in further exclusion (Paradies 2006).



Figure 6: A strength card

This is one of the 22 cards with images of strength and resilience in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. To download or order, visit <http://srs.snaicc.asn.au> , or <http://www.seriouslyoptimistic.com>.

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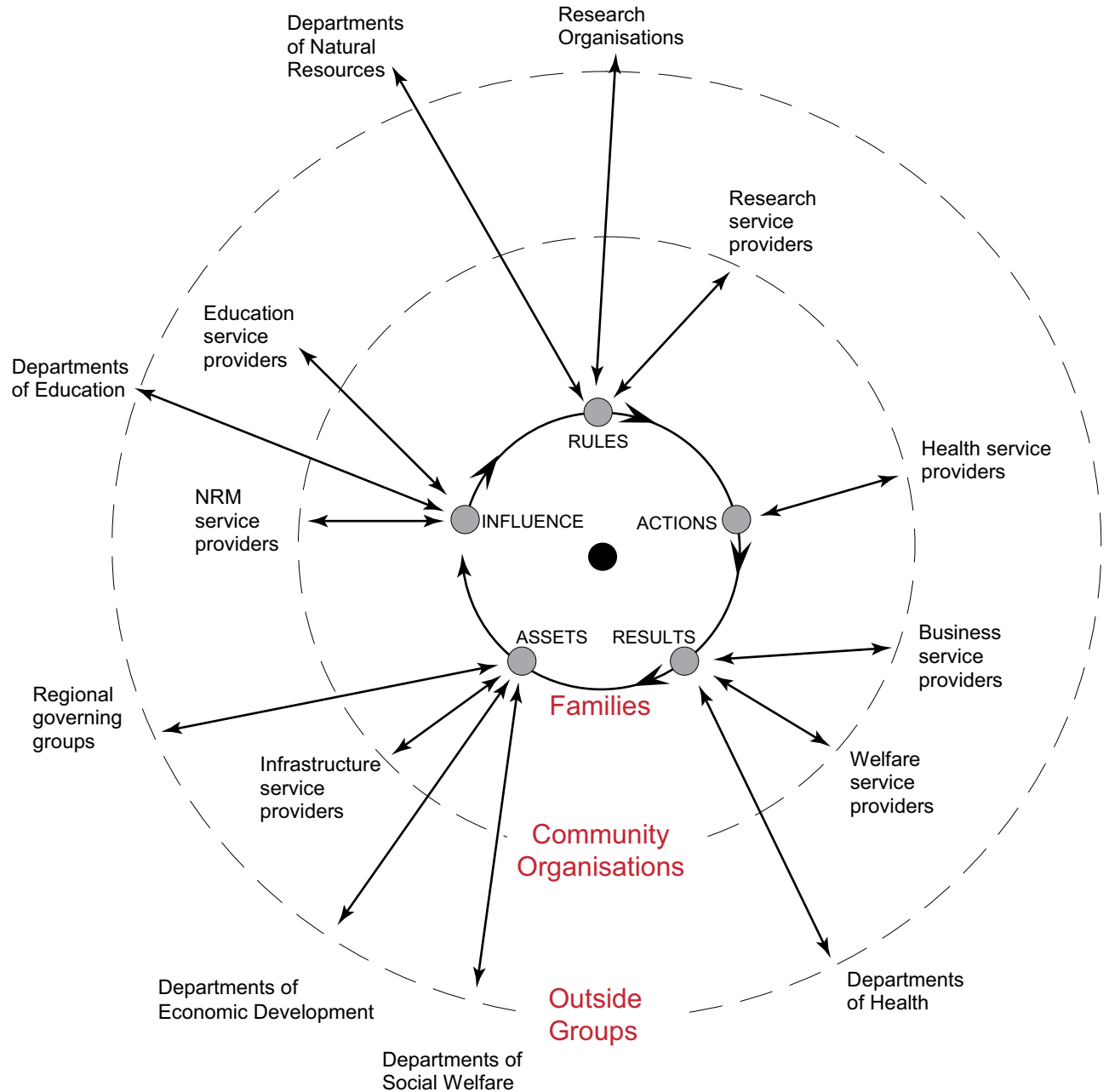


Figure 7: A simplified structure of a messy problem

Sustainable livelihoods are not possible when powerful outside groups compete against each other's interests and against those of less powerful Aboriginal communities. The local groups have less control over their ability to sustain the cycle of actions needed to build wellbeing (based in part on Askeff-Williams et al. 2007).

One system, one family

'Top-down' governance from outside the community system contributes to the problem that policies are trying to solve, and creates the 'failed state' syndrome (Dillon & Westbury 2007, Desert Knowledge Australia 2008). Public servants know they cannot improve local conditions without:

... continually building capacity in citizens, communities and social institutions. The means by which governments go about their work is thus as important as the goals they strive towards on behalf of citizens. (Bourgon 2008:403)

Therefore, people in coastal cities who influence the lives of people in remote desert communities through policies, organisational structures, and services must recognise that they are a part of the local system. However, when governments are not accountable to communities, they cannot learn from each other, and this disconnection significantly reduces the impact of policies.

Elders often present *friendship* as the ideal institution for cross-cultural partnerships, and the antidote to social exclusion. Friendship is:

... the cooperative and supportive relationship between people. In this sense, the term connotes a relationship which involves mutual knowledge, esteem, affection, and respect along with a degree of rendering service to friends in times of need or crisis. Friends will welcome each other's company and exhibit loyalty towards each other, often to the point of altruism. Their tastes will usually be similar and may converge, and they will share enjoyable activities. They will also engage in mutually helping behaviour, such as the exchange of advice and the sharing of hardship. (Wikipedia 2010)

Friendship is important for developing cooperation because it enables different people to work harmoniously together (Hruschka & Henrich 2006). For example, connecting the existing skills of local residents enables a group to create a unique team to improve their system. Service providers who take the time to engage everyone and create 'one family' can significantly improve results.

“Aboriginal people coming through town, they need to know the people first: the clinic, school, police station.”

“People who come to work here, you must love one another, to be friendly, to know family. Don't come in a secret way. You need to be friendly so people know you.”

“The clinic should go to the school to look after the children every morning, to look for skin sores. They need to work together, the schoolteacher and the clinic.”

“If there is an accident, the clinic and the policeman need to be there working together.”

“The clinic needs to go out into the community. If they are not looking around for sick people, they're not doing anything. The clinic has a big job.”

Remote Aboriginal elders

From Family to Organisation to Government

When the participants in a system are engaged in ‘solving’ a messy problem, they learn how each problem is connected to another problem, and they develop a shared understanding of their whole system. That is why it is important that people in a system always try new ideas together. Aboriginal elders fully understand this, and continually emphasise the need for everyone to ‘work together as one family, one system.’

Many remote Aboriginal communities have strong cultural knowledge, but limited skills to translate that knowledge into mainstream management practices. To develop those skills, they are interested in working ‘side-by-side’ with skilled individuals, in groups (Hunter 2008). Box 1 summarises several recent national studies on community empowerment that arrive at similar recommendations for developing the basic foundations for a strong community. These recommendations require that the community:

1. Engage and develop local abilities, and limit the role of outsiders
2. Understand their whole system (family-to-government) and its problems
3. Identify and design possible solutions through local employment
4. Develop partnerships that link sectors, levels, information and resources.

Table 2 presents the recommendations in Box 1, with a diagram showing the two-way interactions among three places:

1. families and communities, which come together in their homes and public places
2. organisations and services, which come together in buildings within the community
3. government, business and NGOs, which come together in outside towns.

Those places are linked by flows of resources: people, money and materials. The cultural knowledge (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) is expressed in the relationships within those places and between them. Those relationships guide the flows of resources. When the right resources consistently flow to the right places at the right time in the right way, all other things become possible. Fred Chaney, former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, described the underlying simplicity of making things work:

I think the real challenge is to systematise good practice when it occurs and to really accept that this requires a whole-hearted, whole of community effort because it’s about a lot of different things. It’s about facilities but it’s also about relationships ... If you actually do the work on the ground, on location – not from Canberra, not from Perth, not from Darwin—and accept that everything has to be done on location, on the ground, you have to have people on the ground, and you have to nurture and create relationships, anything is possible. (ABC 2008)

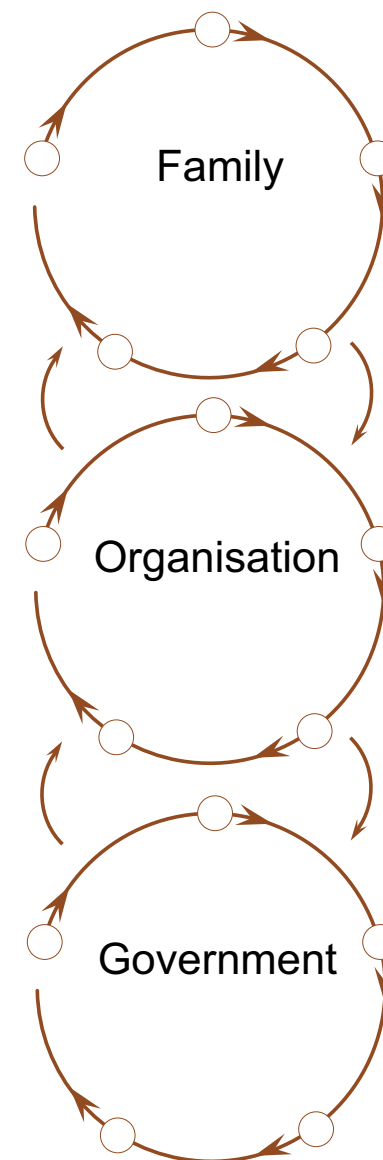


Figure 8: Two-way interactions among the three groups

Box 1: Recommendations for community empowerment

Several recent reports recommend Aboriginal-designed strategies for cross-cultural engagement:

1. *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* (SCRGSP 2009) recommends significantly greater support of Aboriginal decision-making processes, to improve results and give people more control over their lives. They describe a series of case studies of 'Things that Work' that include these success factors:

- cooperative approaches between Indigenous people and government – often with the non-profit and private sectors as well
- community-level involvement in program design and decision-making – a 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down' approach
- good governance – at organisation, community and government levels
- ongoing government support – including human, financial and physical resources (SCRGSP 2009:8).

2. *Little Children are Sacred* (Wild & Anderson 2007) presented nine principles for engagement, with two emphases:

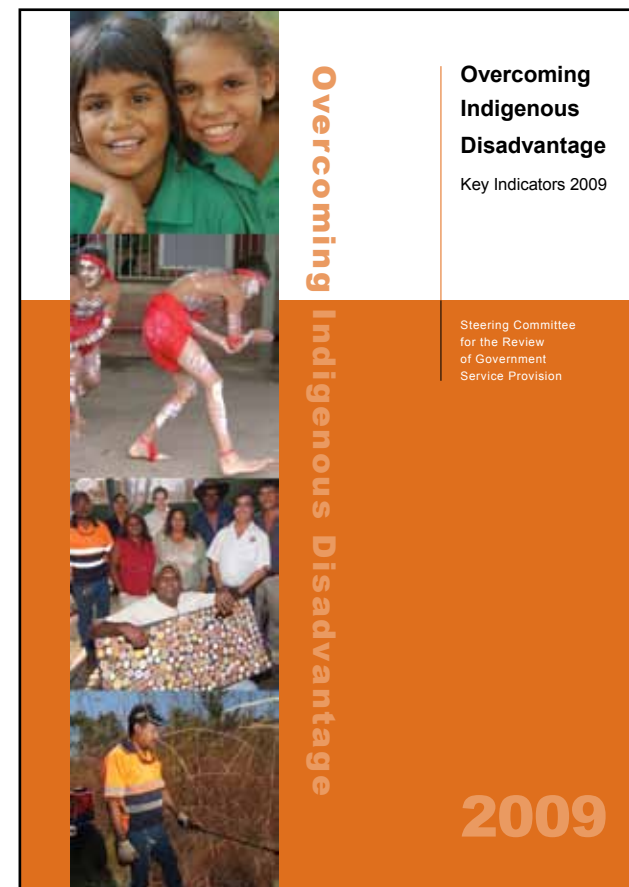
- ongoing engagement that is culturally respectful, empowering and that balances gender and family groups
- effective services with adequate support, resources, monitoring and evaluation.

3. *Many Ways Forward: Report of the inquiry into capacity building and service delivery in Indigenous communities* (Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 2004) concluded:

- The critical challenge for all levels of government is to move from the rhetoric of partnership to a position of genuine partnership and engagement to allow Indigenous people to achieve Indigenous objectives.
- The critical challenge for Indigenous people and Indigenous leaders is to engage in the debate, to enhance the governance of Indigenous organisations so that Indigenous people can invest in, take ownership for and find solutions to problems, and to work in partnership with the wider Australian community.

4. The Council of Australian Governments' 'National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery' (COAG 2009) also emphasised the dual goals of:

- effective resourcing to meet targets
- Indigenous engagement in the design and delivery of programs and services, with particular attention to recognising that strong relationships/partnerships between government, community and service providers increase the capacity to achieve identified outcomes and work towards building these relationships (COAG 2009: C-2).



Box 1: Recommendations for community empowerment (cont'd)

5. Similarly, the CRC for Aboriginal Health (Campbell et al. 2007) reviewed studies on the role of community empowerment in health and identified seven critical success factors:

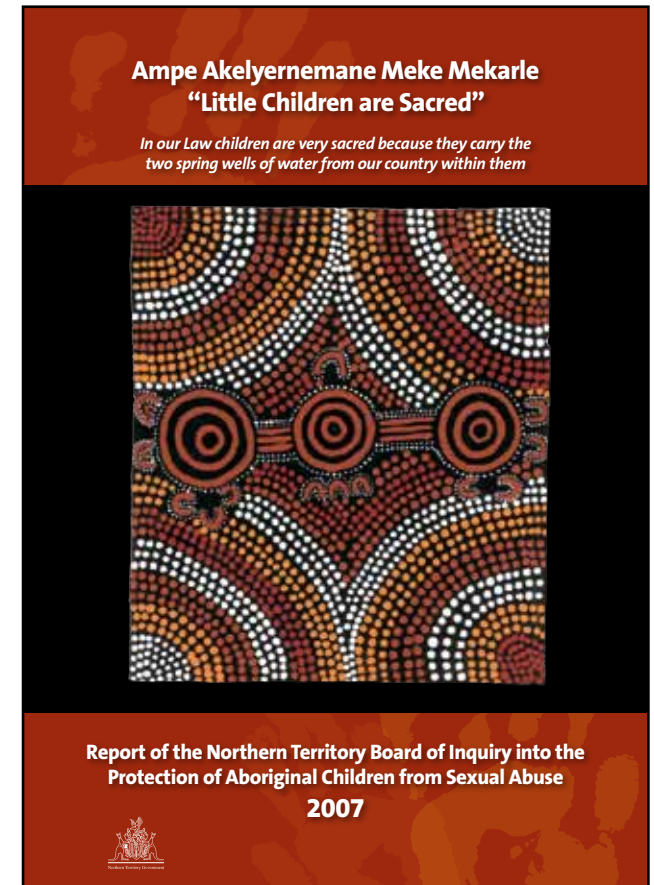
- Community members own and define their problems and solutions
- Existing community capacity and empowerment and a context that supports local involvement in promoting health
- Employing local people and training them in community development skills and processes
- The role of outsiders in providing information about health problems and possible action strategies, as well as in stimulating critical reflection
- Formation and active involvement of a local committee in all aspects of the community development process
- Development of trusting, respectful partnerships between Aboriginal community members and outsiders over time
- Adequate resources both from within and outside the community.

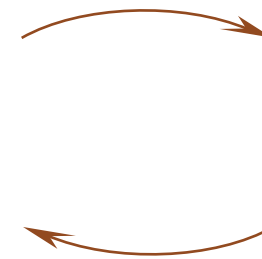
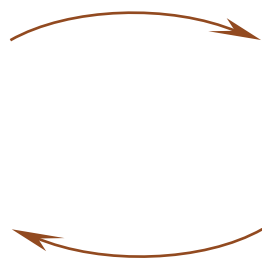
6. At the individual level, a major report on empowerment in rural Australia (Roberts & Coutts 2007) identified six skills for making the most of available opportunities, and planning ahead to deal with issues:

- Critical thinking – to analyse issues and find ways to address them
- Planning skills – to plan an activity to achieve results
- Communication skills – to be confident interacting with different groups.
- Networking skills – to have links with many different individuals and groups.
- Facilitation skills – to help groups interact with each other in different situations
- Leadership – to guide and be an example to others.

7. Dozens of similar reports have been produced (Webb-Pullman et al. 2007). They all emphasise:

- the importance of strong interpersonal relationships to achieving outcomes
- solutions that extend across sectoral and disciplinary boundaries, because Aboriginal communities welcome outsiders who take the time to support their approaches
- Aboriginal decision making, because each community has its own definition of a good society.





Skilled Aboriginal governance and planning	Partnerships to increase local involvement	Cross-sectoral Aboriginal solutions	Partnerships to improve program effectiveness	Resources, support and outside links
Existing capacity, resources and empowerment Aboriginal governance, leadership and decision making Local committee guiding development Community owns and defines problems and solutions Achieve Aboriginal objectives Communities welcome outsiders who help them achieve their aspirations	Engagement that is culturally respectful, and empowering, with gender balance Strong relationships between community and service providers Support for local involvement in providing services Trusting, respectful partnerships with outsiders	Enhanced governance of Aboriginal organisations Community-led program design Achieve Aboriginal objectives Solutions that extend across sectoral and disciplinary boundaries Local people trained and employed in community development Outsiders provide information, possible actions, strategies, promote critical thinking	Cooperation Effective services with adequate support, resources, monitoring and evaluation Strong relationships between government and service providers Work in genuine partnership with the wider Australian community	Good governance Ongoing government support with human, financial, physical resources; links with NGOs and business Adequate and effective resourcing to meet targets

Table 2: Roles for each partner in community empowerment

The research recommendations in Box 1 consistently identify the roles needed for each of the three groups to increase Family and Community control and sustain wellbeing. They are summarised in the columns below each cycle. The recommendations also identify the two-way relationship between each of the groups. They are summarised in the columns below the two-way arrows.

Community empowerment

In this project I have talked with people in locally managed and locally accountable organisations such as PAW Media, Warlukurlangu Arts, Lajamanu Progress Association and Mt Theo. Shifting control from outside to local management requires a more equitable working relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia than we have experienced to date.

Equity is measured in the time that local and outside people spend working side-by-side, in local control of information, and in local decision-making power. Only a handful of non-Aboriginal people have spent more than five years working in most remote communities. This means that Aboriginal worldviews must provide the continuity, but non-Aboriginal people need to spend enough time in close relationships to understand Aboriginal ways of thinking and learning.

In the past, schools enabled sustained cross-cultural relationships to develop. A team of Lajamanu teachers emphasised that any group must be unified with everyone going together to a shared place. They explain that *yapa* [Aboriginal people] must provide leadership and continuity, but this requires they be able to explain cultural concepts to *kardiya* [non-Aboriginal people] and engage them. Formal 'two-way learning' programs provide those opportunities for *kardiya* to build an understanding of their experience with *yapa*. Without that understanding, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have cross-cultural experiences with little meaning.

Aboriginal residents fully understand the 'messiness' of the systems they live within. They understand that community self-empowerment is the only way out of this trap. This research presents a simple method for remote Aboriginal residents to take the lead, in designing and managing culturally meaningful systems that measurably improve their country and community. Those systems can be social activities, local programs, government services and businesses that strengthen cultural identity and are sustainable for generations.

“If we work together, we’ll come up with something *better*.

They’re afraid we might take over the country. They don’t trust us. But it’s *our* country!

They don’t take the time. They don’t listen. They *have* the answers already. But they don’t know bugger-all about our community.

They put all *yapa* (Aboriginal people) into one bucket, but every community has its own *jukurrpa* (Dreamtime story). Every *yapa* is different.

We aren’t going to be White. We’re Black.”

(An Aboriginal representative to government)

Methods

Grounded theory

Residents of small, remote communities must often rely on their own talents to respond to changing local, regional and national conditions. Therefore, adults and elders requested I develop a set of tools they can use to prove to everyone the value of Aboriginal knowledge for measurably improving the wellbeing of themselves, their communities, and their country. The process of developing this report is shown in Figure 9.

Because the goal is to design a tool, and that tool will be used to understand a problem and take action, the tool is actually a type of 'theory.' People use theories to choose which information is important, and how it should be organised for a particular use.

A useful theory is based on real experience. 'Grounded theory' is a method for developing a theory by studying people's experience. This method follows a series of steps that start with general questions and many possibilities. The answers to the general questions narrow the possibilities and focus the next questions. Through this process the theory becomes more useful. For that reason, this research was a learning process with three phases. I used what I learned from each phase to design the next one.

Phase I focused on identifying a visual language to describe how land and people interact as one cultural system. I used that language with other researchers in Phase II to describe in detail how people used a systemic 'livelihoods' approach to improve results. In Phase III, I worked with people to improve different situations, and found the process followed seven steps centred on land and culture. These phases thus identified a method for local groups to clearly see how their current system produces better or worse results for them, and seven steps based on their cultural knowledge to sustain improvements in those results.

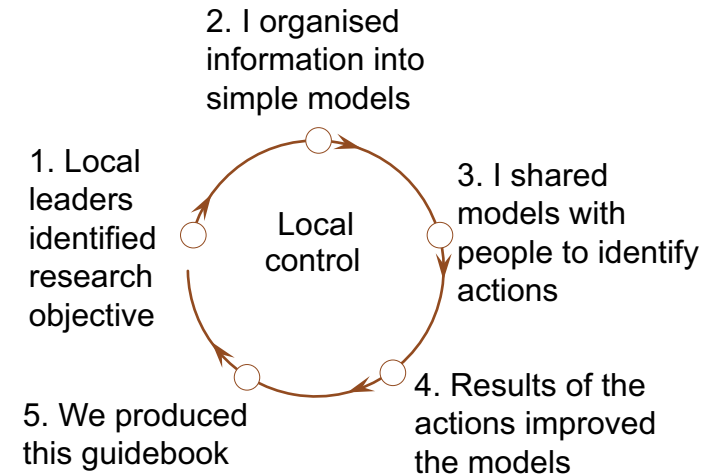


Figure 9: The research cycle used in this report

Ethics

Research ethics approval was obtained from the Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee, as part of the Livelihoods inLand research project. The use of the case to look at integrated outcomes from land management in Phase I was also approved by the APY Executive; the analysis of interviews in Phase II was conducted under the ethics approval of the individual researchers who provided the interviews.

Communities are dynamic. In all of the case studies conditions have changed since the time of research. In the communities involved in Phase II, conditions changed as a result of local dynamics, such as staff and program changes. In Phase III, this research helped them see a clear pathway forward, but they encountered obstacles. For some groups the process of change is slow, but they are strongly motivated. Others were able to continue the process described in their model. For those reasons, the secondary analysis of the interviews in Phase II and the models developed in Phase II are not accurate descriptions of current conditions.

The consent in Phase III was obtained directly from participants throughout the process. Aboriginal elders in particular very much wanted to show that Aboriginal cultural knowledge could guide both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to produce better results for their communities. They welcomed non-Aboriginal residents of their communities who wanted to work together under Aboriginal values. As one elder said, 'This report should go to every community, so people can read what is happening in other communities. If people can read this report, they'll know to go through the elders.'

Figure 10 shows a group involved in planning a case study, and how they used the research results to plan next steps in their land management enterprise.



Figure 10: An ethics cycle - planning the research and using the results

In the top photo, we plan the research by asking if the current system is sustained through cycles. The bottom photo is notes from a discussion in which people use the Learning Journey to analyse their decision. They saw how they can take more control of the decision-making process and influence the community organisations, such as the police and school.

Phase I: A language for system interactions

This was a study based on the well-documented development of the Kuka Kanyini land management plan in South Australia. This case shows the impact of a land management project on how a community functions as a system: which elements were in the system boundary, the interactions and flows among those elements, the rules they followed, and the purpose of that system. I modelled the system as a series of influence diagrams to show the complex network of interactions involved in producing results. Figure 11 illustrates this process.

This study illustrated the importance of working with elders to initiate a project, the central role of outside professionals, how the participants in a land management project engaged many other people in related activities, and how those activities produced results that could be observed and measured.

The resulting diagrams showed how land is the central value, and how family interactions linked all the organisations into a system – young men taught land management skills in schools because their children were students; older women went with young men on country they had not seen for a long time, and started painting again; and so on.

I discussed these results with the head of APY land management, who asked the community to give permission for me to share this analysis. In turn, they asked me to contribute to an outside evaluation of the project.

At the same time, I read many other studies on the many benefits of land management that confirmed that the Kuka Kanyini experience was not unusual.

- three roles were important: land and culture connected; families connected; and organisations connected.
- disconnections within each of these roles caused uncertainties, particularly for young people when they were disconnected from the system
- everyone had clear ideas on how to improve their land management program

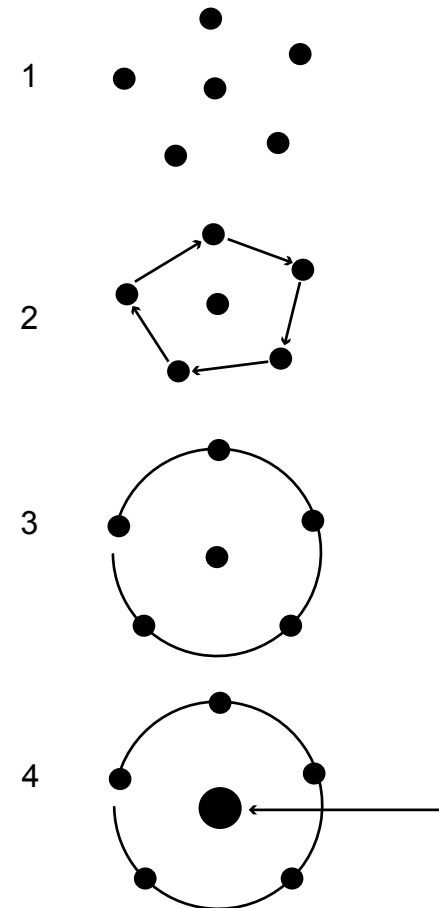


Figure 11: Phase 1 research method

The method in this Phase is to:

1. identify each important action that a group does, such as making decisions, going on country, and making art
2. identify how one action leads to another
3. identify how the actions work together as a system
4. recognise the central value of land.

Phase II: How livelihoods improve results

Phase I showed how a community is a system with land at the centre and family connecting the land with organisations. This guided Phase II, which was to understand how people in a system organised their knowledge so they could put it into action to improve results. I studied interviews with participants in land management programs in South Australia (SA), New South Wales (NSW), Northern Territory (NT) and Western Australia (WA).

These interviews were obtained through the generosity of other researchers: Bronwyn Anderson-Smith (Anderson-Smith 2008), and Kate Braham (Braham 2007) who worked with communities in an Indigenous Protected Area program in NSW and QLD; Jane Walker (Walker submitted), who worked with women in traditional land management in the NT; Karissa Preuss (Preuss in prep), who worked with young people involved in an NT Ranger program, and Fay Rola-Rubzen (Muir et al. 2009), who worked with a community developing culturally based businesses in WA. In these interviews, participants described how elements interacted within their land management programs, at that moment in time.

I categorised their statements according to the international sustainable livelihood framework (DFID 1999). The process illustrated in Figure 12 shows how different interactions in many places were described using a simple livelihood cycle based on the SLF.

The resulting diagrams showed:

- everyone understood their land management program
- their statements fit within one or more of these livelihood categories
- actions started with local and outside decision makers
- actions generally followed steps in a livelihood cycle
- what they actually did depended on the people involved

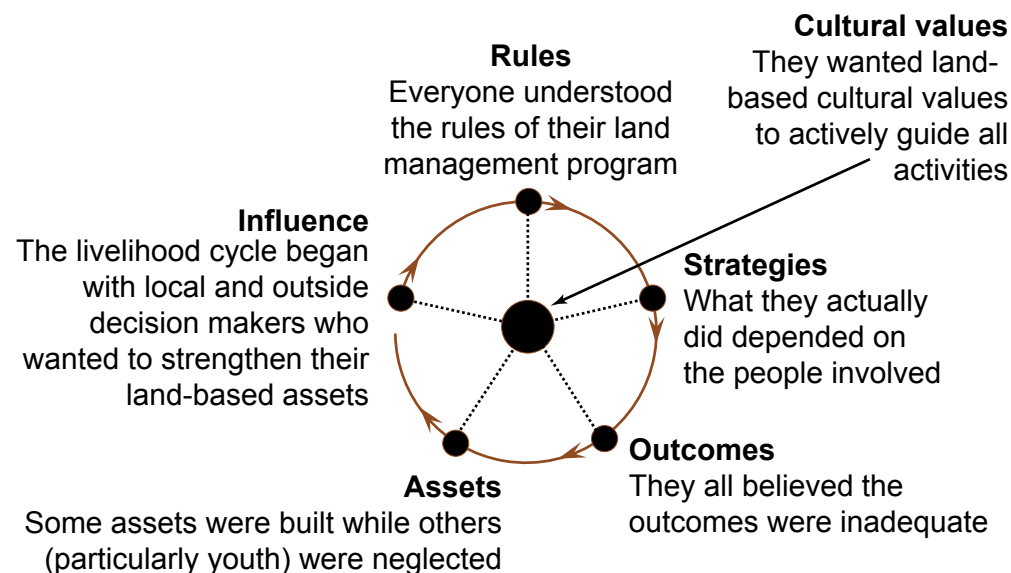


Figure 12: A livelihood cycle describes interactions in many land management programs. Participants made clear distinctions between land management livelihoods strongly influenced by cultural values, and livelihoods without those influences.

Box 2: Livelihood Cycles Sustain Action

To improve a system, important actions must be sustained. Because the world is changing, people must always learn ways to sustain those actions. To clearly see how to sustain those actions, groups around the world use a learning cycle called the 'sustainable livelihoods' framework (Figure 13).

It has one positive (+) cycle that builds strengths:

1. Assets: What people have
 2. Influence: Who makes decisions about what people have
 3. Rules: What people can do with what they have
 4. Strategies: What they actually do with what they have
 5. Outcomes: The results from what they do
- Feedback: If those results are sustained.

It has one negative (-) cycle for managing weaknesses:

6. Risk: What weaknesses affect the system
- Feedback: What they can do about those weaknesses.

Example: Hunting (Figure 14)

What makes it a good day? (Rule → Strategy)

"Looking for goanna."

Why do you want to go out and look for goanna? (Strategy → Outcome)

"Bush foods are good to eat." "Exercise."

Why are bush foods good to eat? (Outcome → Assets)

"Taste good." "Good meat."

What's different about bush meat from shop food? (Rule → Risk)

"Old people been living on that meat."

"We don't like food from shop; shop food makes us sick."

"Used to eat echidna."

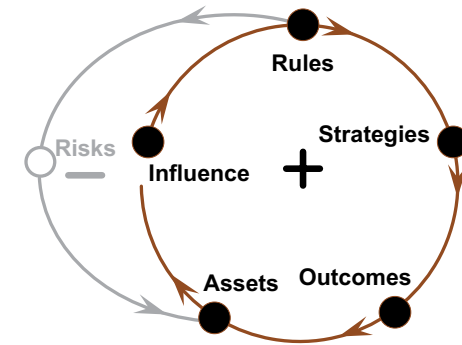


Figure 13: The sustainable livelihood framework

This diagram shows a positive cycle that builds strengths by showing how assets increase influence over rules, and rules determine the strategies that produce outcomes and build assets. The negative cycle shows how rules can reduce risks, and reduce their impact on assets.

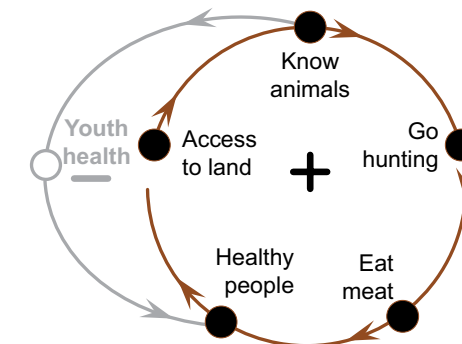


Figure 14: A simple model of hunting as a sustainable livelihood

The women say that if healthy people have access to healthy land and if they know the animals and how to hunt them, then when they go hunting they are likely to get meat. This keeps the land and people healthy. If youth also know animals and how to hunt them, they will also have better health, and will keep land and people healthy.

Phase III: Seven steps for a better system

To see if it is possible to design a framework that supports cultural diversity and local control, I observed and listened to find the smallest number of elements people used to improve many different situations. I then drew them with people, and talked about them to see if they were useful. I then watched to see which ones people used. I found:

Remote people have many creative ideas. However, they rarely share them because outside managers often want to make the decisions, while considering selected Aboriginal knowledge gained through consultations.

When people did share their ideas, they often talked about:

- **Relationship** – that the connections between things are important
- **Circles** – that relationships connect everything equally
- **Centrality** – that land and culture are at the centre of that circle, and guide relationships
- **Causality** – that those relationships are linked, so that one action tends to affect another
- **Two-way** – that causality is two-way; things affect each other
- **Balance** – that unequal two-way relationships are out of balance
- **Responsibility** – that adults have responsibilities to care:
 - for country
 - for family
 - for community organisations
 - for the world
- **Systems** – that everything is linked together
- **Law** – talking strongly about the right way, rather than all the wrong ways.

When taking action to improve a situation, people often talked about protocol. This included:

1. Elders setting the overall direction
2. involving people who know how to do it right
3. understanding the history of the community
4. identifying the cultural ideals of community life
5. involving everyone in expressing those ideals
6. learning by continually trying things out
7. sharing results with elders and celebrating

The research process consisted of identifying the simplest language and a protocol of steps, and finding examples to show its usefulness. Figure 15 is a public performance of Aboriginal knowledge in action, through protocols that engaged all generations, as well as outsiders.



Figure 15: 2009 Milpirri Festival Finale

This Warlpiri cultural festival, which occurred during this research, shares the message that 'Warlpiri law and culture once provided people with stability, self-esteem and direction. It can still do this if it is reinterpreted in the context of contemporary conditions.'

'Milpirri' is a 'metaphor about the meeting of Warlpiri and mainstream cultures and people. In the past we had our violent meeting, and our cultures were all mixed up, but there is hope for a life-giving future for us all' (Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al. 2008).

Top photo: Aboriginal elders, adults and young people gather at the end of the performance. Photos by Anna Cadden.

Bottom photo: Then, non-Aboriginal community residents prepare lanterns to release into the sky, symbolising the Milky Way, the road of learning. (see www.tracks.com.au)

Finding a language and steps

A language is a group of symbols. For example, the important characteristics of a bird can be symbolised as a hand gesture of its flight, a whistling sound of its voice, a painted outline of its shape, and the name that describes its place. Together, these important symbols create a 'model' of the bird. A model simplifies the important relationships in any system, such as a bird.

In desert Australia, leaders often teach using models to help people see the important relationships in the world around them. The 'dot-painting' movement began when Aboriginal artists painted models of important systems to increase mainstream respect for their knowledge (Bardon & Bardon 2004). Today, several desert Aboriginal leaders have published visual models to promote cross-cultural understanding, such as MK Turner (Turner 2005), Veronica Dobson (Dobson et al. 2009), and Bob Randall (Hogan 2006).

In Figure 16, Wanta Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu draws a framework of Warlpiri culture that shows how the five elements of land, law, language, ceremony, and kinship link people and their country (Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al. 2008). He published this framework to help non-Aboriginal people understand how to work with Warlpiri people, and is sharing it to help make Warlpiri values explicit to young people in their community, so everyone from family to government can relate to each other as part of one system: 'to be adopted by ngurra-kurlu' (pers. comm. April 2007).

The Harvard Project on Native American governance found that 'foundational change in a community arises when the external and internal conditions a people face interact with their interpretation of their situation, producing a new, shared 'story' of what is possible and how it can be achieved (Cornell et al. 2005: i).

The goal of this research is to find a very simple language that gives people the freedom to tell many different stories of better places, people and actions.

It is possible that a simple language and model can be a tool for people to understand and have more control of their existing communities. However, it may be that it is impossible to develop a tool that is useful to people of many different cultures, languages, and places. A single tool may restrict people's creative freedom and contribute to the problem.



Figure 16: The ngurra-kurlu model

Leaders use it to teach all others about the relationships among land, law, language, ceremony and kinship in Warlpiri culture (Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu et al. 2008).

Results: The learning journey

In the early stages of this project I discussed this report with research colleagues, Aboriginal participants and with a Reference Group (Figure 17) who emphasised:

- Aboriginal people recognise the value of a good model for designing a good program, but want to design their own.
I responded by finding the simplest possible symbolic language to give the greatest flexibility and creative freedom.
- Models will be used against a community by outsiders who want to manage or control them, and/or who want to show their superiority.
I responded with seven steps based on the evidence that outside control contributes to poor results, and that local control is required for sustainability.
- A good model is not enough to change people. Many past reports have been ignored by policy-makers, but everyone understands a story.
I responded by including examples of the seven steps, using the symbolic language.

This report therefore has three parts

- A Symbolic Language to describe a better system
- Seven Steps to create a better system
- Examples of each step.



Figure 17: Reference group and researchers meeting at the beginning of this research process.

A symbolic language to describe a better system

Figures 18 and 19 present all five elements of the symbolic language:

1. Four circles of responsibility

- Land: Aboriginal knowledge in plants, animals, places and more
- Families: Aboriginal families grow children into culturally knowledgeable adults
- Organisations: Aboriginal-directed services for community
- World: Outside resources and markets

2. Many places in each circle

- Land: Stories, places and living things
- Families: Ages and kinship groups
- Organisations: Services
- World: Governments, businesses, customers

3. Two-way relationships link these places

- Land ↔ Family
- Family ↔ Organisation
- Organisation ↔ World

1. Four circles of responsibility: Land ↔ Family ↔ Organisation ↔ World

2. Many places in each circle

3. Two-way relationships link these places

4. Each place has different cycles of action

5. Repeated cycles sustain improvements

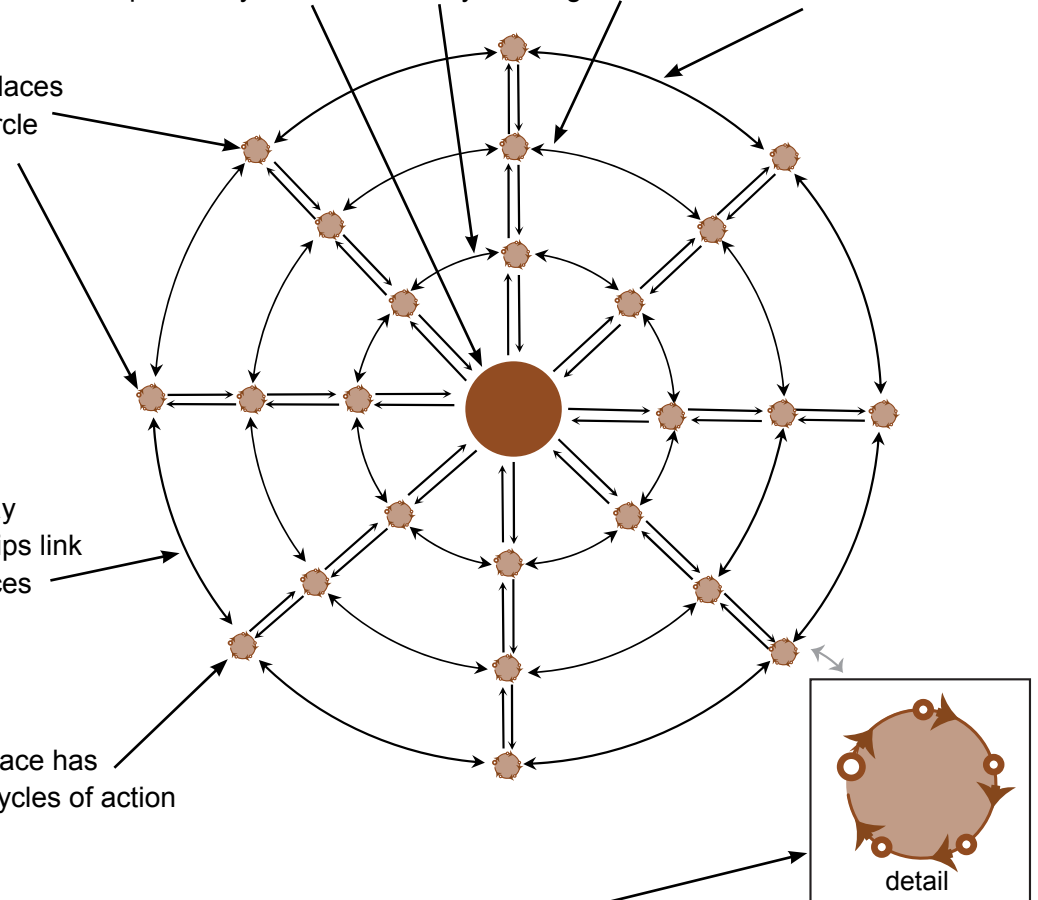


Figure 18: This one image contains all five elements of the symbolic language

4. Each place has different cycles of action

- 1. Assets: What strengths do/don't you have?
- 2. Influence: Who does/doesn't make decisions?
- 3. Rules: What can/can't you do?
- 4. Strategies: What do/don't you do?
- 5. Outcomes: What are/aren't the results and do they build assets?
- Risks: What external factors influence the cycle?

5. Repeated cycles sustain improvement

- A group must be always learning how to improve their actions and their relationships over a long time, to make a difference for future generations.

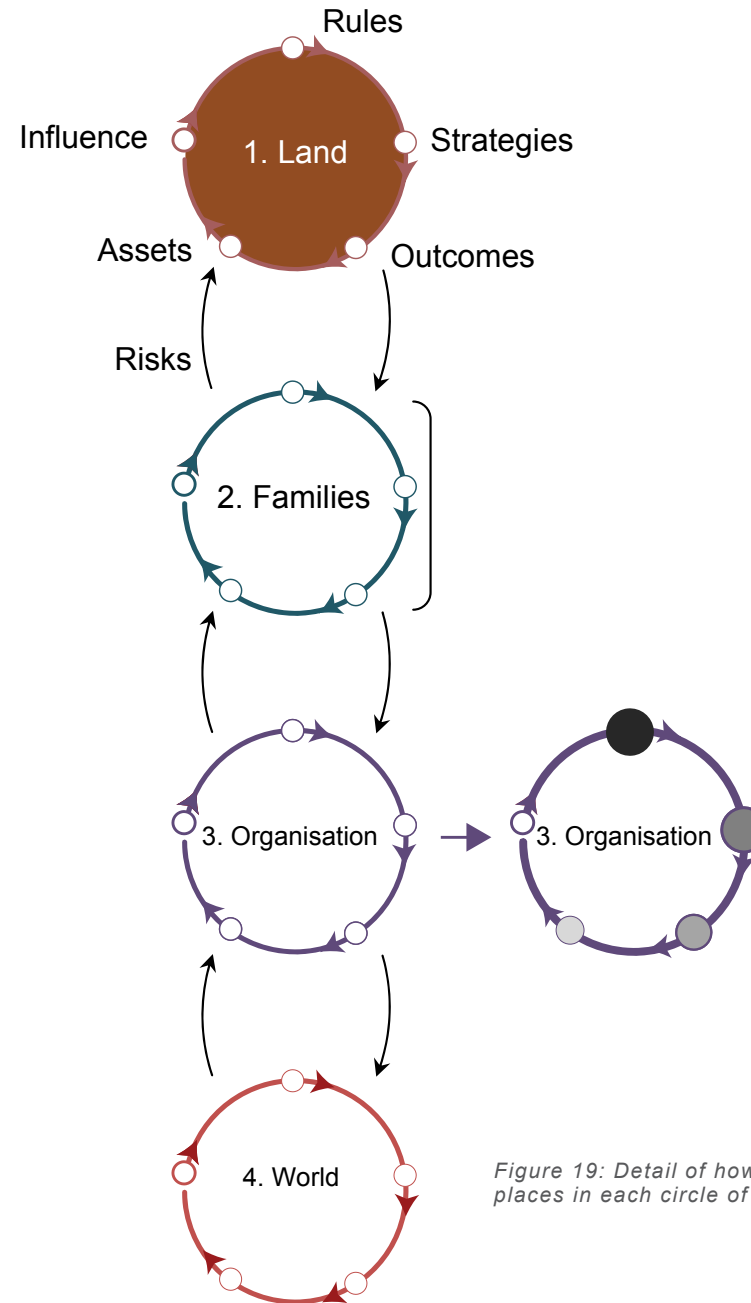


Figure 19: Detail of how two-way relationships align places in each circle of responsibility to the land

Seven steps to create a better system

Each of the seven steps (Figures 20 and 21) is based on evidence from this research.

Step 1: Start with Elders, to learn the central purpose

Evidence: Elder men and women talked in individual and group meetings. They always focused on the central purpose.

Step 2: Bring the right people together for two-way learning

Evidence: Family leaders and heads of community services most respected those people who practiced two-way learning.

Step 3: Tell one story about the system now

Evidence: Organisations, projects, family groups and whole communities told detailed stories of their system now.

Step 4: Tell one story about a better system

Evidence: Organisations, projects, family groups and whole communities always compared the system now to a better one that was aligned to its central purpose.

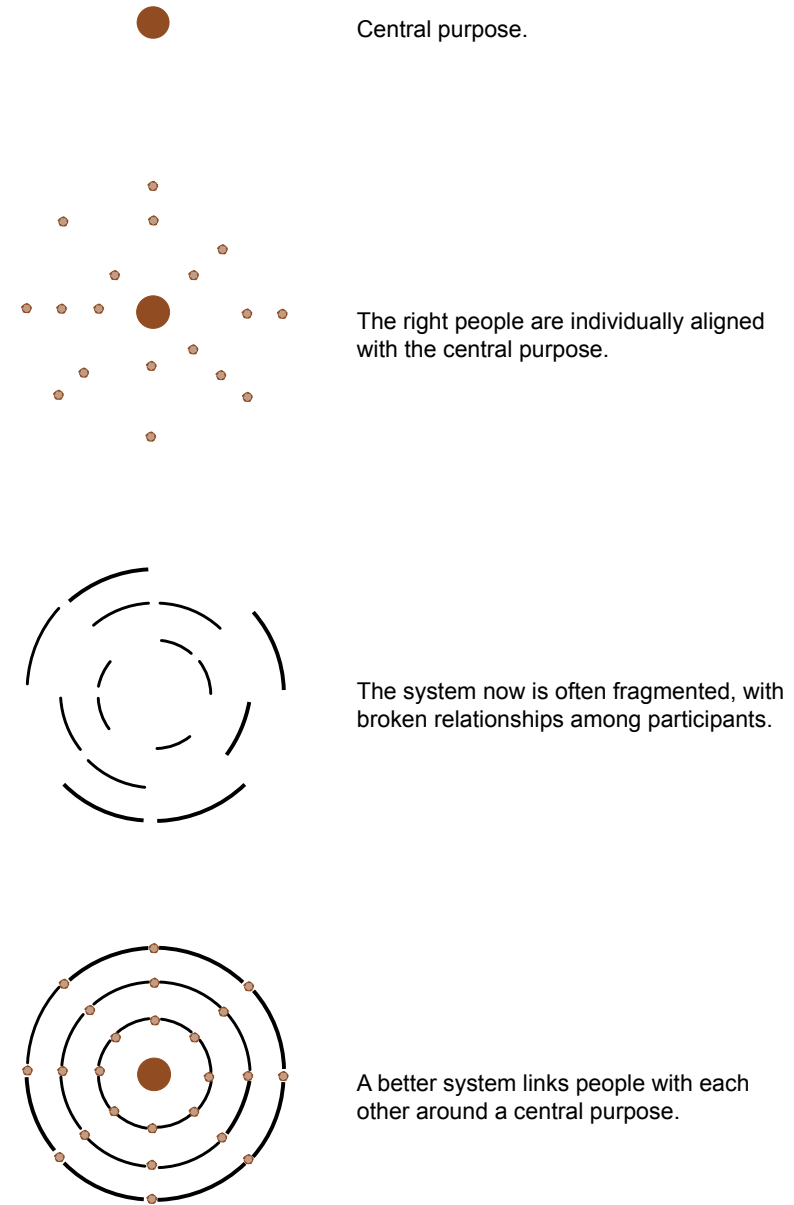
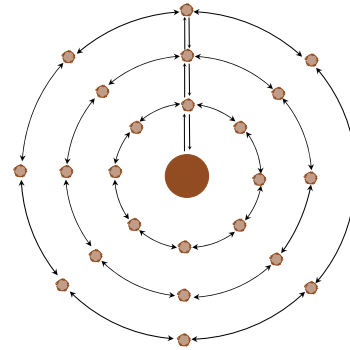


Figure 20: A systems model begins with the central purpose

Step 5: Identify pathways to a better system

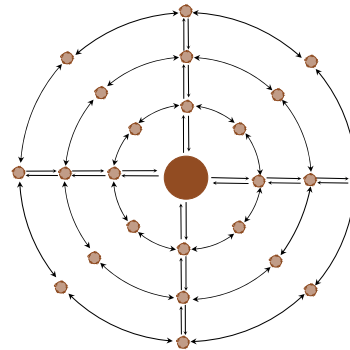
Evidence: Family groups, agencies and service providers identified pathways that gave people many different ways to express their creative talents and improve their system.



A better system happens when people with similar responsibilities are linked with each other and with the land.

Step 6: Try out different pathways, to gain knowledge

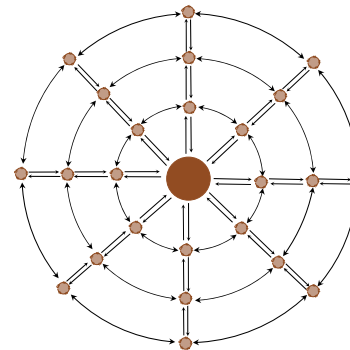
Evidence: When community members engaged with other groups, they learned by taking action, by observing what changed, and by talking about what works.



When many people link with each other they learn from each other's experience.

Step 7: Share the knowledge with elders, to involve others

Evidence: Groups reported back to elders and created materials that shared knowledge of their process with others. This report is written in response to requests for training materials.



Gradually, the elders help everyone to learn how to work together as one system.

Figure 21: Participants create their model of the system through the process of learning by doing.

Why these seven steps?

These seven actions were developed by comparing four things:

1. Evidence of what worked and did not work in the case studies
2. Evidence of the words and pictures local people used to describe what did/did not work
3. Principles for describing actions in systems: I studied many possible principles, and compared them with the case studies to identify ones that people actually used.
4. Ethics, because no actions are right for all people in all situations. Therefore, these actions must always increase people's freedom, and encourage their own creativity.

Why a cycle of steps?

- Steps are necessary because this method is based on story and action, and both of them happen in steps: one thing leads to another.
- Cycles are important because as one action builds the next, it strengthens their relationship. As each cycle repeats the actions and relationships, they become stronger.
- Cycles of steps mean that people become familiar with the steps, and use what they learn to improve the next cycle. There is no failure, only learning and improvement. This is necessary in remote communities, where residents, land managers, and anthropologists emphasised that failures are blamed on Aboriginal people.
- Continuing a cycle for a long time builds a small action into a big improvement (such as a Gap indicator). 'Out of little things, big things grow.'

Why only seven?

- Simple system diagrams with only a few steps make them clear and understandable
- Useful models are easy to remember, and therefore small. People can hold only a handful of elements in their mind at one time.
- Research in other systems shows only a handful of steps make the differences in most complex natural-cultural systems.
- Evidence in this report confirms these three factors.

Why this order?

- This is an ideal order, but is not rigid. It should encourage people to learn-by-doing. For example:
 - People may try out something (Step 6) to learn if it works, before they ask elders for help (Step 1). A Ranger coordinator did this in one case study.
 - People may try to create a new system, before they understand the details of the current system. This happened when Income Management was first introduced, and Centrelink did not realise how often people needed to travel to large towns.

The Learning Journey

This research method resulted in a cycle of seven steps for growing communities that can be described as a 'learning journey' to fit the emphasis on teaching and learning:

Invite elders to identify the central purpose for the community. Identify the 'right people' who already put that purpose into action in their group. Together, tell the community story as it is now. Then tell the story they want – all connected to the central purpose. Brainstorm ways to get from the story now to the story they want. Involve everyone to try out different pathways to that story, and study which pathways work best. Share the results with the elders and others, and use what you learn on the next journey.

Step 1: Start with Elders to learn the central purpose

Why? It is important to first identify the intended purpose for the system. A central purpose helps a group orient its actions toward one goal, and provides a clear reason for the individuals in a group to work together. In Aboriginal communities, that purpose is based on cultural knowledge that is reflected in the stories of a place, and the actions of the animals, plants and people there.

Almost all of the six desert communities with whom I was engaged are in states of confusion from frequent changes in government policy. As a result, most Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents do not identify a clear sense of shared purpose. While everyone in a system such as a family or organisation has a 'feeling' or a 'sense' of that purpose, they cannot always talk about it because they are in the middle of their system.

A framework such as the Learning Journey developed through this research helps people 'stand back' and see it. As people become more knowledgeable through cultural training and life experience, they see it more clearly and can talk about it explicitly so others can also see it. These people are elders.

A group of knowledgeable elders is the best way to identify that purpose because they began this training early in life and have since had many years of observation. In the case studies, elders had long experience observing and interacting with the systems they led. Their lives were occupied by many meetings with government and non-government organisations. As a group, they can work together to identify the right direction for each action in the system, and identify the right people (Step 2) who are doing that now.

This picture shows how people are aligned with the central purpose that comes from the land. The system of relationships in nature is the guide for the other systems that learn from it: families, organisations, outside world. People are guided by the same principles when they fulfil their responsibilities in the land, in their family, in their organisation and in the outside world. That is why this diagram shows only the land and the relationships.

This step is necessary because many community residents – particularly young people – have forgotten their purpose. Outside people, actions and relationships have changed many systems so they no longer fulfil the purpose for which they were originally designed. Elders can help people remember their underlying purpose as part of larger systems, to help them work together more effectively.

If this step is missing: well-meaning outside people often want to impose their purpose on a system. Because they have a limited understanding of the system, and have different interests, this often creates confusion and messy problems.

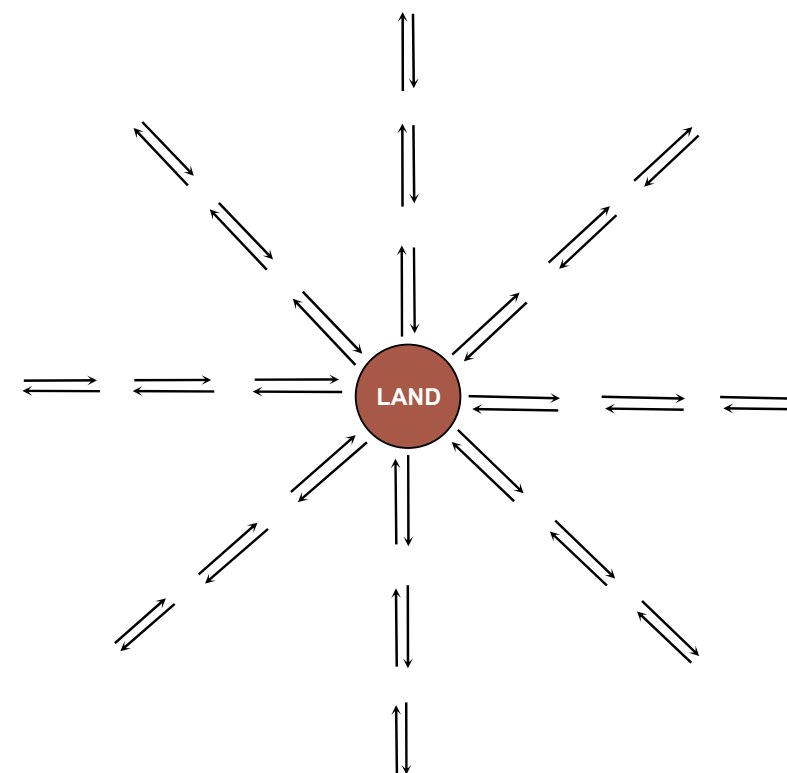


Figure 22: The picture for this step illustrates the central purpose. This purpose is grounded in the land and in cultural knowledge.

Step 2: Bring the right people together for two-way learning

Why? The right people are those who are already practicing two-way learning, as part of their responsibility for their place, as shown in Figure 23. These Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are easily identified because everyone can see that they are doing things right in their organisation. They help people build on their strengths, and manage their weaknesses.

Just as we bring together a group of knowledgeable elders to help people see the central purpose of the community, we bring together the right people to see how they put that purpose into action in the land, in their families, in their organisations, and in the outside world.

By bringing the right people together, they learn from each other's successful actions. They learn ways to combine their different actions to sustain the community through changes. They learn how to talk about what they are doing, so they see it more clearly and can teach it to others.

Other people in the community see the right people as evidence of their potential strength as a community. They see them as leaders, and want them to teach others who are not as strong. Because they are part of the community, they can teach young people and adults for a long enough time for them to develop their strengths. The most important teaching strategy is to tell stories (Step 3).

This picture shows how there are often only a few right people in a community, and they are often isolated. The challenge is for others to connect with them and learn from their example.

This step is necessary because many residents are not focusing on building their cultural strengths and doing more of what they do well. Many residents are doing nothing, and many leaders are focusing only on fixing what is wrong. They need the experience and example of the right people to guide them on their learning journey.

If this step is missing: well-meaning outside people often want to design short-term programs to fix a community. Because they do not know the people, cannot build trust, and do not stay for a long enough time, they cannot make a difference.

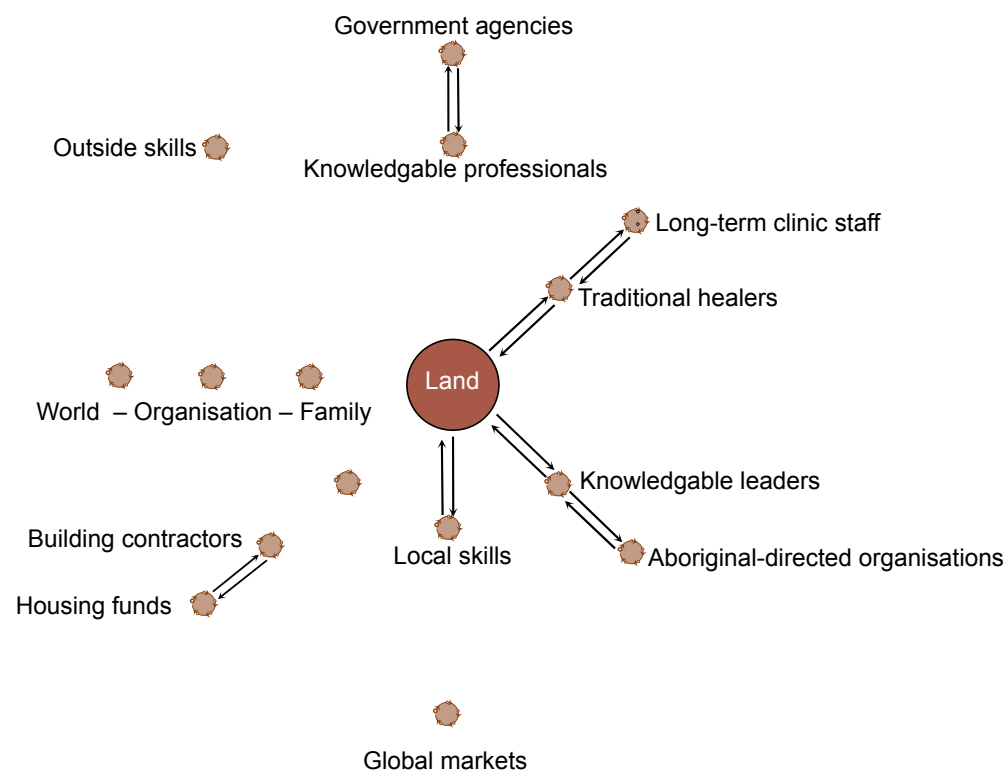


Figure 23: The 'right people' are oriented to the central purpose, but are rarely linked with each other

A person is a 'right person' because they are responsible for an important place, and practice two-way learning there. However, those practices are often isolated from each other, from families, and from land.

Step 3: Tell stories about your system now

Why? When each person in a group tells their own story, together they create a group story that describes the whole system. They are able to 'stand back' and see how their system sustains itself, and each person's part in the system.

Drawing that story helps everyone see the entire system at once. They can then begin to analyse which people, places and interactions are present, which are strong or weak, and which are missing (as in Figure 24). They can identify where resources do/do not flow, where they flow to, and how actions influence each other. They can see which actions repeated in each place create cycles that sustain a system in a good or a bad way.

They can identify people or groups by their influence on the system: 1) those having two-way relationships with a wide range of lands, organisations and outside groups; and 2) those having limited and one-way relationships with a narrow range of lands, organisations and outside groups. When these two groups have conflicting purposes, the system becomes messy and resists change.

Through this process, people can see which actions have the most influence on *how their current system is sustained*.

This picture is able to show more detail about the relationships in the whole system: between the places in the land, in the family groups, in the organisations, and in the outside world.

This step is necessary because most people do not understand their community as one system. Individuals develop their own ideas, but need to bring those ideas together in a story to understand how the current situation sustains good and bad results.

If this step is missing: well-meaning outside people often bring new ideas without taking the time to understand that Canberra may be a part of the community system! New ideas may not be sustainable because they conflict with the interests of distant people in the system.

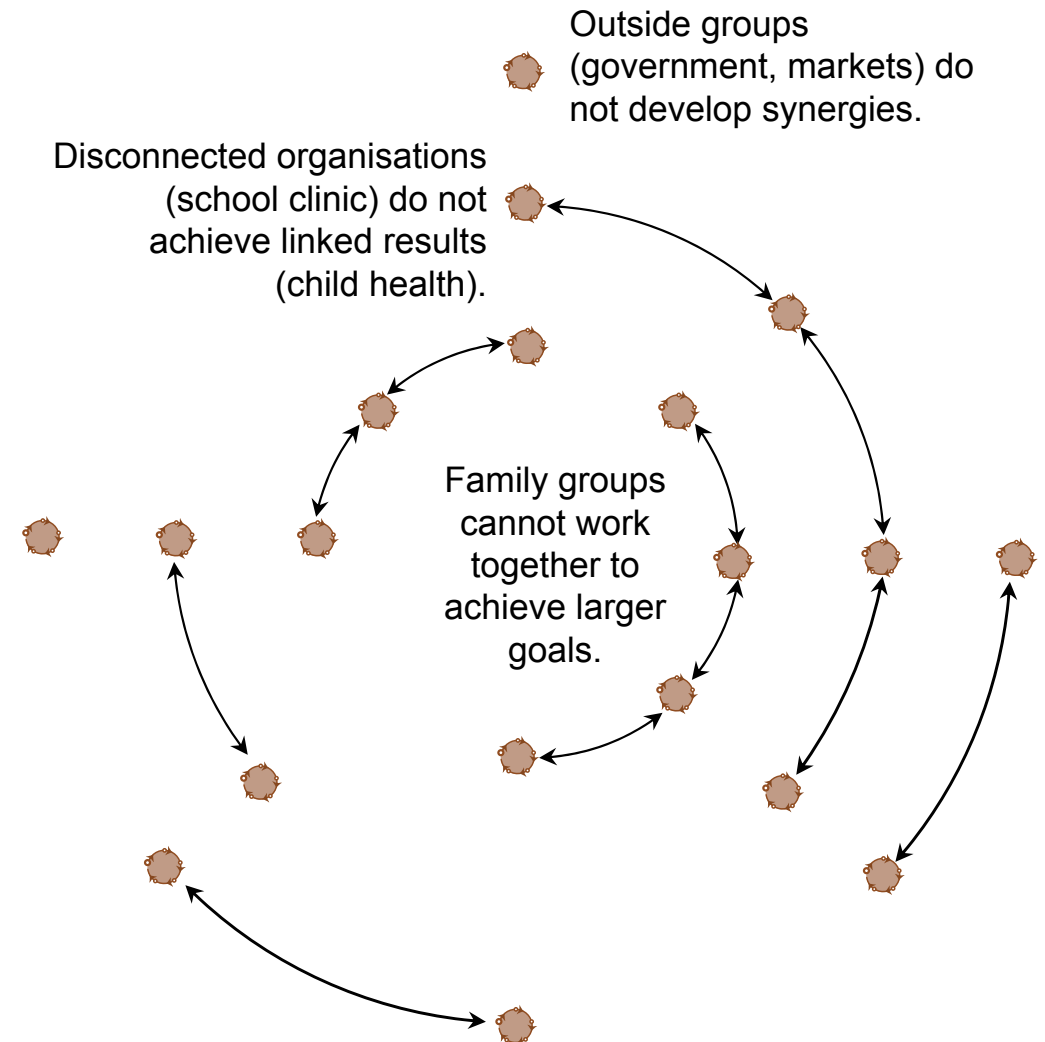


Figure 24: The picture for this step shows a common system.

There is isolation between the world, organisations, families; no connection with land; and no central purpose.

Step 4: Tell stories about a better system

Why? Communities want to show how their cultural values are central to achieving better results. This step brings together interested participants to use what they have learned to begin to identify the basic structure of a better system, as shown in Figure 25.

This better structure focuses on increasing the capability of the community to sustain its improvements in a changing environment. This is achieved by clarifying how the families and organisations will work together in their 'circles'. This requires identifying:

- which participants in each circle need to work together to contribute to the central purpose
- which participants in the system are missing
- which people are disconnected and need to be reconnected
- a picture of an equitable exchange of knowledge and resources.

This picture shows the opportunities: that new relationships which link the places in each circle of responsibility into a whole are needed to create synergies and stabilise the system.

This step is necessary because people want to improve their current system, to link the parts which are working well with those which are not. In this way, everyone learns from the best examples. This step is empowering because local groups gain a system-level understanding of how to improve their system.

If this step is missing: well-meaning outside people may start a good program without thinking about how to sustain it. The detail in this step identifies how many people will need to learn how to build local ownership that can sustain the community in the face of many changes.

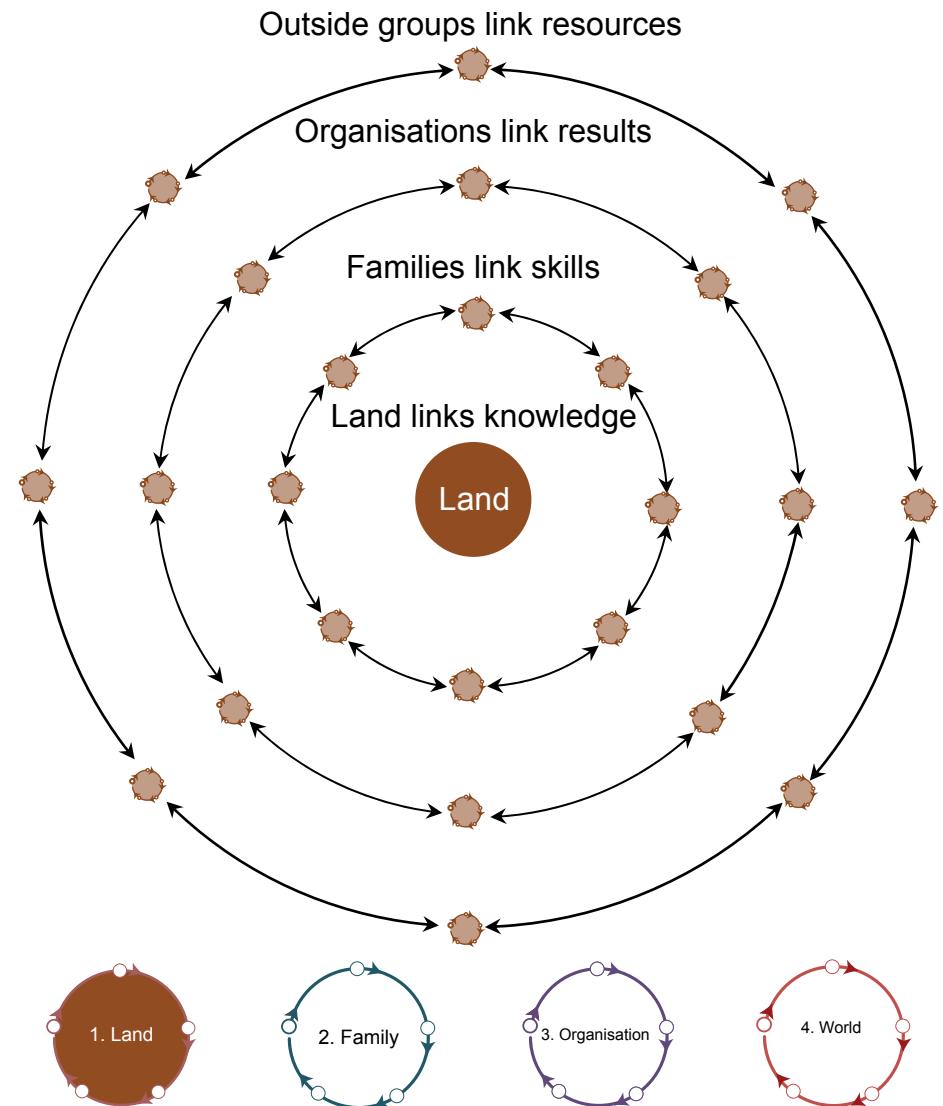


Figure 25: The picture for this step shows a better system

A new picture often starts by seeing how people in each circle need to be connected and need to work with each other around one central purpose.

Step 5: Identify pathways to a better system

Why? It is necessary for a group to understand how consistent interactions lead to improved results. Stable interactions between land-based cultural knowledge, the responsible family groups, the relevant organisations, and external resources helps those people work together around a central purpose, as in Figure 26.

This diagram helps a group to visually describe those interactions:

- Which knowledge, families, organisations and outside groups must be aligned to support the purpose of the system?
- Who is engaged in the livelihood activities in each location?
- How those places work together to form a group.
- How to identify if the interactions are equitable.
- Gaps or weaknesses in a group's alignment with the central purpose.

This picture adds detail to identify how reciprocal interactions create effective pathways; and to show measures of change that enable learning and change on the pathway.

This step is necessary because people must be able to identify enough measures so they can learn-by-doing, and create pathways to improved results. This process of group 'adaptive management' is necessary to eliminate failure (Berkes et al. 2000).

If this step is missing: well-meaning outside people create ideas that look good on paper but are not practical, or they allow only a few possible actions and cannot involve the many different talents in a community.

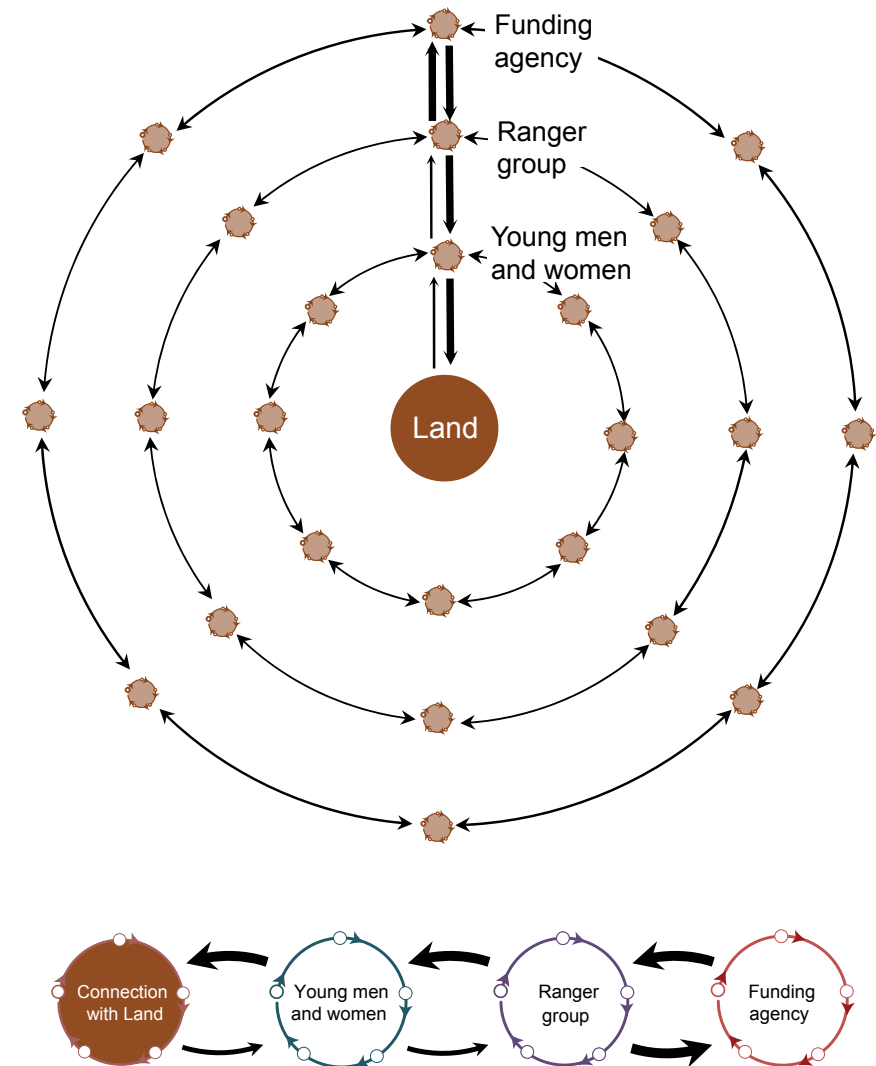


Figure 26: This picture shows how to measure the strength of two way relationships and their links to the central purpose

The land, families, organisations and outside groups are aligned. Unequal relationships can be illustrated with arrow thickness, resource differences with cycle size, and relative importance of each action in the livelihood cycle with circle size.

Step 6: Try out different pathways to gain knowledge

Why? Early and frequent actions are important to test if ideas work ‘on the ground’ with the people, information and resources available in that particular place.

Aboriginal groups are active and learn-by-doing. The previous step identifies possible measures, but when people take action they learn which handful of measures actually show changes in the relationship between actions and results.

Figure 27 is a more detailed way to see which actions are most important, and how they are linked to improve results. It is helpful to ‘try out’ many small ideas, before they are linked together into a system. By trying out ideas as part of this process, everyone learns from what each person does, and can help improve each action because they know:

- what measures show if the system is changing in the right or wrong direction
- what handful of changes (e.g. new participants, rules, places) are needed for the system to go in the right direction
- how to easily stop a system from going in the wrong direction.

This picture records the results of actions: it documents which pathways people have found to be most important, and which measures tell people how successful they are.

This step is necessary because Aboriginal people have many ideas that are never even tried. This step identifies opportunities for people to ‘try out’ different ideas and learn from them, with little risk of failure.

If this step is missing: well-meaning outside people often keep all the records. Each person in the group cannot learn how their action does/does not contribute to the results they want. This uncertainty increases the chance of failure.

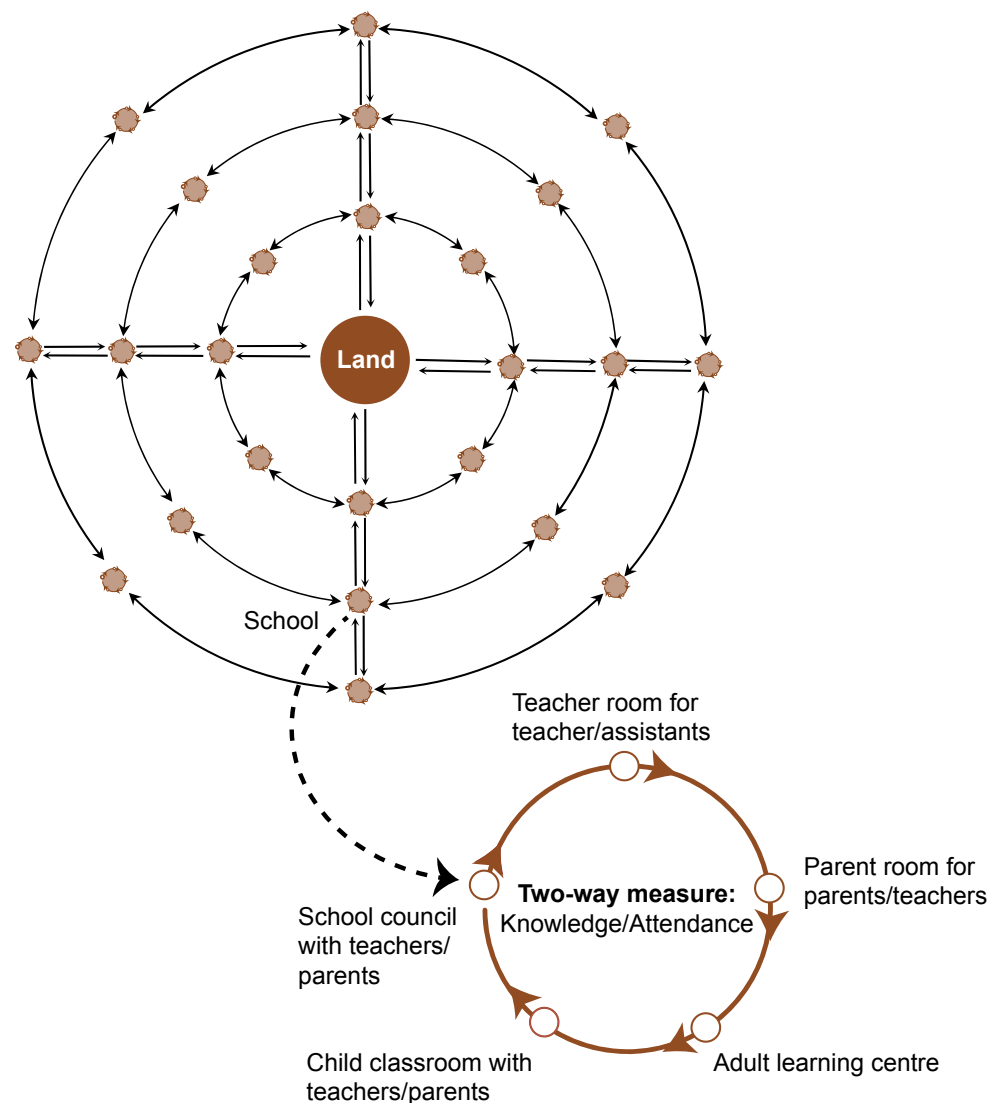


Figure 27: The picture for this step shows ways to take action.

It identifies the involved families, organisations and outside groups, their strength of relationship, and the cycle of action in each place. All of these important measures can change as they are tried.

Step 7: Share the knowledge with elders, to involve others

Why? This step shares the important knowledge learned, to increase the authority of local leaders and build the understanding of disengaged adults. Figure 28 is an example of how all the places in a community must align their activities to achieve these purposes.

Remote desert communities have a history of short-term successes in two-way education, agriculture, Aboriginal-managed local businesses, healthy food, biodiversity surveys, etc. Those successes have rarely been sustained, and their stories are often hidden in the filing cabinets of agencies and broker organisations, while local residents have few documents.

This picture helps sustain successes: when a group (land-family-organisation-world) sees why everyone must steadily work together toward a shared purpose, they can resist unnecessary changes in policies or programs.

This step is necessary because successes must be sustained through infrastructure for generations to improve outcomes. Sustained actions are able to become part of an ongoing learning cycle that gradually attracts more people, information and resources.

If this step is missing: well-meaning outside people often take Aboriginal success for granted and do not understand that it requires stable infrastructure. They often make changes to soft or hard infrastructure, when smaller changes would be adequate.

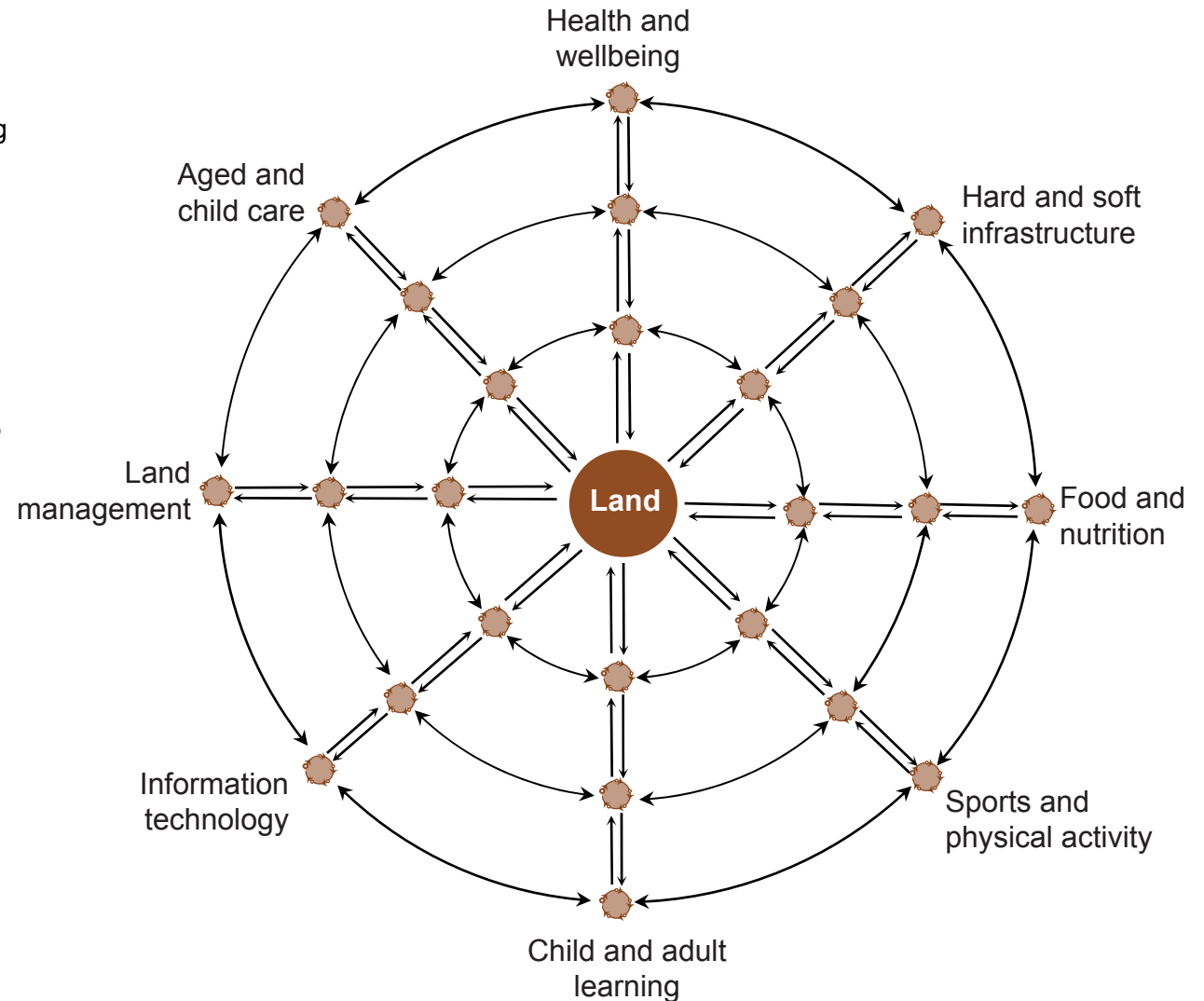


Figure 28: The picture for this step shows how working together improves results for the whole system

It identifies the involved families, organisations and outside groups, their strength of relationship, and the cycle of action to improve each system. All of these important measures can change as they are tried.

Examples

The case studies were chosen as good examples of one or more of the seven steps:

1. Start with elders, to learn the central purpose
2. Bring the right people together for two-way learning
3. Tell one story about your system now
4. Tell one story about a better system
5. Identify pathways to a better system
6. Try different pathways, to gain knowledge
7. Share the knowledge to involve others

The central purposes and measures for all case studies

Each case study began by talking with elders to identify the central purpose.

Changes toward the central purpose are measurable at the points in Figure 29.

Case A – To be one family: measured by number of organisations sharing knowledge to engage others/total number of organisations.

Case B – To work as one system: measured by the number of people engaged in actions/total number of actions needed for results.

Case C – To work on country together: measured by number of people engaged/total number in community.

Case D – To keep young people ‘on track’, engaged in purposeful activity: measured by number of young people meaningfully engaged/total number of young people.

Case E – To have equitable or ‘two-way’ relationships: measured by comparing the contributions of participants from different cultures.

Case F – To be strong in both worlds: measured by comparing degree of literacy (all types) in both cultures.

Case G – To have equitable or ‘two-way’ relationships: measured by comparing the engagement of participants in different roles.

Case H – To work as a one system: measured by number of people linked to country/total number in community.

Case I – To have a ‘two-way’ project that benefits both groups: measured by comparing benefits to both groups.

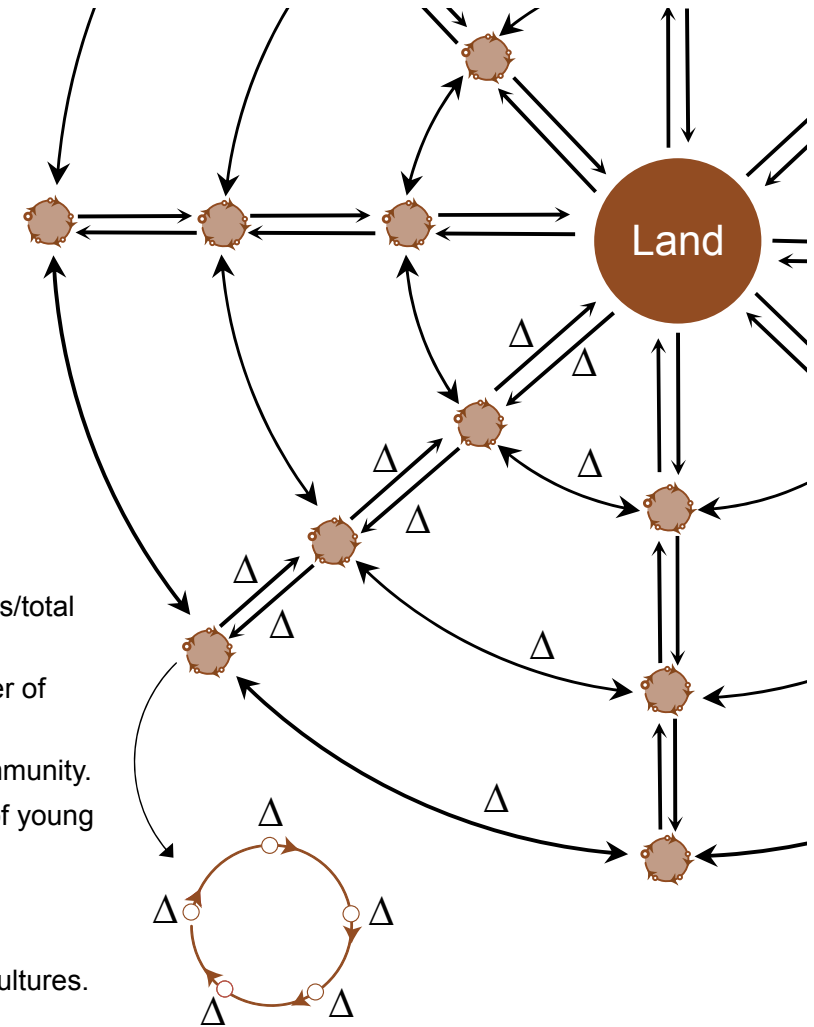


Figure 29: Each of the Δ shows places to measure change, before and after an action

Step 1: Start with elders, to learn the central purpose: Case A

In this case study, I asked elders what I could contribute to their community planning. They invited me to a meeting and said they wanted to show how their cultural values can guide the community. I followed up with several small-group discussions that resulted in the diagram in Figure 30. I presented the results at the meeting (shown in Figure 31). Elders consistently presented the same values – to be one family, one system:

As a friend, a family, in one community, we gotta work together. It's a hard one but we need to keep doing it, to carry on. If a good idea comes in, we gotta try that one, practice.

The only way we can do it is if everyone shares their part. So we can see where the community's future is heading, to share their ideas, to make the community strong. Indigenous and non-Indigenous, we need to work together. We can share our cultures. It's hard sometimes for organisations to work on their own. We want to learn together, to find out what the clinic and police station roles are. Elders look after the community as well.

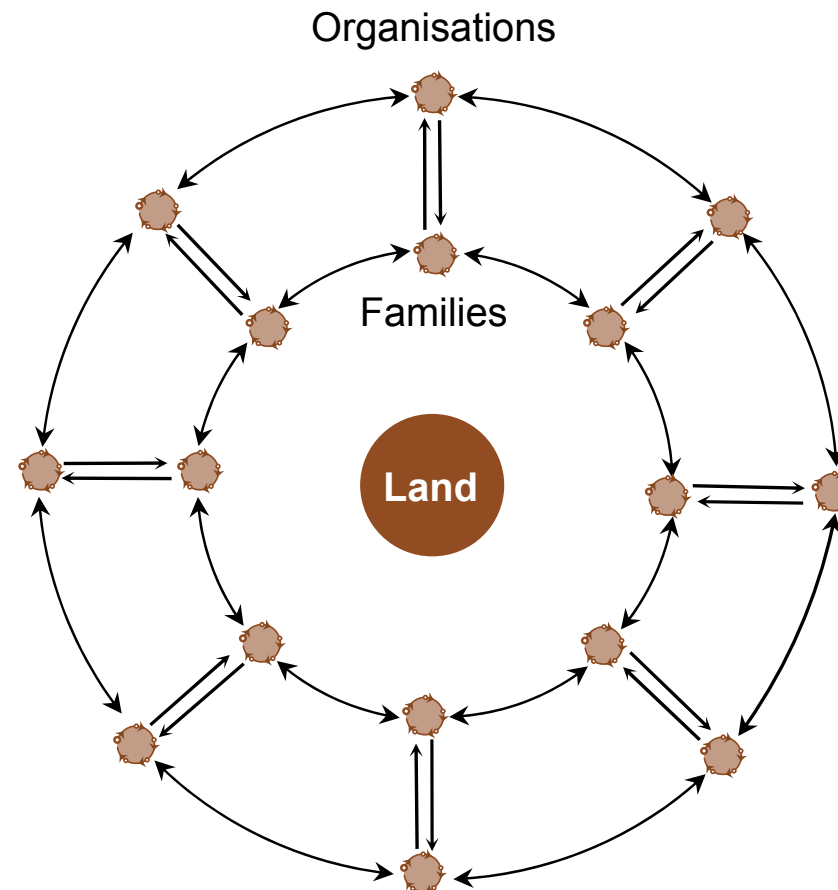


Figure 30: How a community becomes one system

The central purpose of developing 'one system' is at the centre. The process is to have two-way relationships between residents and organisations.

Working with Elders

It is most helpful to work with elders as a group (as in Figure 31) because they help each other clarify concepts and reach agreement on the nuance of a central concept.

In addition, as I asked about the implications of a concept – such as how ‘being one family’ could help people work together to improve child nutrition or environmental health – the diversity of participants helped increase the variety of ideas.



Figure 31: Reporting back

I ask for guidance from elders to design the next step of research on how organisations listed around the circle on the whiteboard can put the idea of ‘one family, one system’ into action.

Organisational structures

Elders pointed out that community organisations differed in their organisational structure, as shown in Table 3. They said that some organisations supported the purpose of being one family – one system, and others did not. The ones that supported the purpose had significantly greater Aboriginal engagement in governance and employment, and had better results. This was because their organisational structure, and how they interacted with people, reflected Aboriginal values of being like family. Residents identified five sets of indicators that make an organisation like family:

Aboriginal board: The board is a way for local people to decide: 1) how the organisation operates; 2) how it interacts with families and other organisations; and 3) how it benefits the community.

Empowering manager: Empowering Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal managers working under the direction of an Aboriginal board help set up organisational structures that: 1) enable local people to perform all tasks (e.g. clear procedures and understandable technology); and that 2) reduce risk (e.g. high standards for financial management).

Aboriginal staff: Number of staff employed is a clear and measurable way for an organisation to benefit the community.

Two-way practices: Two-way practices ensure: 1) the board can operate the organisation, and interact with local and outside organisations, in accordance with cultural and government rules; 2) all staff have the skills to run all the daily operations, so several people can handle each duty, in a schedule that enables them to fulfil their family duties. These practices give local people the skills to benefit their family and community, while following proper organisational procedure.

Aboriginal benefit: Organisation uses its knowledge and money to benefit the community. For example, the store puts its nutritional guidelines on the notice board, and contributes to sport, funerals and transport.

These five actions support each other and create a sustainable system, as shown in Figure 32.

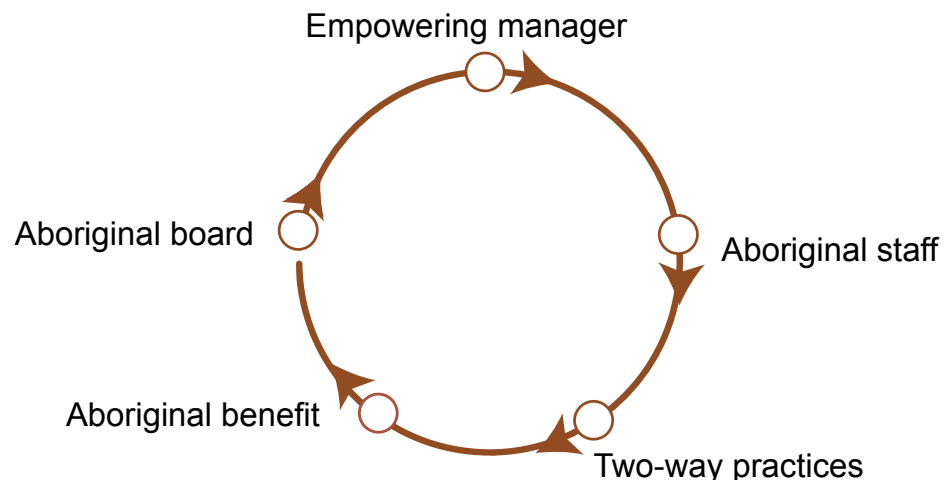


Figure 32: How the indicators support each other to increase benefits

The board provides policy guidance to a manager who identifies procedures for the staff to follow in daily operations. The result is two-way knowledge, and increased capability for Aboriginal benefit.

Table 3: How community residents viewed organisational structures, at the time of this study

Community Control	Aboriginal Board	Empowering Manager	Aboriginal Staff	Two-way Practices	Aboriginal Benefit
Art Centre	X	X	X	X	X
Youth Program		X	X	X	X
Shop	X	X	X	X	X
Police					
Shire			X		
School		X	X	X	X
Clinic					
Aged Care	X	X	X	X	X
Outstation centre	X		X		
Rangers	X		X	X	X

Step 2: Bring the right people together for ‘two-way’ learning: Case A

Elders said they should first involve the ‘right people’: those who are best at teaching Aboriginal people how to manage local organisations. Everyone should study those successful approaches, so organisations that are ‘not doing so well’ can learn how to build stronger teams.

I interviewed the leaders of all organisations to study their policies and practices. I then interviewed community members, or observed their interactions with those organisations. I found that each organisation had two possible ways of interacting: a way that built on Aboriginal knowledge and the capabilities of local families, and a way that built on non-Aboriginal knowledge and the capabilities of the organisation.

This important set of relationships can be simply illustrated by the two livelihood cycles in Figure 33. Non-Aboriginal knowledge is shown with a strong flow of influence from the powerful organisation to the less-powerful family. Aboriginal knowledge is shown with a strong flow of influence from the family to the organisation. Two-way learning occurs when the groups interact as equally powerful partners.

I discussed my findings with community members, who confirmed the results and emphasised the necessity for everyone to work together for Aboriginal self-empowerment.

Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge were important to elders, because they want their young people to be strong in both worlds. However, each organisation differed in how ‘two-way’ its learning was; in some organisations both forms of knowledge were equally powerful, while in others non-Aboriginal knowledge dominated.

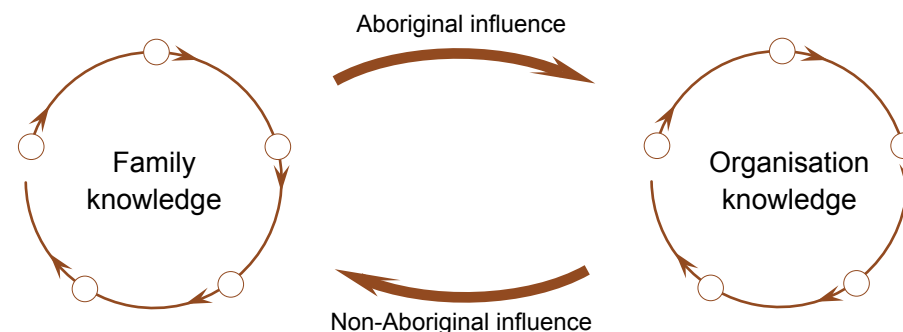
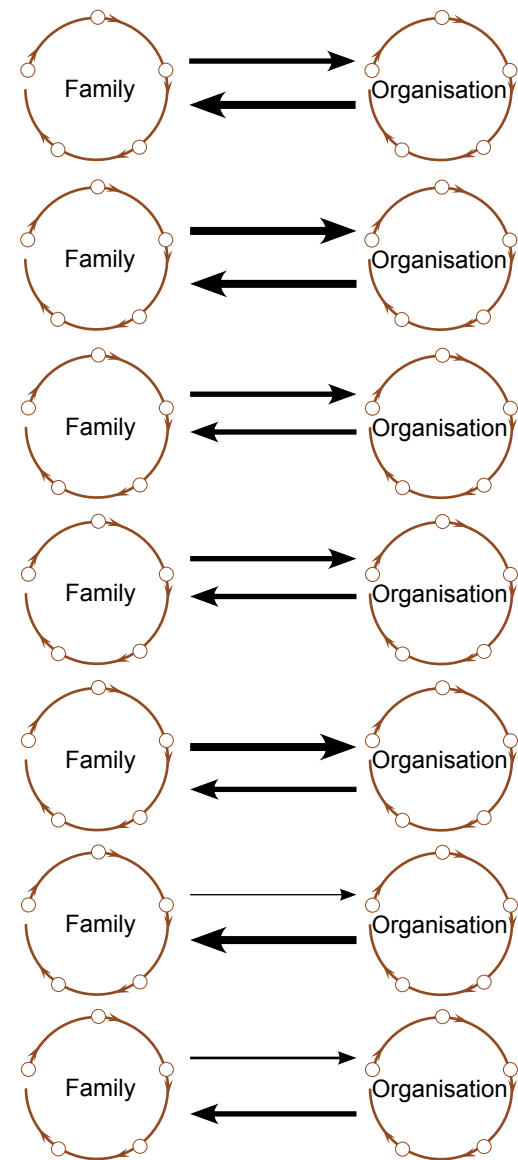


Figure 33: An illustration of how two-way relationships affect both systems

Table 4: Measuring differences in two-way relationships

Organisation	Family/Aboriginal knowledge	Two-way strength	Organisation/Non-Aboriginal knowledge
School	Building a strong cultural identity by understanding Aboriginal stories in language		Building skills to be culturally strong in the world by learning English language and culture
Youth Program	Building confidence by managing and participating in culturally meaningful activities		Gaining workplace skills by managing youth activities, and skills for cultural expression through the arts
Ranger Program	Visiting and caring for country with elders through songs, stories and ceremony		Managing weeds and feral animals; monitoring ecological changes
Shop	Caring for their children and families by encouraging healthy eating		How food and other goods are transported, priced and sold
Media	Improving cross-cultural communication; having a voice; archiving elders' knowledge		Being able to use radio, television and satellite technology
Police	Teaching young people respect for others through cultural teaching in language		Obeying state laws; the justice system and prison system
Clinic	Gathering and using bush medicine, and cultural knowledge to prevent and treat some diseases		Using Western medicine and public health methods to prevent and treat other diseases



Step 3: Tell one story about your system now: Cases A and B

Aboriginal leaders continually emphasise that communities become stronger when they care for and learn from each other as ‘one family – one system’. The elders in this community were concerned that local organisations did not consistently put this principle into practice.

I then interviewed people from local organisations such as the police, school, shop, art centre, clinic and Shire, and asked: What do things look like when they are going well? What do things look like when they are not going well? I found that the difference between ‘going well’ and ‘not going well’ was one factor: if everyone is learning together or not.

Table 5 presents a simplified example of a clinic ‘not going well’ and having poor results. That clinic and community recognised that their results were due to the lack of two-way learning between the clinic and the community. Areas of learning from the clinic to community included environmental health and public health practices. Areas of learning from the community to the clinic included Aboriginal health knowledge and building trusting relationships.

The language clarifies that the cause is not the clinic, but that some groups are disconnected from the system. In interviews with all participating staff, it was clear that change in one part of the system depended on action in other parts. No one had the authority to change the entire system.

Agencies often bring outside resources (world) to a community organisation (organisation), to provide services to Aboriginal people (families). They rarely learn the principles (land) that will engage people (families) to design the best procedures (organisation) to achieve agency objectives (world). Two-way relationships are strong with the organisation and its funding agency, but one-way with families, with little engagement of cultural knowledge.

“People have lost the way of knowing in stories, lost the way to respect each other. Language teaches them how to respect each other. Warlpiri language teaches people to honour each other: the one who looks after the law, the way the law is run. Language has strategies that help people come together and resolve conflicts. If you don’t resolve conflict among skin groups, you lose the connection with the story. It’s about maintaining the right relationships between the different stories. If the police learn Warlpiri, they will be surprised to learn what ‘protect and serve’ really mean.”

(A community educator)

“Health department locked away, not letting everybody know what they’re doing. Elders can work with the clinic, police, school, rangers. Elders work with police if they aren’t doing their job properly, police can work with elders, together. Shire’s job is to make sure these other organisations are working together. One family, one system. Everyone will know we are heading in the right direction.”

(Community chairperson)

Cases A and B: A system not doing well

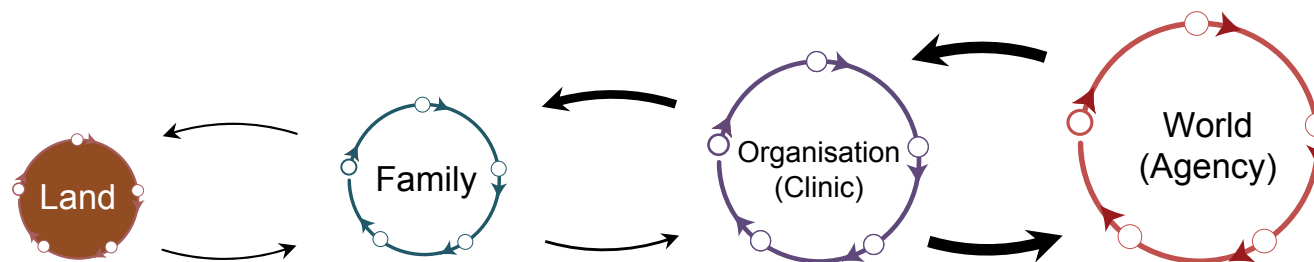


Table 5: The causal relations and measures that result in an unbalanced system

Each of the areas of responsibility (Land–Family–Organisation–World) has its own livelihood cycle, and the responsibilities interact as one system. The actions of the people in each influence the actions of the people in the next. Over time, the results become worse for everyone in the system.

Land – Families	Families – Clinic	Clinic – Agency
Families experience nurses as coming and going, staying locked up in the clinic, not knowing anyone in the community, not caring about them, and being strangers.	Nurses in communities for only 6 weeks have few opportunities to develop relationships with local residents. They do not know patient histories and there is no continuity of care.	Agency must treat high rate of disease by staffing clinic with skilled nurses and a doctor. They pay high salaries for short assignments, and recruit many staff from overseas.
Families have no opportunity to share their knowledge of plants and Aboriginal health. They do not trust the staff, know little about modern diseases, avoid going to the clinic until their illness is acute, and stay as brief a time as possible. Health gets worse.	It is difficult to practice good primary care such as complete medical histories and patient counselling, and to prevent acute illness and injuries. There is no environmental health or preventive health, and late-stage treatment is the least effective medical care.	Staff burn out from the high rate of disease and injury. With high turnover, they cannot do long-term healthcare planning. Agency has no funds for environmental health nurse or public health nurse, to work on preventive health strategies.
Key Measure: How often family members contact the clinic	Key Measure: How long each staff member stays in the clinic.	Key Measure: Ratio of agency funding for prevention/ treatment

Step 4: Tell one story about a better system: Case B: A system doing well

This illustrates a clinic 'doing well' as a result of two-way learning through the entire system.

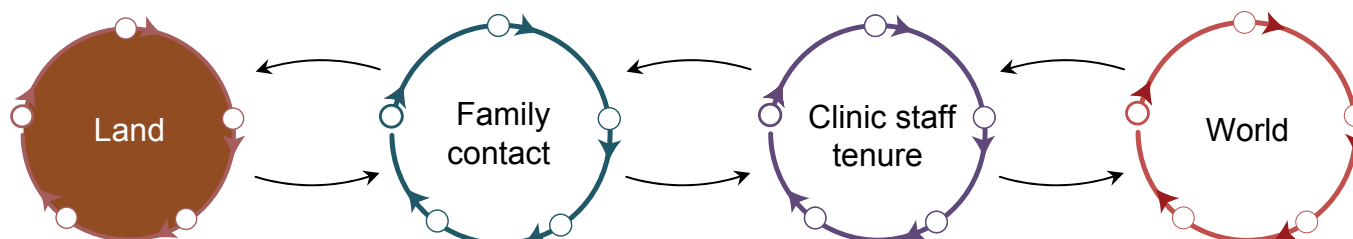








Table 6: The causal relations and measures that result in a balanced system

Each of the areas of responsibility (Land–Family–Organisation–World) has its own livelihood cycle, and the responsibilities interact as one system. The actions of the people in each influence the actions of the people in the next. Over time, the results become better for everyone in the system.

Land – Families	Families – Clinic	Clinic – Agency
Community identifies the right people to be trained in all areas of health. They receive two-way training from clinic staff and from senior women. They develop culturally-effective methods for health promotion.	Clinic staff stay long enough to train family members 'side-by side' in environmental health livelihoods that enable 'two-way' healthcare. Health understanding increases, contact with staff increases, health improves.	Agency provides long-term funding to clinic staff to train environmental health workers. Improved working conditions enable staff to stay for their entire career.
 	 	 
Families take responsibility to teach clinic how to improve community health. They meet regularly with clinic to design practices that are more welcoming to children, men, women and elders. They design long-term strategies to reduce all type of injuries.	As family become more active in health promotion, clinic staff get to know and like more families, they enjoy their work more, their healthcare services become more effective, staff feel more successful, are happier and stay in community longer.	As staff tenure goes up in response to better relationships and outcomes, the agency shifts funding from needs-based to preventative, to train more staff. Staff stress and burnout decreases, so staff need fewer financial incentives to stay.
Key Measure: How often family members contact the clinic	Key Measure: How long each staff member stays in the clinic.	Key Measure: Ratio of agency funding for prevention/ treatment

Step 5: Identify pathways to a better system: Case A

Remote Aboriginal communities have different sizes, locations, histories, languages, family groups, dreamings, and much more.

I found that communities do not want standardised and centralised control of local organisations across many communities. I found that remote groups want to design their organisations around the unique combination of people, knowledge and skills found in their place.

Each community is very proud of the successful organisations that they have grown and that they own. They express their creativity through those organisations, and those organisations then express what is unique about their community. Those organisations then become part of the distinctive community identity, while other organisations are seen as 'outside.'

The quote on this page by an Aboriginal man working to increase local employment describes how a systems understanding helps engage workers. That practice results in the close family teamwork shown in Figure 34.

He points out that jobs must welcome local creativity, must support people to contribute their ideas to that organisation, and must enable people to take responsibility, as shown in Table 7.



Figure 34: A smoothly working family team

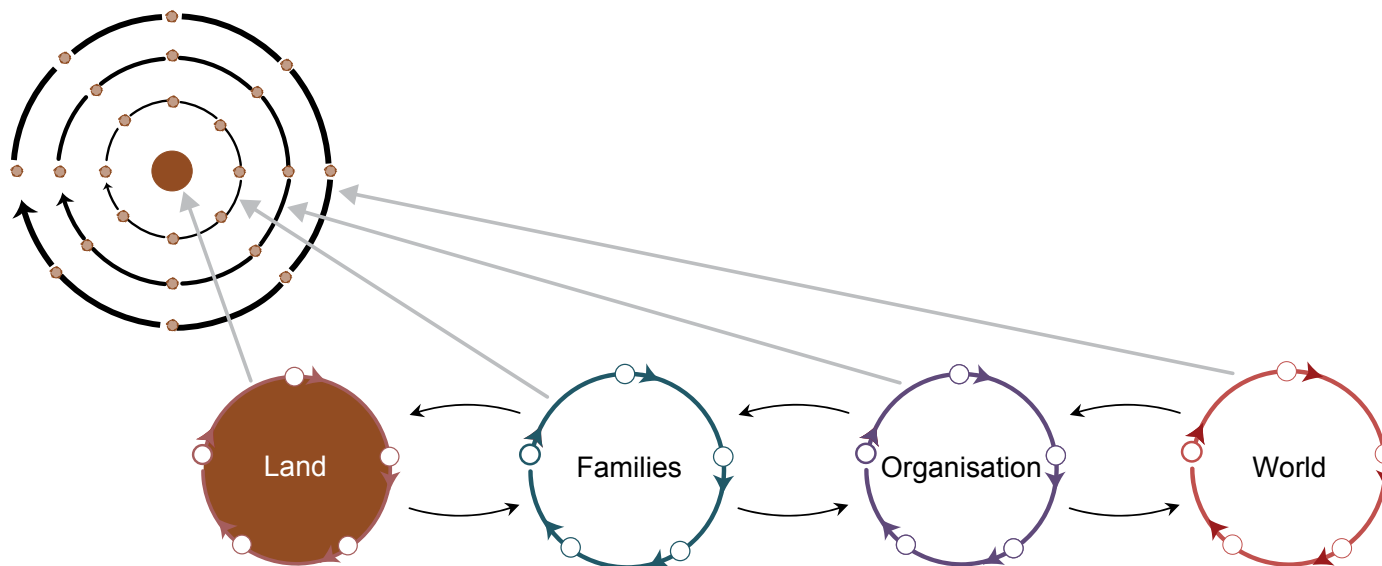
Tell the big picture: This is the purpose of this place, this service. This is the problem this place is solving.

Present the problem you want them to solve. Give the reason for the problem. Ask them to think of a solution. Provide support. If they don't know if their idea will work, try it out.

- Assign the job
- Give responsibility to finish the job, to fulfil the purpose.
- Give respect
- Be flexible – if you don't do something, it's not the end of the world.

Table 7: How the responsibilities in a community work together to create pathways to a better system

Each of the pathways is aligned to the central purpose: one family, one system, with two-way relationships and equal engagement of all participants.



System	Land	Families	Organisations	World
Family enterprise	Everyone working together	Adults and young people having their own strengths and being able to put them into action	Create leadership roles in the organisation for young people, so they can design programs to meet their needs	Develop funding guidelines that include multi-generational support and build youth skills
Community employment	One family, one system	Understanding how all families can contribute their strengths through local organisations	Every organisation holds regular public presentations about what they do for families, how they do it, and how families can help them do it much better	Increase the number of local people in stable employment, within a wide range of job descriptions
Improved health	Everyone involved in a holistic approach to health	Sharing knowledge of bush medicine and learning Western medicine	Clinics train and employ knowledgeable local women and men to design preventive health and treatment programs	Develop long-term strategic plans that emphasise locally managed preventative health
Educated youth	Two-way teaching to be strong in both worlds	Families taking active roles in schools to both learn and teach both ways	Schools create places where local families and school staff can work together as equals to develop both-ways curriculum and teaching for children and adults	Identify a stable set of outcomes and funding, and allow local schools to develop methods to achieve them
Art production	Sharing love of country with others	Many people being active producing paintings	Art centre employs and trains staff in the entire process of operating an art centre and marketing paintings	Methods to expand the network and bring buyers together with artists
Food and nutrition	Learning nutrition to care for health	Learning about good food and preparing it for your family	Shop develops ways to teach people about food, serve healthy food and sell healthy items at a lower price	Develop sustained networks with professionals to try new strategies

Step 3: Tell one story about your system now: Case C

An Indigenous Protected Area program – now

Participants described their Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) programs using elements, relationships and results that corresponded to those in the livelihood framework. It was begun by three skilled people, and through a process of adaptive governance is now managed by the Council. Each IPA decision began with a governance group using assets to design a set of rules to manage the IPA; those rules focused on management strategies to achieve outcomes that built assets. This confirmed that sustainable livelihoods are a useful framework to organise stories, as long as people can use their own terminology to describe their livelihoods.

Each IPA was conceived as a single livelihood, in part because it was centred on one parcel of land and engaged one set of people in a coherent set of strategies. The livelihood operated as a learning cycle: each livelihood element (asset, governance, rules, strategies and outcomes) improved over time (see Figure 35).

In addition, each IPA had been managed for long enough that it had experienced more than one adaptive cycle: information gained from designing strategies that achieved sustained outcomes was used to improve governance and to improve a subsequent set of strategies. This program appeared sustainable.

At the same time, participants identified several risks to their families: no youth jobs, so youth move away; drugs; poor access to health care; drought that affects the land and employment. They identified that these risks are a result of the disconnection of people from the knowledge in country.



Figure 35: The livelihood cycle of a successful IPA program

The cycle starts with the cultural influence on the IPA, and the team that began the process; the managers use a cultural mix of rules; they have many different activities that improve country and community together; and have a lasting improvement in cultural identity. At the centre is the cultural values that are disconnected – they are not put into action to create a single purpose.

Step 4: Tell one story about a better system: Case C

An Indigenous Protected Area program – a better system

However, there was one significant livelihood risk: the IPA engaged the most skilled adults, but excluded those with fewer skills such as young people or those affected by grog. Participants attributed this weakness to the limited representation of the governance group – it did not represent the entire community.

Participants then presented a comprehensive alternative: an IPA program that retained ALL of the successful elements of the current program, while increasing its scope of activities to include vulnerable groups in their community. This is consistent with the values of many Aboriginal groups to focus on the most vulnerable people in their group, rather than the most successful (see Figure 36).

The key strategy to achieve this aim was for the governance group to be more inclusive of the community, and to explicitly prioritise community cultural values over those of the government. Researchers and community groups agreed with this analysis.

The community proposed an expanded design for their IPA to address these risks. That new design would be achieved by bringing the entire community together, to develop youth leadership by planning new activities around the IPA. Those new activities take advantage of the ecological, educational, social, spiritual, cultural and healing qualities of country. It is a significantly broader vision than that encompassed by the IPA. This development strategy of building on an existing success is characteristic of remote communities with few resources.

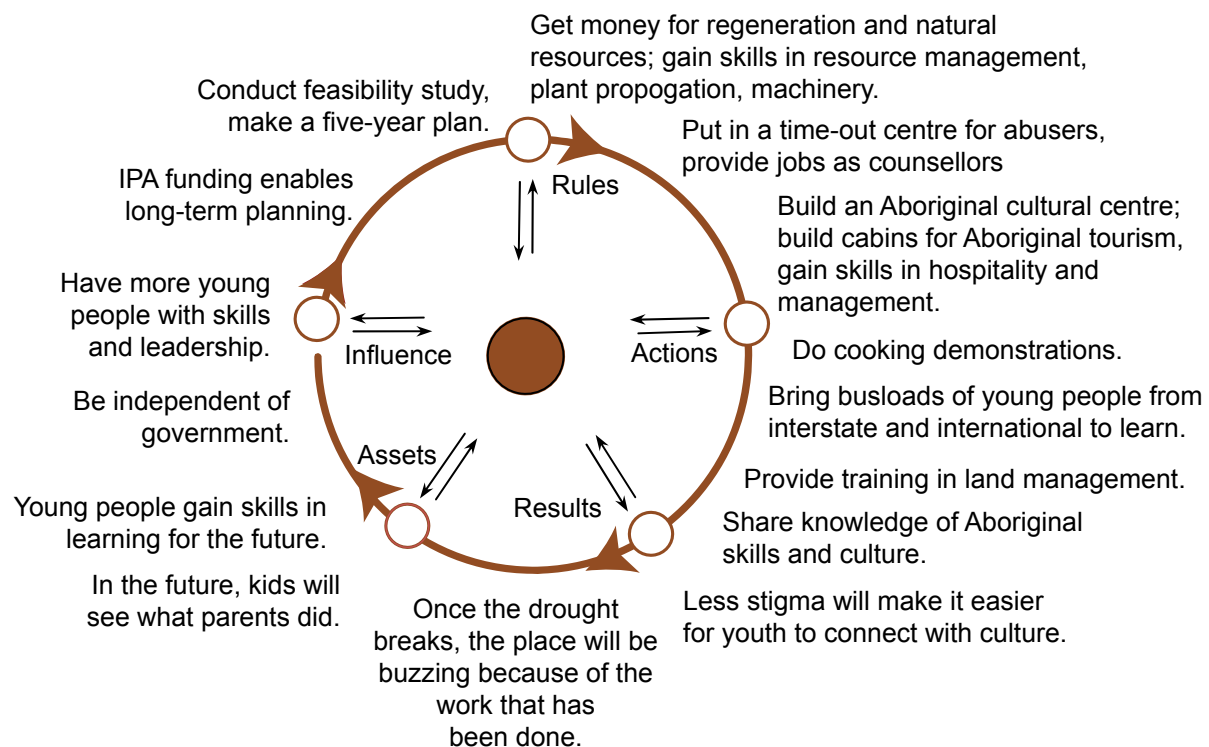


Figure 36: The livelihood cycle of a better IPA program

A better cycle starts with the new influence of young people on long-term planning of the IPA. Plans establish long-term NRM policies and organisations to strengthen family, culture and health. The actions focus on building two-way skills, to build self reliance. The cultural values at the centre are connected into a single purpose: for all ages to work on country together.

Step 3/4: Tell one story about your system now/about a better system: Case D

A youth program

In this case, many young people are bored in town; they cannot travel on country to learn, and have few opportunities to develop their own skills to engage with the world. In this diagram, the current state of youth in their families is described in the inner circle. It is a cycle that sustains itself.

The youth program knows these young people well. The program does not fix weaknesses, but develops a two-way system that builds on family strengths. That system is a youth program that brings together elders and adults to teach youth on country. This is also a cycle that sustains itself.

Figure 37 shows how the youth program's actions directly address each of the family situations, creating a two-way relationship. All of these actions occur together, creating a whole system.

The intention of the youth program is to sustain these desired actions, so the whole system of youth in families changes to connect more strongly with country.

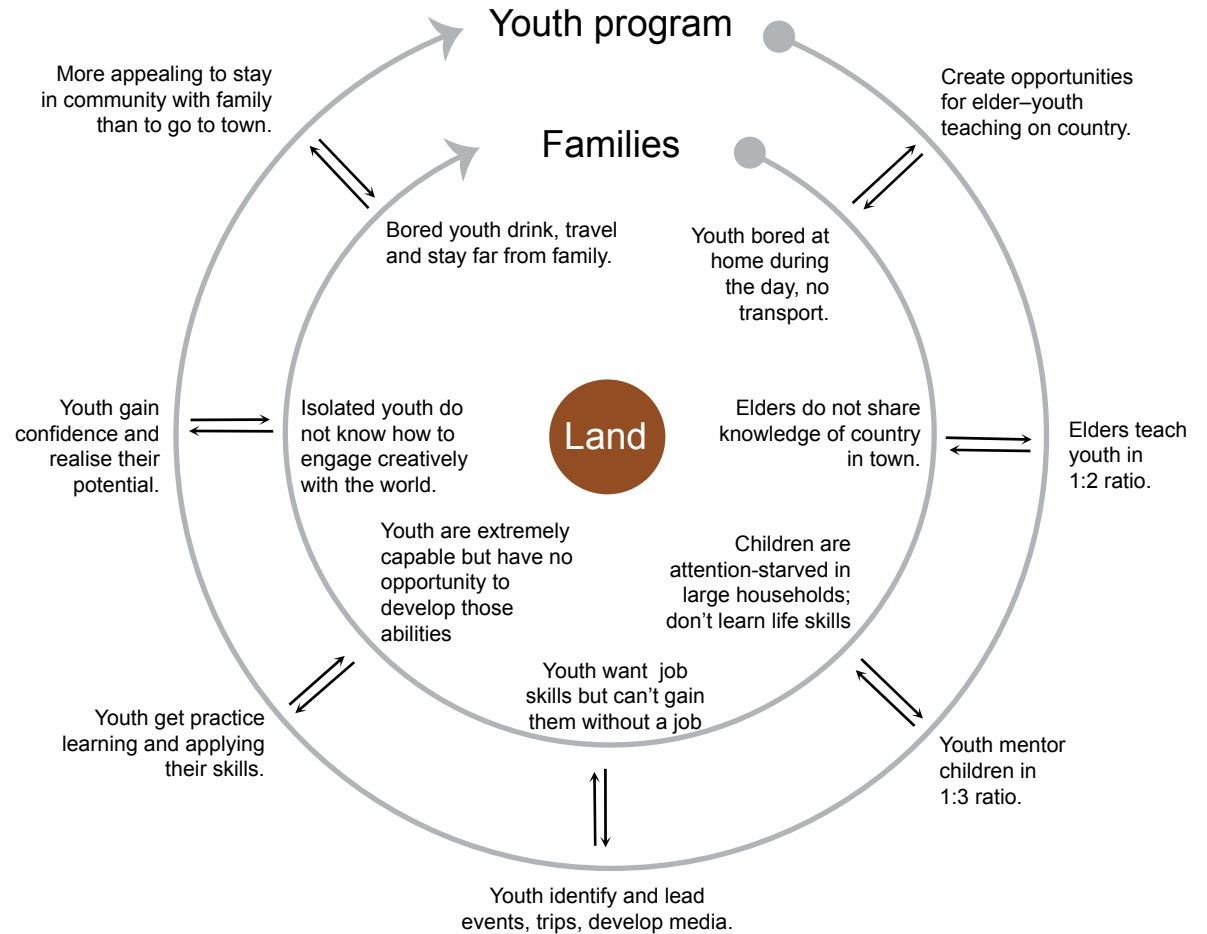


Figure 37: Youth program interactions with families address each point of risk

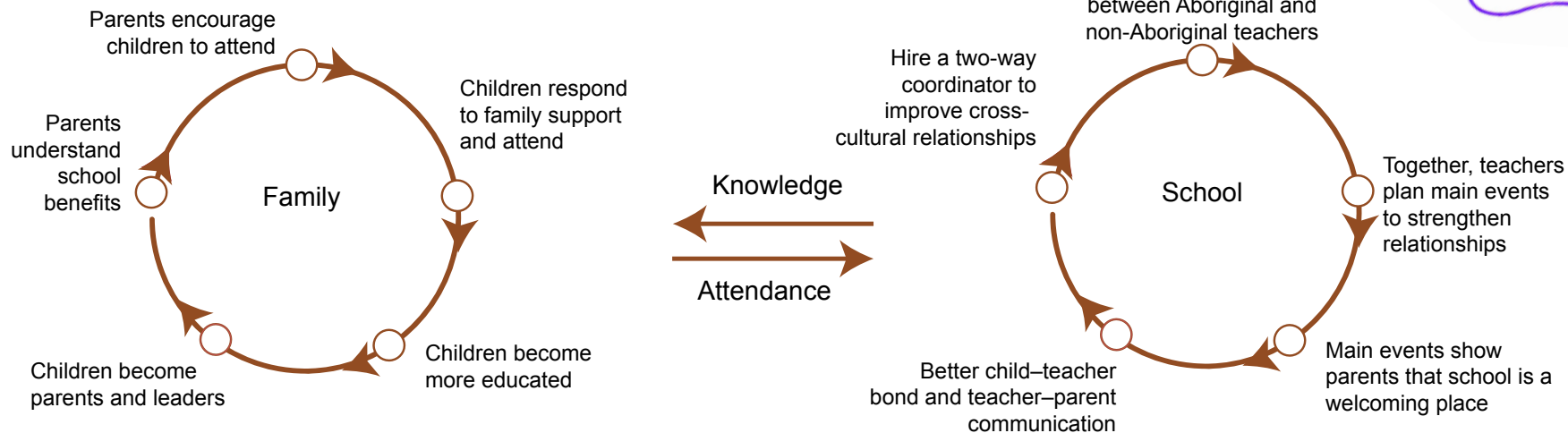
The inside cycle of this diagram shows how the series of risks in a family system lead to youth leaving town. The outside cycle shows how youth workers partnered with elders and adults to develop a different strategy for each risk, to build youth, family and community.

A Family–School System: Case E

Teachers in this remote school drew the system they wanted to create (Figure 38), to help them more clearly understand how hiring a cross-cultural coordinator will improve relationships between teachers and assistants, how those improved relationships will help them plan 'main events', how those events will increase family involvement, and how more involvement will strengthen relationships in the school and improve outcomes.

Figure 38: This drawing is translated into this diagram

It shows how the family and school support each others' livelihood cycles. The necessary school contribution is knowledge, and the necessary family contribution is attendance.



Step 3: Tell one story about your system now: Case F

Case A presented the problem of centralised and standardised control, and the desire for local creativity.

In this case, the government invited the community to increase local control of their school. To support this effort, I presented some examples of successful Aboriginal schools, to show how similar ideas had been put into action elsewhere.

I then interviewed the head of the education department, who identified that increased local control depends on sustained working relationships between the department and community.

Aboriginal elders and a teacher drew this 'influence diagram' in Figure 39 that described how government now controls the school through the community.

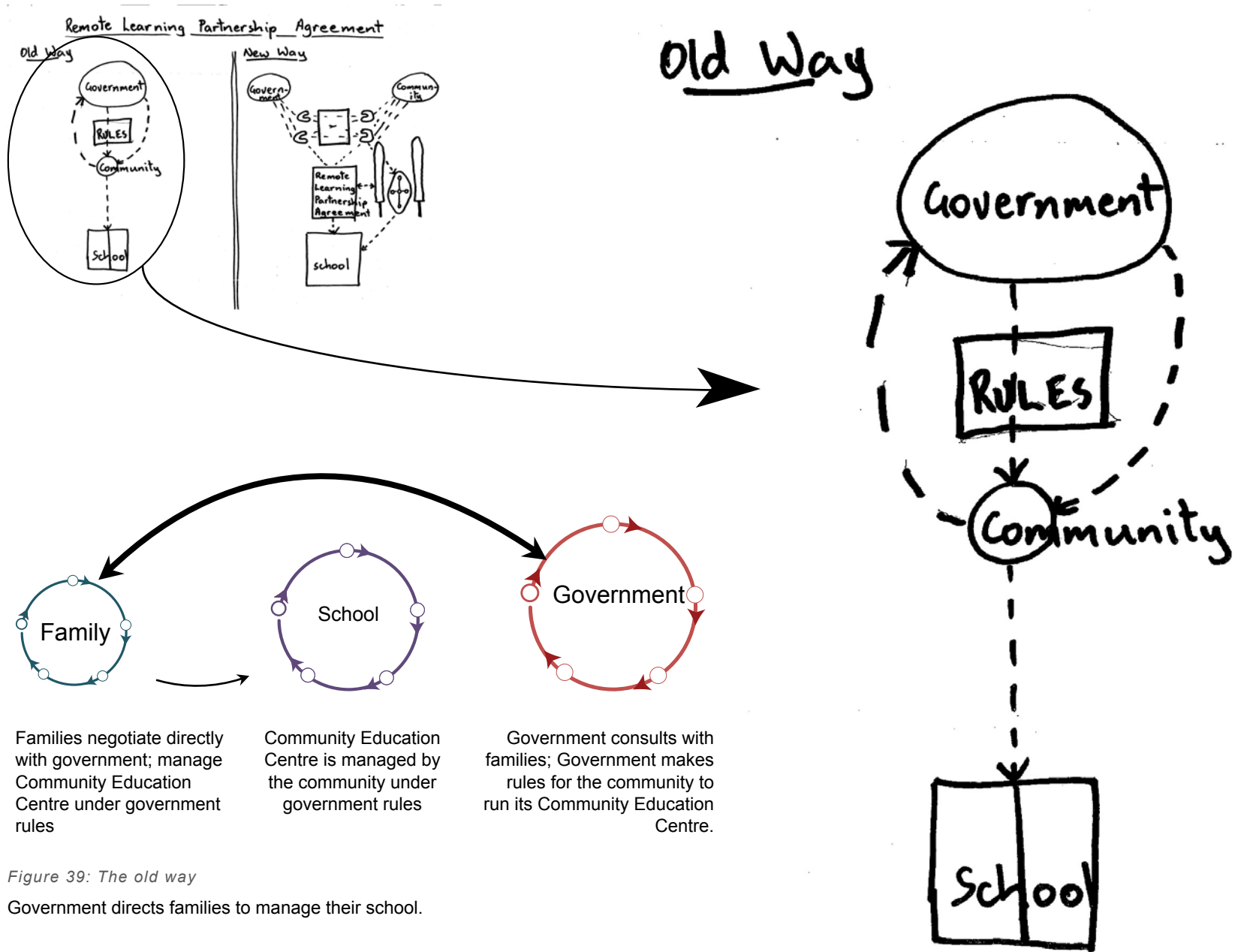


Figure 39: The old way
Government directs families to manage their school.

Step 4: Tell one story about a better system: Case F

At the same time, Aboriginal elders and adults drew this diagram in Figure 40 that shows how to sustain a better system through a two-way relationship with government.

The 'symbolic language' in this diagram was very meaningful to the community, because it shows Aboriginal law and lore applied to a contemporary situation, described with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal imagery.

It shows a complex set of two-way relationships based on the principles of justice (the poles) and responsibility (the shield). For example, they say that families have a responsibility to use the school to teach others, such as government, to respect land for what it is.

Community members enthusiastically responded to the government's invitation with 80 people attending a meeting.

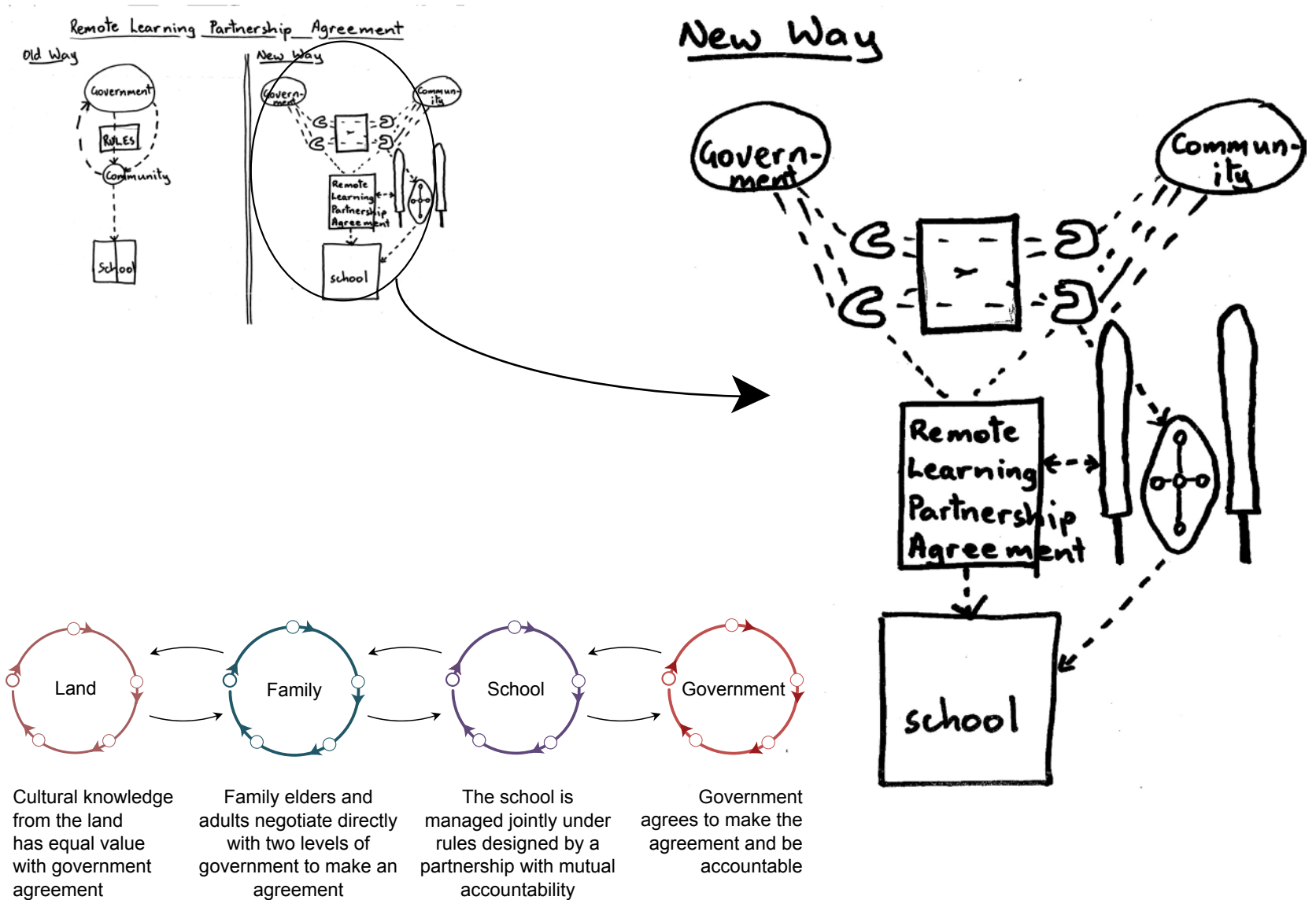


Figure 40: The new and better way

Land contributes the cultural knowledge through families, who manage the school with the contribution of government knowledge, under an agreement that guarantees a long-term partnership.

Step 5: Identify pathways to a better system: Case F

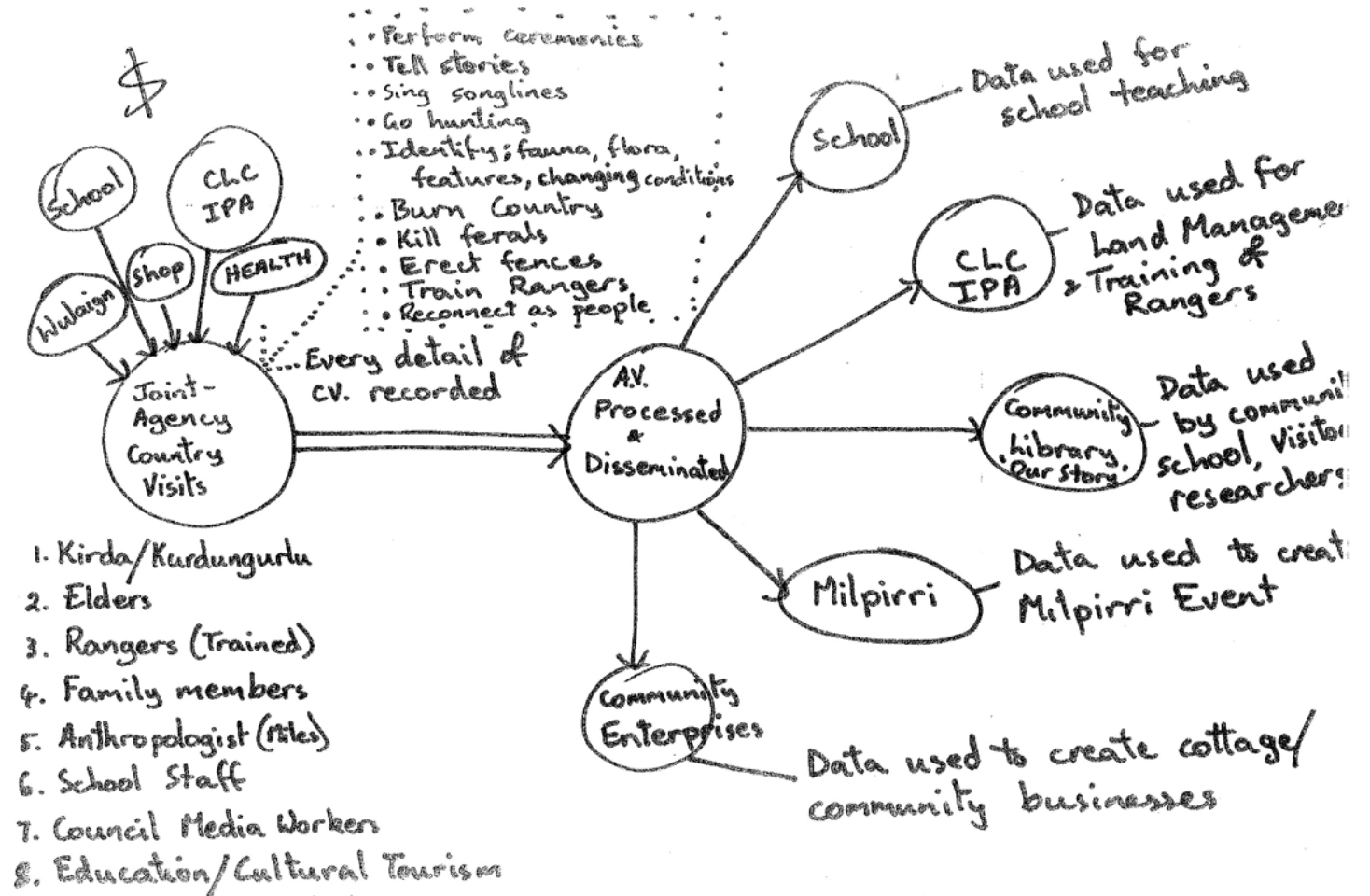
The previous diagrams presented stories about the system now and a better form of governance. They were two ways to identify pathways to a better system.

Their 'better' process would begin by the community negotiating with government as equals, so both contribute their knowledge and both are accountable for improved school results.

This drawing (Figure 41) by Aboriginal elders and a teacher describes in detail a better relationship between land, families and organisations. By looking at their community as one system, they showed how all organisations benefit from stronger relationships with country.

This drawing shows how elders and adults wanted to include every organisation in their community, and enable many different pathways to that better system.

This detail of their plan is for representatives of all agencies to go on 'joint-agency' country visits, to record the cultural knowledge gained during those visits using audio-visual media (AV) and to share the knowledge back to each organisation to improve their services.



Joint-Agency Country Visits	Every detail of country visit recorded	Audio visual recordings processed and disseminated
Agencies involved	List of NRM activities	List of agencies to receive recordings
Other participants	List of cultural activities	Description of how they will use them

Figure 41: Pathways to two-way relationships among land, families, and all community organisations

The three steps in the pathway are shown below: Country visits that involve all agencies; every detail of the visits is recorded using audio and video; and the recordings enable the organisations to use the knowledge from the land in their work.

Figure 42 'translates' the drawing in the previous drawing into the 'Learning Journey' symbolic language of this report.

This symbolic language helps a group systematically identify and measure the two-way communication among the participants, and outline the change desired as a result.

The translation shows that measures are missing for the Shop, the Clinic, and the Rangers, and there are many missing opportunities for groups in the outside world to help support and sustain this activity.

Figure 43 on the following page presents measures identified by the community for one of the places in this diagram – the school. I arranged them in a livelihood cycle to show how they are a sustainable system.

The livelihood cycle is:

1. Family responsibility for all areas of the school
2. Rules made and enforced by local leaders
3. Actions focus on two-way curriculum
4. Results are stronger cultural identity
5. Strengths built are responsible young people.

The two-way interactions with the Education Department show how government can support greater local responsibility and hold itself accountable to give that support.

Unfortunately, soon after the community drew these diagrams and identified these measures, the government changed its education policy and these plans were never implemented.

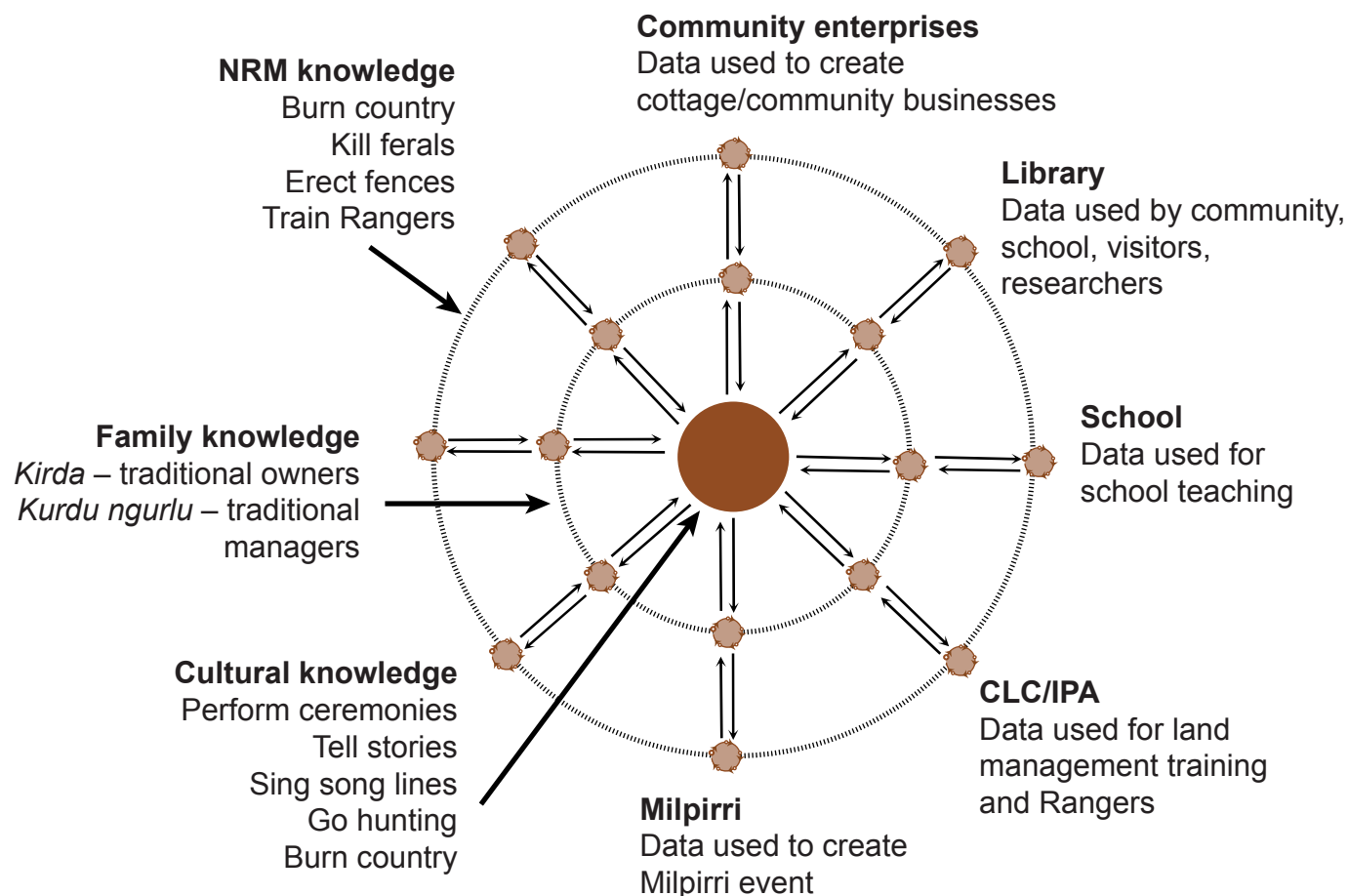


Figure 42: Interactions between country knowledge, families and community organisations

A Sustainable Livelihood Cycle for a School: Case F

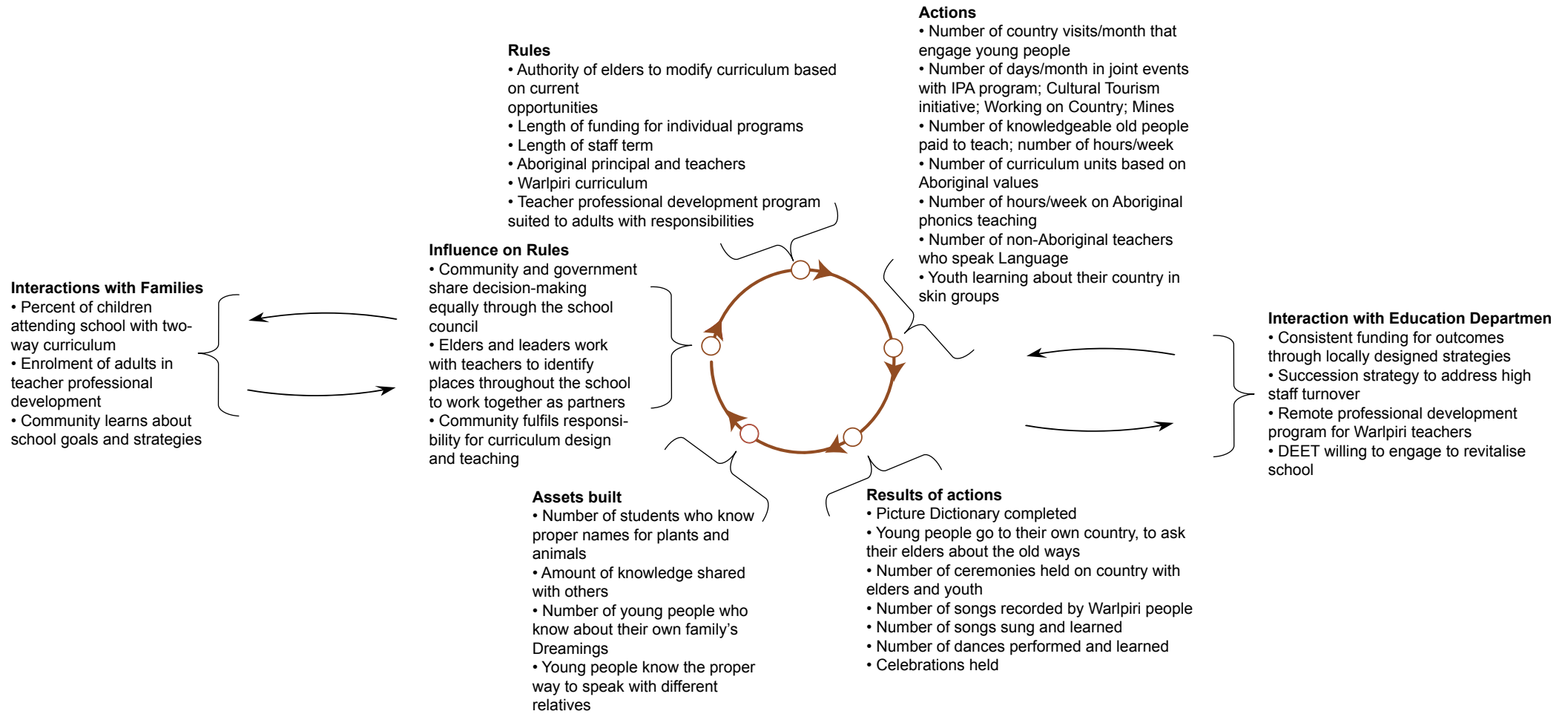


Figure 43: Some measures of the local contribution to school outcomes, in a livelihood cycle

A handful of the most important measures in the previous diagrams were linked to create a simple model of the interactions among the measures that people could control. I used a computer program, STELLA, which is often used in schools.

The resulting model (Figure 44) shows the interdependence of three groups: 1) families, 2) schools and 3) land management agencies. The central purpose – Youth Knowledge (4) – feeds back to the families and agencies, increasing their willingness to plan and fund country visits.

This model was clear to community members because it reflected their own experience. One leader described it as showing ‘the front line of a footy team’ because it illustrated how teamwork among those three groups is needed.

Using this model I produced graphs showing how it is necessary to begin building a knowledge base early in young people, and to steadily continue that work, to guard against the loss of knowledge from loss of elders and lack of regular practice (5), and from outside distractions (6). Aboriginal leaders used these results to argue that the land management agency needs to work closely with the schools to build their next generation of Rangers.

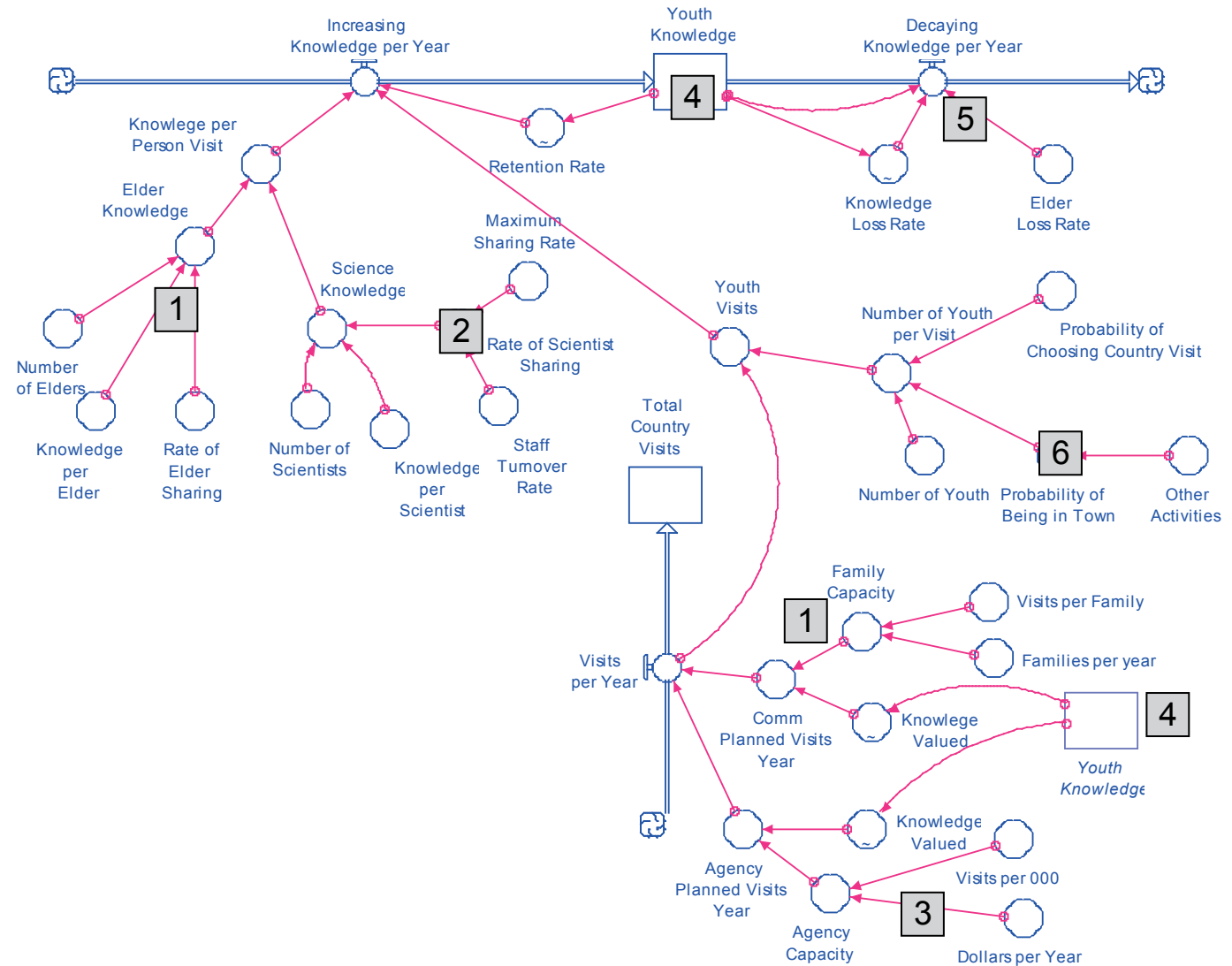


Figure 44: A computer model of Figure 43

It shows the interactions among elders, school, NRM agencies, young people and their families.

Step 5: Identify pathways to a better system: Case G

Aboriginal Assistant Teachers (ATs) in another remote community made these drawings (Figure 45) to describe their desired 3-Way system: for ATs to plan together with non-Aboriginal teachers as one team, with both cultures expressed equally in a 'two-way' relationship.

However, both groups of teachers do not know how to do this. As a result, non-Aboriginal teachers talk harshly, don't invite responses from the Aboriginal assistants, and the Aboriginal assistants then do little work. This is why Aboriginal assistant teachers say, if they do not plan together, they will not teach together.

ATs identified multiple pathways to achieve this goal: by talking face to face in the morning, in the classroom and after school, on excursions and as friends, to bring both sets of knowledge together in planning.

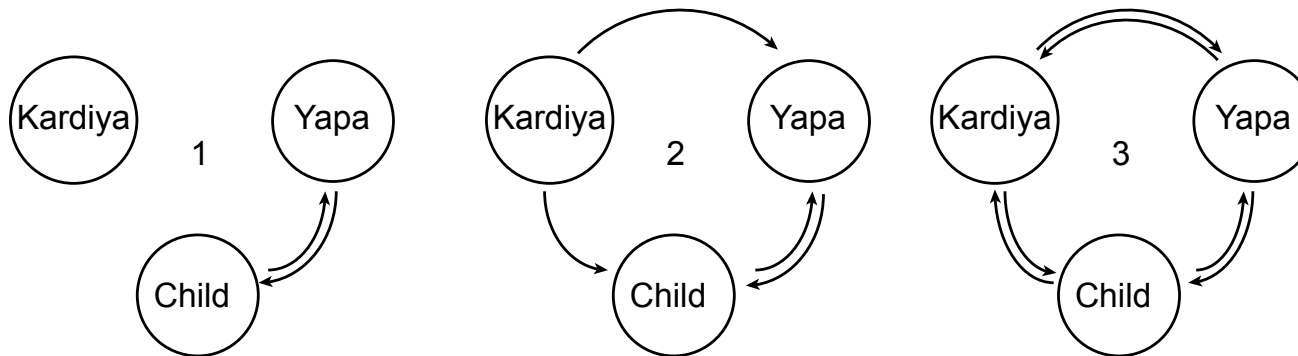


Figure 45: Drawings by remote Aboriginal teachers, to show the many interactions they described in that drawing.

A senior Aboriginal man drew 1, 2 and 3, and a group of women developed that idea in a more detailed drawing, to illustrate the effects on the child and adults of:

1. No genuine relationship between the Aboriginal Assistant Teachers (yapa) and the non-Aboriginal teacher (kardiya), in which the child does not attend or learn
2. A one-way relationship, which the non-Aboriginal teacher must provide all instruction and the Aboriginal Assistant Teacher must manage both relationships; this increases the stress on all participants
3. A genuine two-way relationship in which the child develops respect for both ways of learning. This reduces stress on all participants.



Step 6: Try different pathways, to gain knowledge: Case H

Figure 46 shows the NRM-related interactions that improved physical and mental health.

Figure 47 presents the web of interactions between a land management team and some community members that enabled those people to design new livelihood actions, such as camel mustering and gathering bush tucker. Not all participants engaged in all interactions, and some chose non-NRM activities. Therefore, the pathway to a better system is to support people's creativity to sustain existing livelihoods, and to develop new ones.

Figure 48 shows these interactions, and the interactions with the school, to show how actions flow through an entire community. Figure 49 translates this into a Learning Journey model which clarifies how to sustain the system.

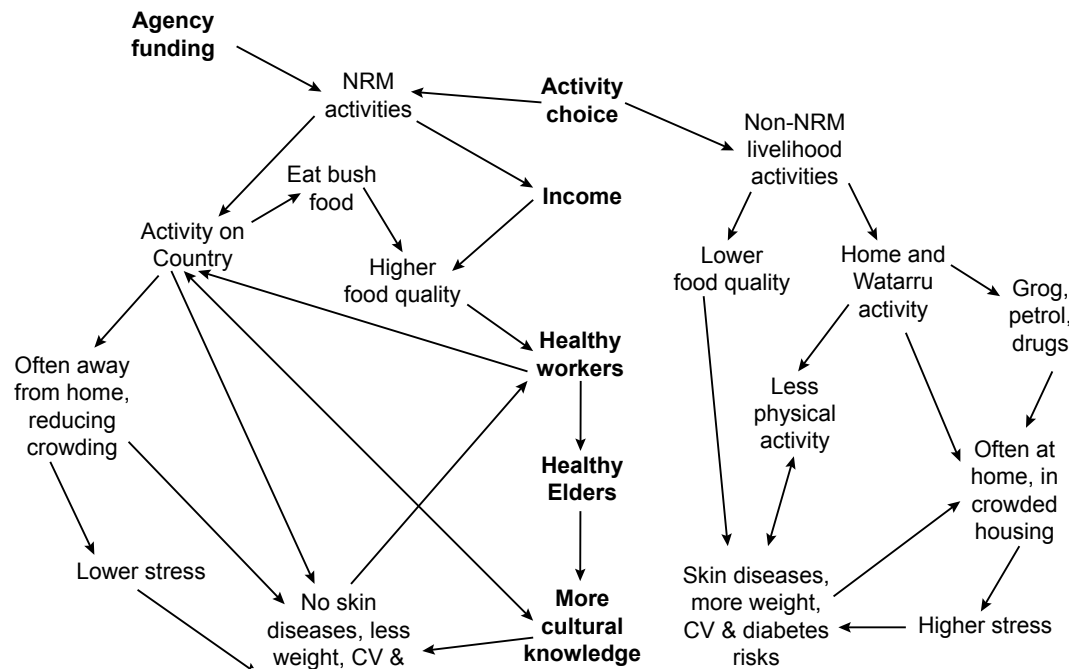


Figure 46: Interactions between NRM activities, and health and wellbeing

This diagram indicates some of the impacts of NRM activities on health and wellbeing.

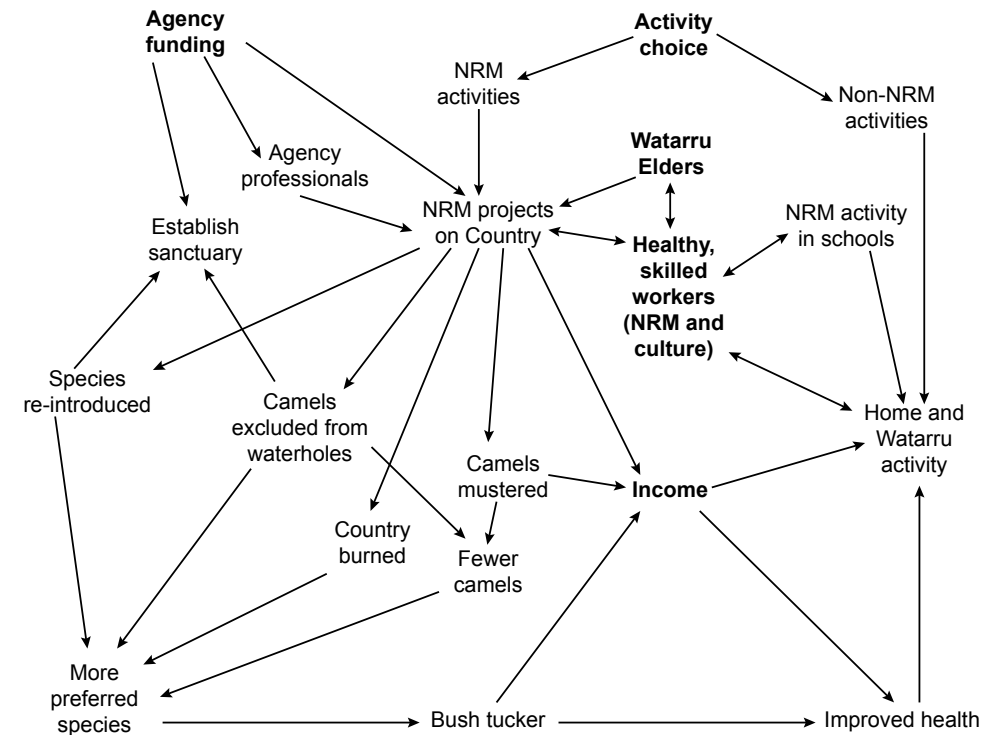


Figure 47: Interactions between NRM activities and skills

This diagram identifies the many factors involved in engaging a community in NRM activities; which NRM skills are developed; and how those skills are shared in the community.

Figure 48: This diagram shows some flows of knowledge and resources within the community

The diagram simplifies the system interactions, to identify multiple pathways to better results. Figure 49 below shows how these flows can be sustained by strengthening the livelihood cycles within each of the Roles.

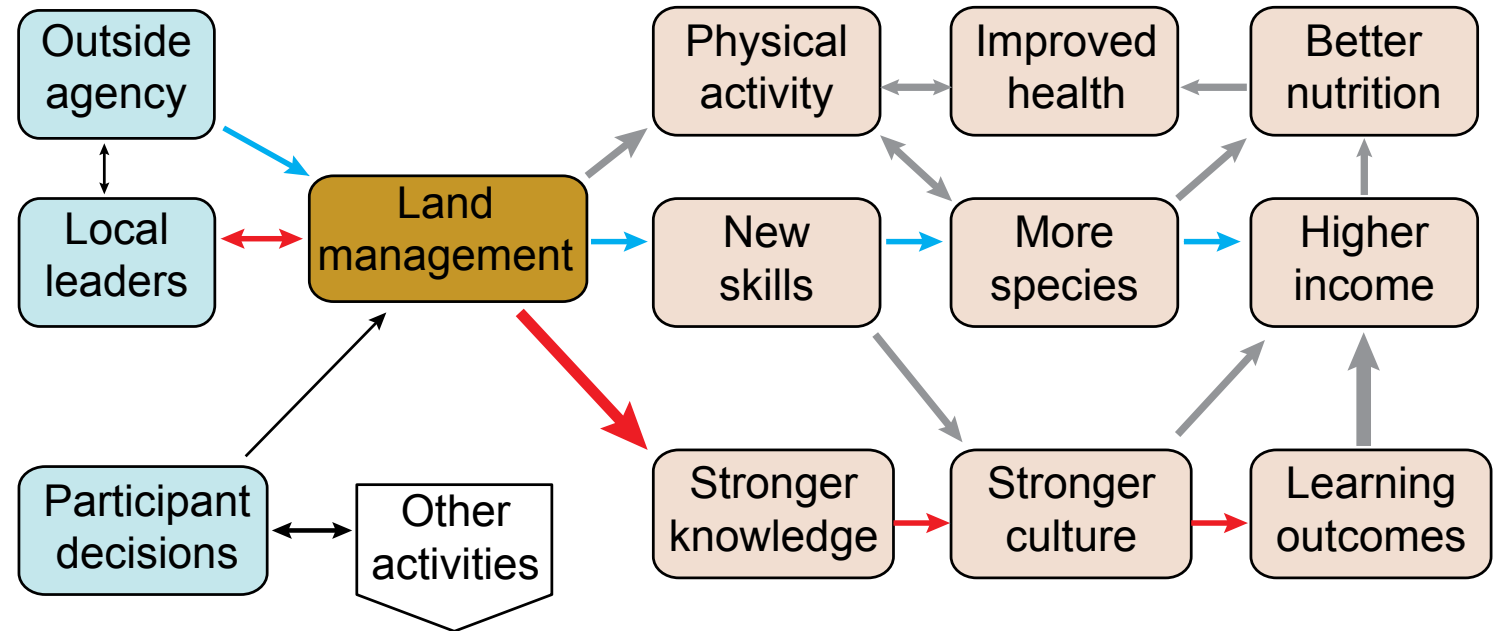
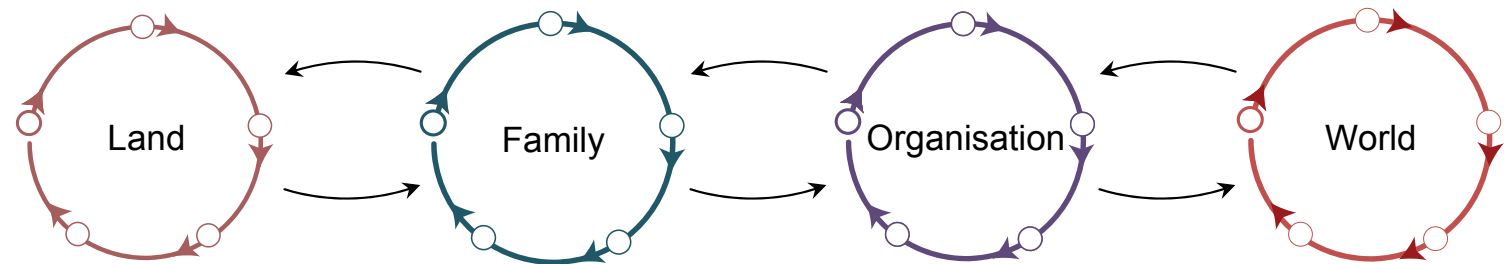


Figure 49: The diagrams in Figure 48 are translated into a learning journey model

The diagram shows that the goal of sustaining the relationships identified in the previous diagrams can be achieved by establishing livelihood cycles in each of the key roles.



Land cycle:

Land management: feral species, bush food, threatened species

Family cycle:

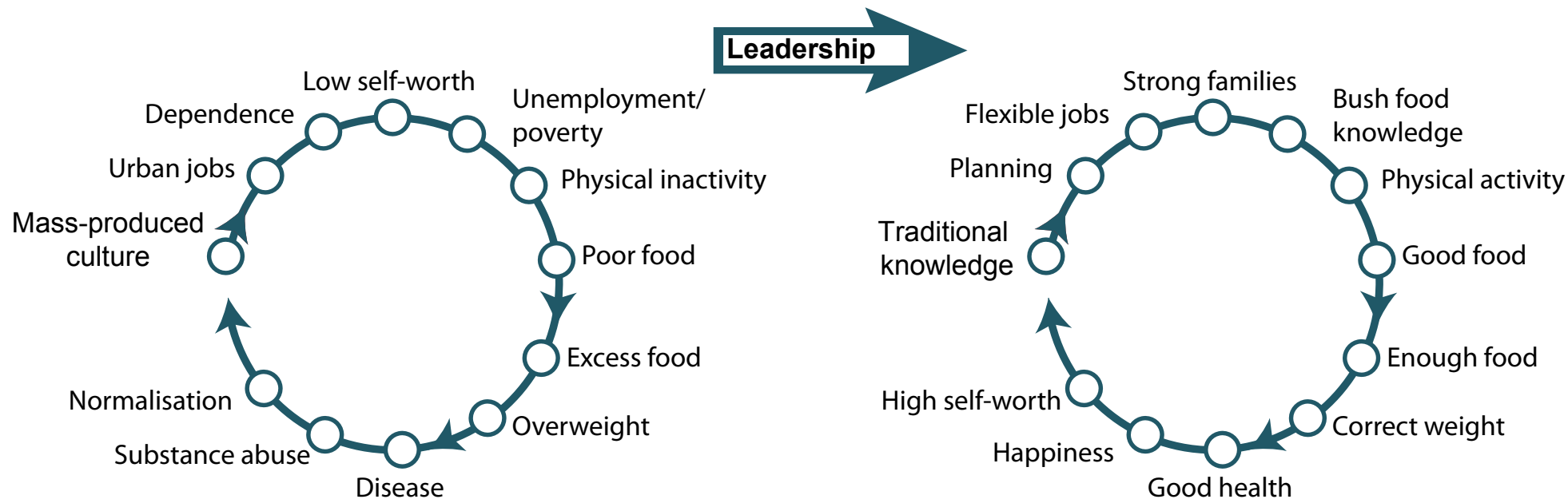
Elder men – adult men; elder women – adult women; adult men – children in school

Organisation cycle:

The school is managed jointly under rules designed by a partnership with mutual accountability

Outside cycle:

Regular funding for NRM and program management expertise; integrated markets for art, bush food, NRM tourism



Step 7: Share the knowledge with elders and others: Case I

This step ends one 'learning journey' by sharing what everyone learned, so they can use that knowledge to begin another cycle.

In this case, a group in a town camp could not sustain the business they had started, and it closed.

The project leaders analysed their experience, and identified that the project did not maintain its focus on their central principle: to bring the families together on country.

They knew from their own experience, and that of the elders, that being on country provides multiple benefits.

Drawing this cycle (Figure 50) clarified the benefits, and encouraged them to begin a new project focused on the purpose of bringing generations together on country.

Figure 50: Cycles that were developed from interviews and shared with participants

They show the effects on health and wellbeing from long periods of time in town, and long times out bush on health and wellbeing.

Time in town

The left side presents the sequence of actions that sustain the undesirable situation of being in town. Mass-produced cultural knowledge prepares one only for urban jobs; this places one in a situation of dependence that in turn gives low self worth and poor motivation; this contributes to poverty and physical inactivity; this in turn creates cravings for stimulating but low-quality food; the poor nutritional quality requires that excess quantities be consumed leading to obesity which is a risk factor for disease; poor physical health increases likelihood of poor mental health and the risk of substance abuse; over time this situation becomes normalised, and one then has no alternative but mass-production culture.

Time out bush

The right side presents the sequence of actions that sustain the desirable situation of being out bush. Traditional knowledge gives one many options which enables planning a career based on a variety of flexible jobs; this strong identity builds strong families who grow up with knowledge of bush food by actively hunting and gathering it; this nutrient-dense food easily meets the body's needs and enables correct weight, good physical and mental health, which strengthens one's self worth and desire to learn more knowledge.

Using that knowledge to begin another cycle

When they decided to start another cycle, this small town camp group of about 20 rapidly progressed through the next cycle of seven steps:

Step 1: Start with Elders, to learn the central purpose

Box 3 shows notes from a conversation with fifteen adults in response to the question: What concerns you the most? The senior people spoke first, and identified the purpose to reconnect land with family, and family with organisations (such as school) to benefit young people.

Step 2: Bring the right people together for two-way learning

The group included all the active adult leaders and young people. We were all sitting around a fire at night, having just finished bowls of kangaroo stew, with damper and some grilled lizard.

Step 3: Tell one story about your system now

They described the system as it is now in detail, because they often experience it. They described the system they desire more generally, or referred to good experiences in the past.

Box 3: Interview transcript

LAND – <i>DESIRED</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We want our country back.
LAND – <i>NOW</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We don't have ourself our title. Mining companies digging it up.
LAND – <i>DESIRED</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do we have control over how people use the land?
ORGANISATION – <i>NOW</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most important is kids' education. Getting them to go to school. We've tried everything. The WAY the kids are educated now doesn't work. They send young teachers out there to learn. It's just getting them to come to school. The school counsellors are not coming to us anymore.
ORGANISATION – <i>DESIRED</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We need a boarding school, a bush camp. Sit around the fire, hunt. A bush school.
FAMILY – <i>NOW</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kids don't have any identity. It's American rappers. They don't know who they are.
FAMILY – <i>DESIRED</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They need to learn who they are, where they are from, what their background is.
FAMILY – <i>NOW</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They learn drinking from grownups. Smoking, doing drugs. We made the kids change.
FAMILY – <i>DESIRED</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This wasn't happening before. We had that good little place, where I grew up. Good place, that camp.
LAND – <i>DESIRED</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We would like to run a station. Young people could come out and learn skills. Help young people who have problems with reading. Schools don't have programs for kids with those problems, so when they get older they pass them on to us
FAMILY – <i>NOW</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents don't see the value of indigenous knowledge. They say, 'We don't live in the stone age.' If they don't enforce law with their children, no one in town will say anything. It's not like an Aboriginal community where the elders are looking over your shoulder.
FAMILY – <i>NOW</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainstream culture devalues Aboriginal culture. Adults are discouraged from developing culture and passing it on.

After reviewing these notes, the group identified that:

1. their strength is cultural knowledge
2. those strengths do not have a strong role in the land–family–organisation–world system
3. a strong role for culture will improve results in all of those places
4. this role starts with elders and adults teaching youth to strengthen their identity.

The elders and adults ‘told this story’ by taking action: teaching young people on country (Figure 51).

The group then used the whiteboard diagram in Figure 52 to clarify how all of their individual stories of their system now come together to form one group story.

All of those stories were examples of unequal two-way relationships. Those examples are illustrated in Figure 53.

Drawing the group story helped everyone ‘stand back’ to understand how everyone in their system works together to sustain the system in its current situation, and produce poor results for everyone for generations.



Figure 51: Taking action to create a better system

The day after telling a story about the system now, the family started to improve the system by teaching young people on country. In the top photo, a teacher photographs a goanna the boys caught. In the bottom photo, two boys show me stick-nest rat nests they are recording.

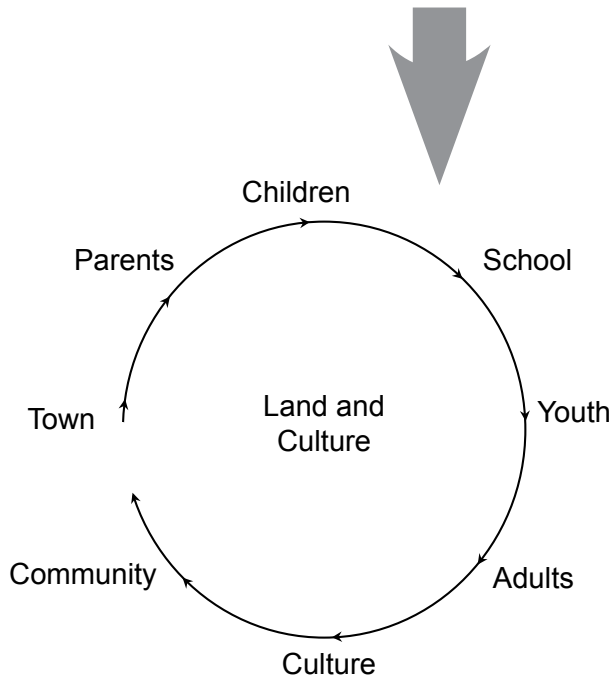
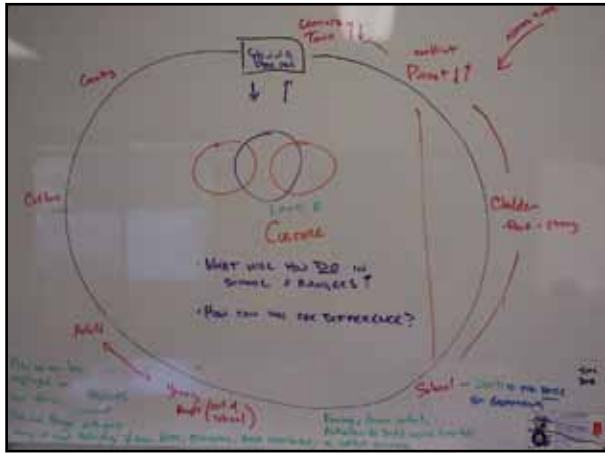


Figure 52: Their analysis of the 'system now'

This identifies each place where poor two-way interactions sustain poor results for everyone.

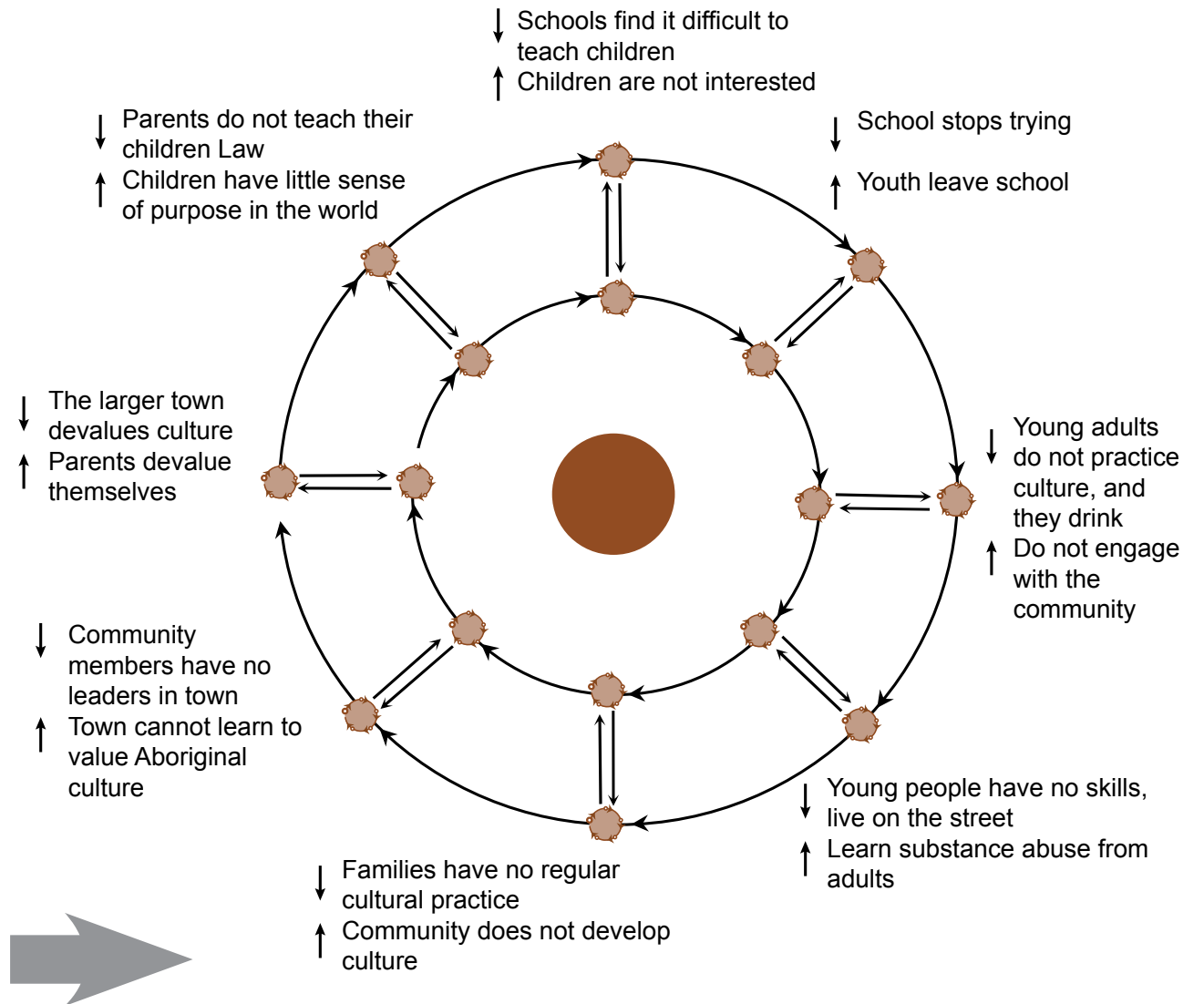


Figure 53: The drawing in Figure 52 is translated into the symbolic language

The diagram clarifies how each top-down action causes the bottom-up response, and how that response leads to the next (moving clockwise) top-down action. Together, these interactions across the community form a cycle that sustains poor results for land, family and organisations for generations.

Step 4: Tell one story about a better system

After discussing the current situation, I asked the senior man, 'What part do you want to address first?' He replied, 'All of them.' The diagram (Figure 54) showed how one whole system, and one action – strengthening culture and land – could improve results in all of the parts at once. That action was placed in the centre.

They prioritised a new school and new Ranger program for immediate action, because they benefited young people and country. Young people's involvement in the Rangers would give them skills they could contribute to the existing or a new school, to strengthen their cultural identity.

Step 5: Identify pathways to a better system

They identified specific actions and measures, and achieved the following in order:

1. Stopped young people from sniffing petrol
2. Based on their existing skills and with the assistance of a consultant, drafted a business plan to manage ferals
3. Wrote a picture book about the cultural knowledge they could teach to local land managers
4. Surveyed town residents to identify their interest in paying to learn about Aboriginal culture
5. Redesigned their Ranger program around their existing skills.

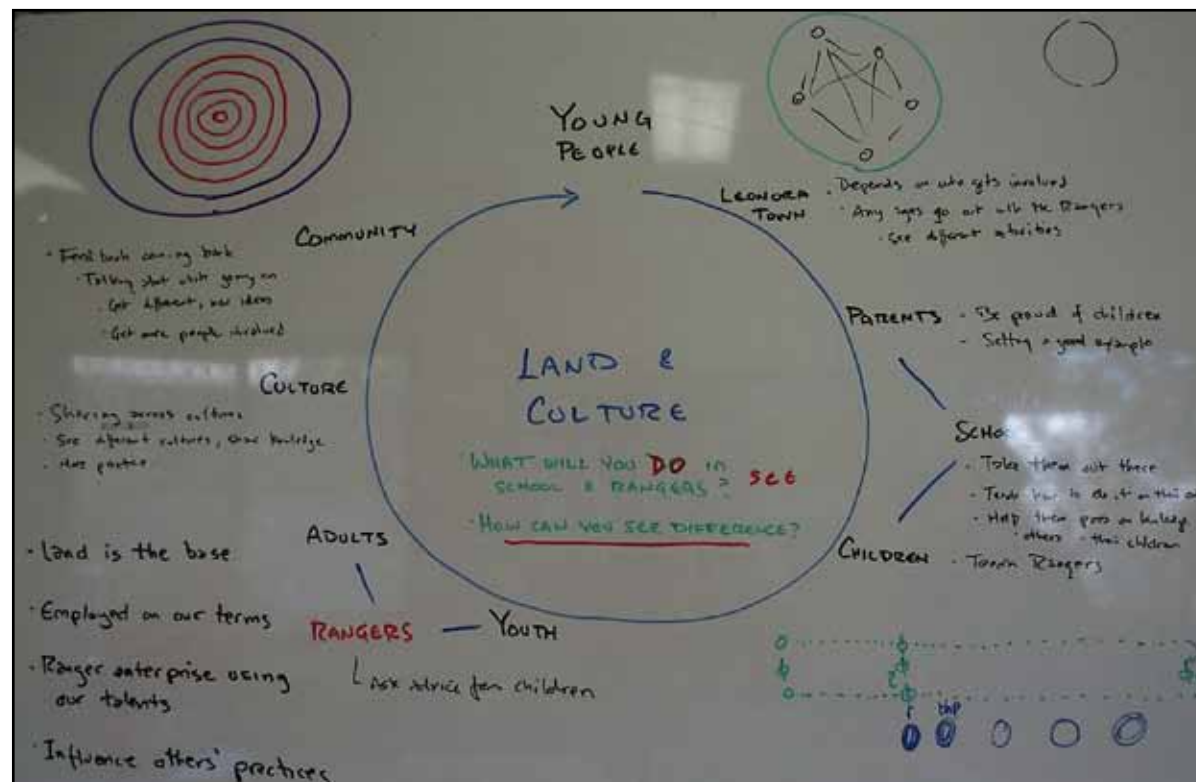


Figure 54: Their drawing of how they intend to redesign their Ranger program to improve the whole. The senior men identified that a stronger central purpose would improve results in all of the places in the system.

Step 6: Try different pathways, to gain knowledge

Taking action continually is necessary for everyone to learn, because this process is new to them. Action is also necessary because the whole system is organised to sustain the current state, and people must take action to learn what changes will work. Therefore, change requires an adaptive management cycle: to take action, measure its impact, and learn from the result to design a better action.

Figure 55 shows several new actions that one group took to try different pathways: to make a book that shows their cultural knowledge to the public, to conduct a public survey on interest in that knowledge, and to identify how to link the skills of all family members to develop a cultural tourism enterprise.

A Learning Journey model of this process helps focus the actions on the central purpose which would otherwise be forgotten in the distractions of day to day life.

Ranger Book

Table of contents

Early morning at a bush camp
 Making Milo
 Ready for the day
 Making plans
 Learning skills from the elders
 Preparing tools for the day
 Digging a Gidgee tree root to make a spear
 Digging for Bardi 'witchetty grubs'
 ...and finding a mob of them.
 Fruits of our efforts!
 Digging wadja
 ...mawuku to make your moustache grow...
 Learning about animal tracks and seasons
 Learning about the 'archaeology of the dreaming'
 Sharing our knowledge of plants
 Elders teaching youth archaeology 'grinding stone'
 Holding a piece of prehistory 'a stone knife'
 Identifying wildlife habitat
 Roo for dinner
 ... and goanna too.
 When's dinner?
 Preparing food for dinner
 V for victory \$ our next generation
 The Ngalia Foundation Prospectus
 Discussing our projects
 Teaching the story of the Foundation
 Using technology and art to record and share stories
 Young people recording ecological knowledge

Figure 55: Trying it out

The group presents their new Ranger plan to the town in front of the shop (top). They designed a book to illustrate their plan (see box above), and surveyed town residents to gauge their interest in learning about Aboriginal cultural knowledge at bush camps (middle). They then designed an enterprise by linking the skills of all family members (bottom).



Discussion

This report was developed in response to the widely recognised need for a method to reduce the confusion of remote residents about the ever-changing systems that control their communities and to increase their ability to manage their own affairs in two-way relationships with other groups.

Many residents do not have the required management skills, but they recognised that local organisations who trained Aboriginal people in management skills should be the example for all others. Local people used the information they learned to identify new actions that improved results. By trying out different actions they learned what they are able to do. This collaborative process is illustrated by the drawing in Figure 56.

Almost all of the services and programs in the remote communities within these case studies were managed by non-Aboriginal professionals. These managers have different cultures, organisational goals, professional aspirations and families. However, they avoided creating messy problems when a systems approach helped them see the long-term benefits of two-way partnerships, as illustrated by the example in Figure 57.

All learning methods simplify complicated systems, to make them more understandable. Maintaining this understanding is particularly important when those complicated systems frequently change. The Learning Journeys framework helps people maintain the system relationships that are most important to them, even as the details change.

The strengths of the Learning Journey are:

1. The symbolic language that can be used to describe many types of systems. The symbols (people in places, places in relationship, equity of that relationship, actions in cycles, etc) can be used to describe the most common causes of problems (social exclusion and messiness), and the many locally different solutions.
2. The symbols are arranged in a simple picture that allows many levels of detail. By using the same language to describe systems at different levels of detail, basic management concepts can be understood by everyone.
3. The central purpose links all actions. The central purpose is a single, simple measure that applies to all actions and unifies them. This unity of purpose is necessary to address messy problems.
4. The structure has land at the centre, acting through families to organisations, and organisations mediating relationships with the outside world. This structure recognises the responsibilities for the land, families, organisations and world.

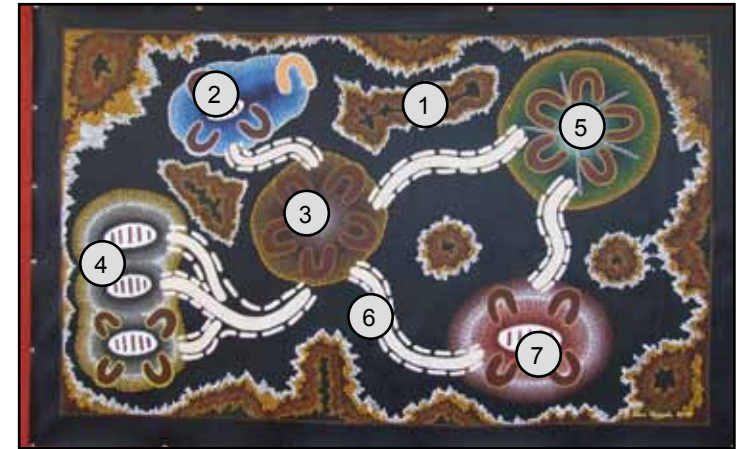


Figure 56: A different symbolic language to link country and community

Lance Box, a non-Aboriginal teacher who had been living in Lajamanu for five years, worked closely with elders and adult leaders to develop a learning framework to clarify how to sustain improvements.

Their discussions identified steps very similar to those in this report: 1. The fragmentation in the community that is the main source of concern. 2. Aboriginal elders meet to set the direction to build a stronger community, with a non-Aboriginal consultant. 3. Aboriginal adult leaders who are meeting to put the elders' direction into action. 4. Different sources of information needed by the leaders. 5. Community members who will take action. 6. Pathways linking the different groups. 7. Celebration of the resulting success and knowledge gained. Copyright Lance Box. Used with permission.

5. Equitable two-way relationships are described in detail. Small differences in the information, political power, money, and other resources exchanged between groups grow large over time. It then becomes more and more difficult for the group with less to become equal. The long-term impact of equity clarifies the need to invest in local abilities to manage this resource flow to improve results for communities.
6. The structure shows cycles within each livelihood. Livelihoods are the important context of daily life. A model helps clarify how different livelihoods work together within an organisation to sustain the improvements needed for long-term improvements.
7. Each area of responsibility can be drawn in dirt, on a whiteboard, on paper, or modelled using a computer. This is an important facilitation method. In these case studies, all models were drawn in front of the users as the stories were told. Pre-printed papers were impersonal.
8. English literacy or numeracy is not required. Aboriginal groups are different, and so are the non-Aboriginal people working with them. The simple language and structure were developed so everyone could share their knowledge and talk as equals.
9. The symbolic language is based on the practices of Aboriginal groups. People frequently talk in terms of people, places, proper 'two-way', and the centrality of land and law. This language was consciously built so people can use familiar concepts to understand unfamiliar organisations, livelihoods and interactions.
10. The method is supported by systems science. Communities are more complex than one person can understand. Therefore, it is necessary to involve everyone in working toward a shared purpose that is not imposed from the outside, but is already there in the system: the language and culture of the community.
11. It identifies enough measures to clarify the change needed to sustain change. That clarity is necessary, but it is not enough. The challenge is use those measures to sustain improvements in an environment that is changing in many places: lands, families, organisations and outside groups
12. This process is designed to present a language and structure to understand the community as one system. When this 'big-picture' is clear, people can identify where to design specific projects that reflect each community's unique identity. Each of those projects will have its own language and structure that can include flow charts, maps and spreadsheets, as well as stories, songs and dances. A project that contributes meaningfully to a group's cultural identity and central purpose is more likely to be sustained. Finally, this very simple framework allows groups to create their own versions (e.g. Wheatley & Frieze 2008).

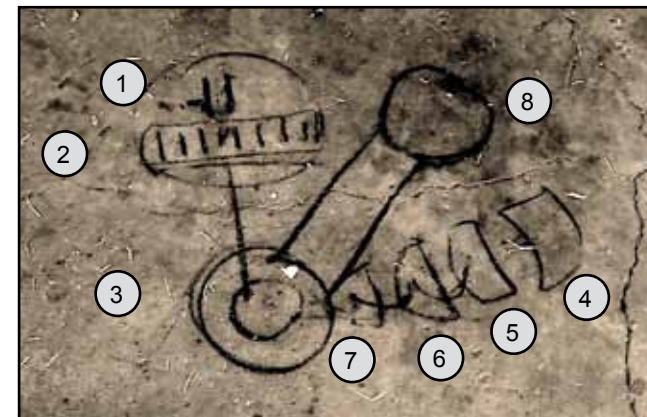


Figure 57: A different symbolic language to link two forms of governance

After discussing this report, Daniel Jupurrula Rockman, a WA Aboriginal adult leader responded by drawing this diagram in charcoal to show:

1. Aboriginal leaders
2. Aboriginal family heads
3. Aboriginal community now
4. Prime Minister/Opposition
5. Parliament
6. State government
7. Local government
8. Better community

This drawing tells the story of levels of governance working together:

- 1–3 show how Aboriginal leaders guide the heads of the different families, who guide the community
- 4–7 show how the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader guide the Senate and House, which then guide the State and Shire. There are also interactions directly from the PM to the Shire.
- The two groups work together at the community level (3) to develop a better community (8).

Conclusion

For most of Australia's history, non-Aboriginal people have designed policies, programs, principles, rules and other directives for Aboriginal people. This outside control has systematically prevented remote Aboriginal people from gaining the experience and skills to develop their own approaches, in areas from governance to mining.

This ongoing practice of social exclusion is recognised by the Productivity Commission, as well as by the World Health Organization and other international bodies, as the main cause of Indigenous disadvantage or 'the gap.' This report directly addresses this major cause by presenting a method to:

- Go from social exclusion to local authority
- Shift from a focus on Aboriginal weaknesses to one of building distinctive strengths
- Manage cross-cultural conflicts of interest by integrating all participants into one system
- Sustain local control through Aboriginal leadership of two-way relationships

To sustain a locally controlled system, Aboriginal residents want to develop a detailed understanding of their land, families, local and outside organisations as one system, and to coordinate the actions of all of those participants around a central purpose. While these tasks may appear impossibly complicated, this research has found that success requires seven actions in a system that can be described and measured using a simple symbolic language.

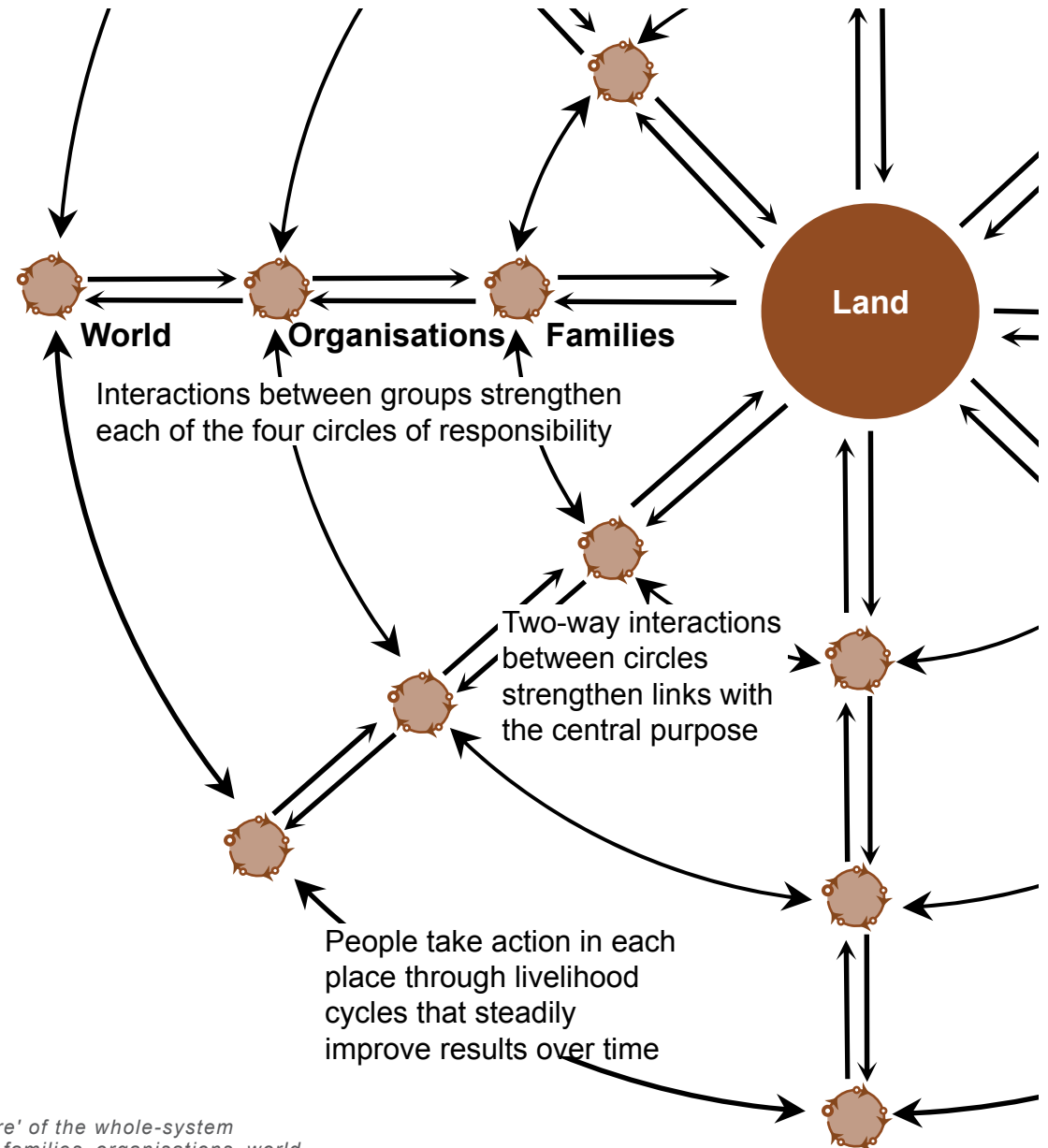


Figure 58: The 'big picture' of the whole-system interactions among land-families-organisations-world

- A symbolic language (Figure 58) describes this system using only a handful of familiar symbols: four areas of responsibility (land, family, local and outside organisations); equal exchange relationships between places in those areas of responsibility (e.g. country, young people, service organisations, government agencies); and livelihood cycles that can be sustained within each of those places to consistently improve results over generations.
- A cycle of seven steps (Figure 59) shows the learning process: 1) Invite elders to identify the central purpose and the right people. 2) Then bring the right people together to tell and draw what is most important to them. 3) Describe their situation now, and 4) the situation they want. 5) Identify many different pathways between those two situations. 6) Then try out those pathways, to learn which pathways work best. 7) Celebrate the evidence of your successes with elders and others, to involve more people in the next cycle.

Together, the symbolic language and the seven steps form a 'learning journey' that describes how to improve a community as one system. The symbolic language allows several levels of measurable detail that can be used to analyse causal relationships and test different scenarios. It requires no English literacy or numeracy, and so can involve everyone. People who understand its simple structure can easily adapt it to their own symbol systems.

The seven steps keep cultural knowledge explicitly at the centre of every action. The livelihood cycles formalise learning-by-doing, which minimises opportunities for failure. The multiple pathways encourage the individual diversity that characterises Aboriginal families. And the emphasis on sharing and celebrating knowledge recognises that everyone from youth to government workers is personally accountable for the results of their actions.

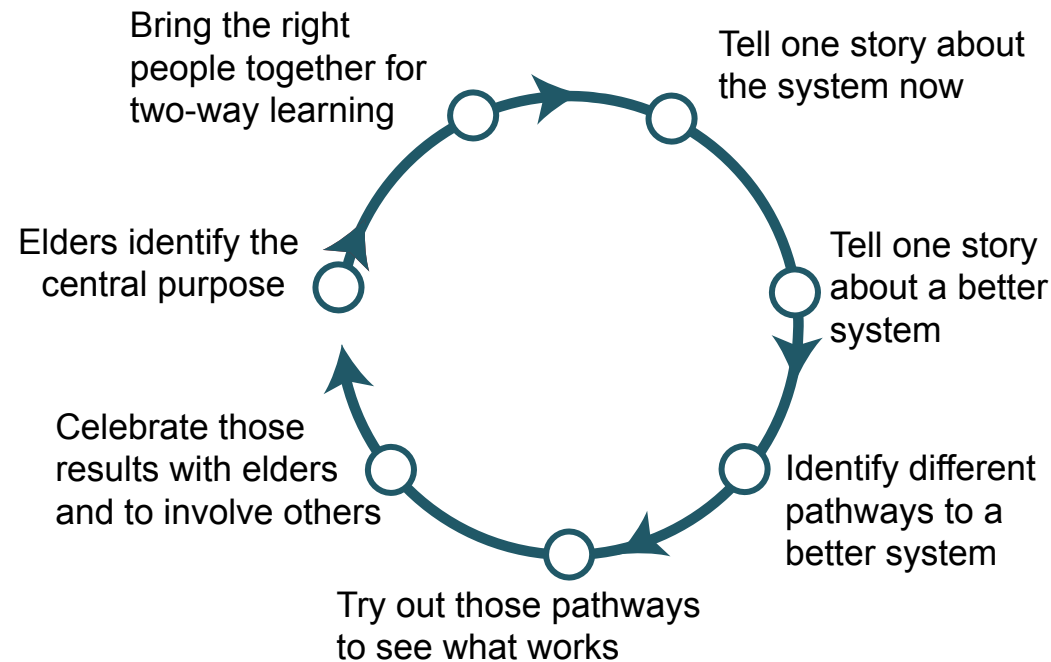


Figure 59: The cycle of seven steps in the Learning Journey

By setting up a stable cycle, people become better at each action, and steadily improve results over time.

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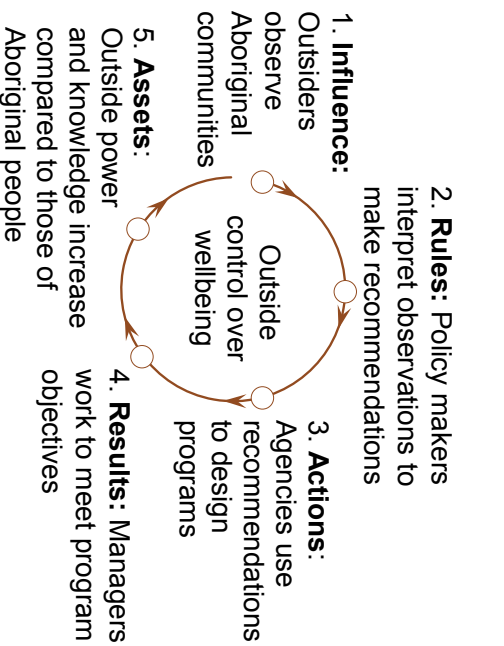
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Learning Journeys: Field Notes

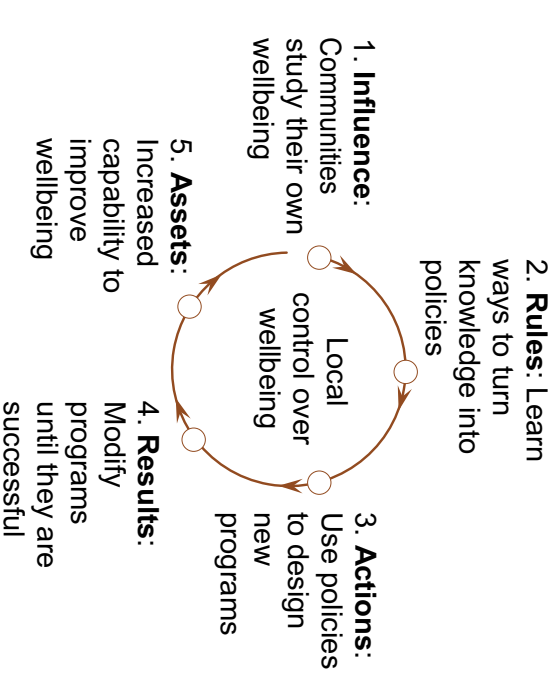
From outside control to local control:

The Learning Journey is about building local knowledge to increase local control. Local control is necessary to design meaningful and effective systems that people can sustain long enough to improve long-term results for country, family, wellbeing, education, employment and more.

These two cycles describe how outside control weakens local capabilities, and how local control strengthens capabilities.



Outside control
With outside control, Aboriginal people are in a weak role that builds outsiders' abilities and opens 'the Gap'.



Local control
With local control, Aboriginal people are in a strong role that builds their abilities and closes 'the Gap'.

From fixing weaknesses to building strengths:

Communities support the strengths of local people, and involve others to manage weaknesses

From social exclusion to local authority:

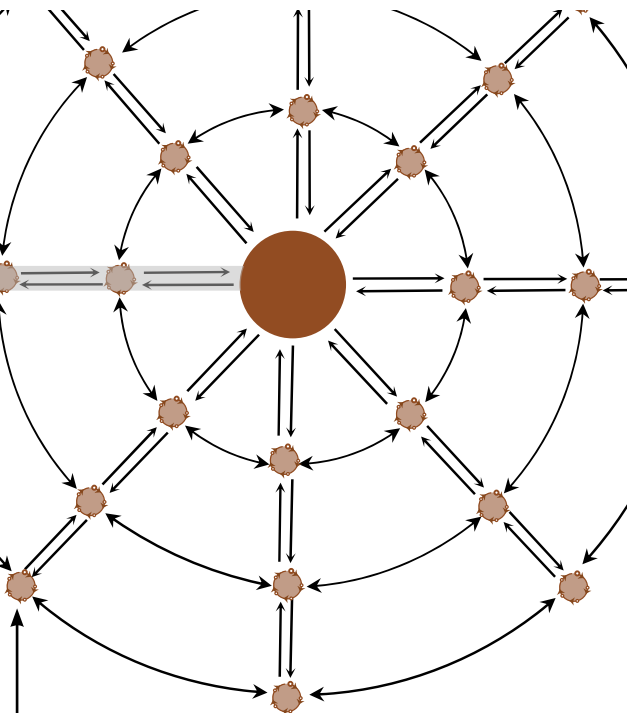
Communities increase role in decision making by building planning and management skills

From messy problems to one system:

Communities manage conflicts between organisations by bringing everyone together as one system

From land to family to organisation to government:

Communities place cultural knowledge at the centre, to guide families, organisations and government



A Symbolic Language

A symbolic language is a way for many different people to understand their community using only a few symbols.

With a shared understanding they can work together as one system.

Four circles of responsibility

1. Land: Knowledge, plants, animals, people
2. Families: Grow children to elders
3. Organisations: Services for community
4. World: Outside resources and people

Many places in each circle

1. Land: Stories, places and living things
2. Families: Ages and kinship groups
3. Organisations: Services and businesses
4. World: Governments, industries, customers

Two-way relationships link these places

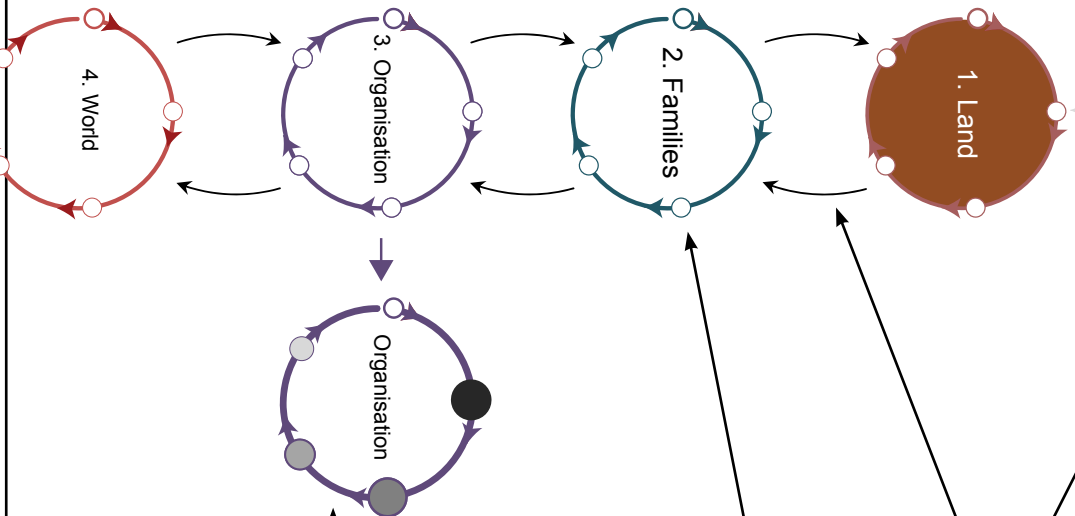
- Land ↔ Family
- Family ↔ Organisation
- Organisation ↔ World

Each place has a cycle of action

1. What strengths do you have?
2. Who makes decisions?
3. What are you able to do?
4. What do you do?
5. What are the results?
6. How do those results improve the next cycle?

Repeat cycles of action to build success

- The first cycle teaches a group how to do something new and get results.
- The next cycle makes the results stronger, and attracts other people.
- With a good cycle, out of little things, big things grow.



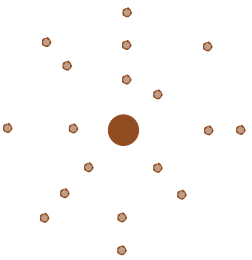
Learning Journeys – Seven Steps

These steps are a way to learn-by-doing



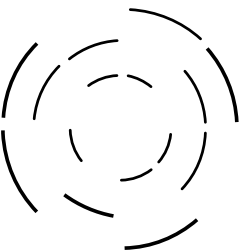
Step 1: Start with Elders, to learn the central purpose

The central purpose comes from the land, language, and cultural knowledge.



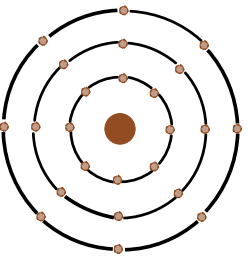
Step 2: Bring the right people together for two-way learning

The right people practice two-way learning and can teach others.



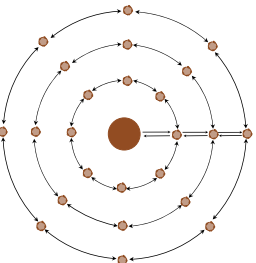
Step 3: Tell one story about the system now

This story is often about people being disconnected from each other, from their land, language and cultural knowledge.



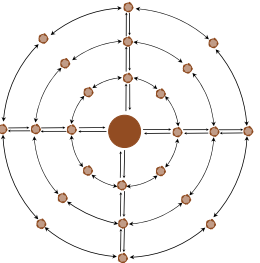
Step 4: Tell one story about a better system

This story is often about people being re-connected to each other, and to their land, language and cultural knowledge.



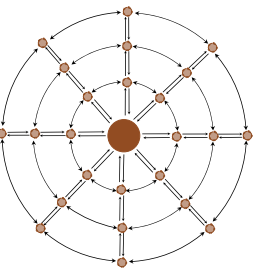
Step 5: Identify different pathways to a better system

There are many different people, families, types of knowledge and skills. Everyone can contribute a way to create a better system.



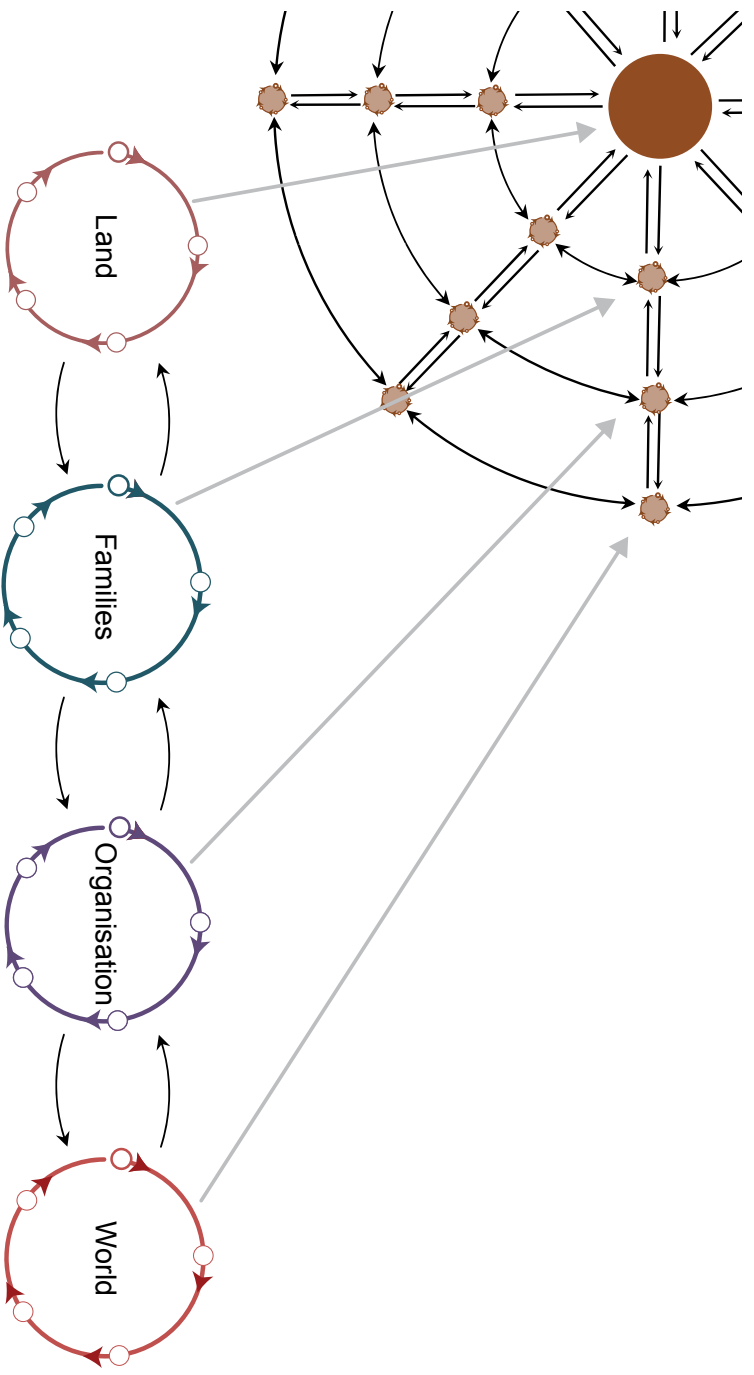
Step 6: Try out those pathways, to see what works

Learning by doing is the only way to know what works. The symbolic language lets everyone see the 'big picture' while doing their own part.



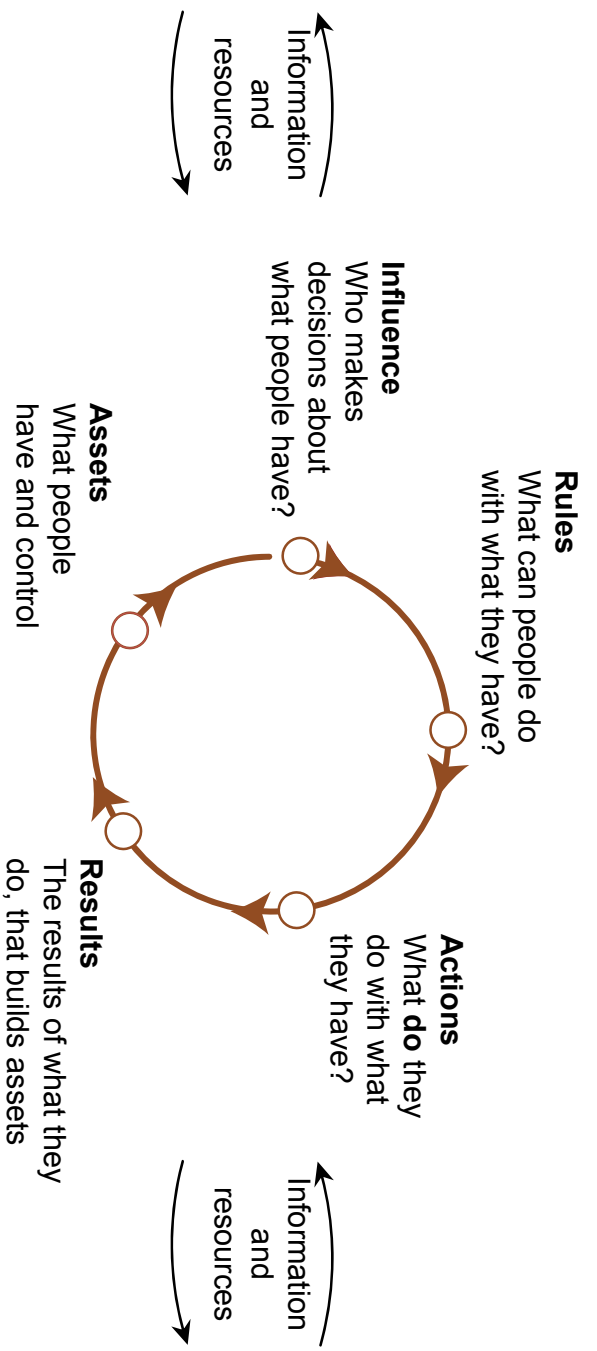
Step 7: Share that knowledge with elders, and to involve others

Celebrate successes by sharing with others how you put knowledge into action, and then involve others in continuing the learning journey.



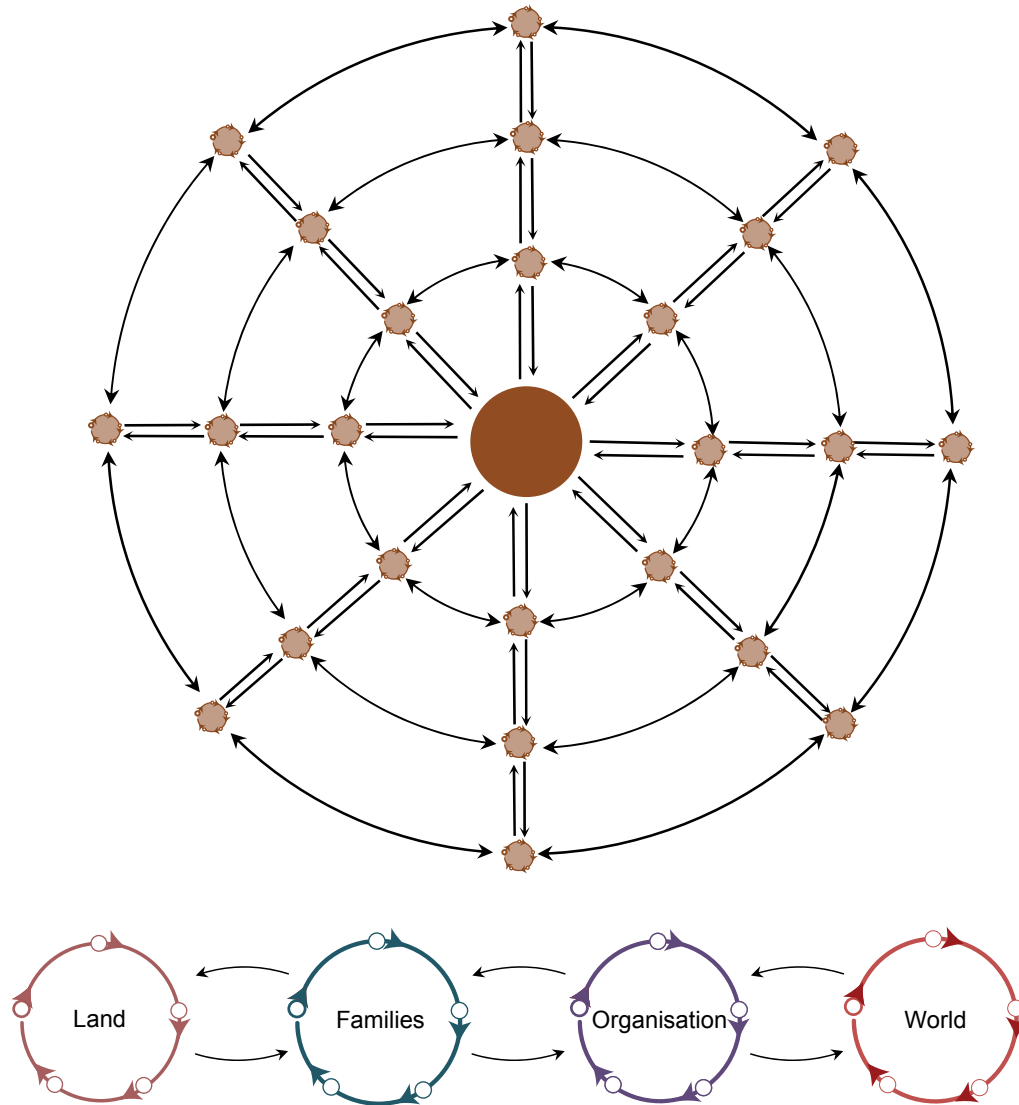
Project	Land	Family	Organisation	Outside groups
Local Service	Everyone learning from country; young people initiated	Adults and young people know their own strengths and take responsibility for putting their strengths into action	Leadership roles for each group, so they can improve the service to meet their needs	Very long-term partnerships with people, knowledge, skills, money, and political connections with other groups

How to show the actions in a livelihood cycle



Learning Journeys: Worksheet

This page provided as a worksheet that can be removed and copied



1. Start with Elders, to learn the central purpose
2. Bring the right people together for two-way learning
3. Tell one story about the system now
4. Tell one story about a better system
5. Identify different pathways to a better system
6. Try out those pathways, to see what works
7. Share that knowledge with elders, and to involve others

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