

# The Other-Side of the Roper: Work Ideology in Ngukurr

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# Overview

- Research Question
- What can be drawn from the literature
- Discussion of findings
  - Aboriginal Work Ideology in Ngukurr
  - Experiences of CDEP
  - The “Social Career”
- Summary

# Research Question

## **What is the meaning of work in a remote Aboriginal community and how is it valued?**

### Objectives:

1. To understand the ideology behind western work and the development of a “work ethic” and how this influences both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples perceptions of work
2. To explore the relationship between western work ideologies and structures and Aboriginal culture and practice
3. To investigate employment options and in particular the Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP)
4. To document Aboriginal experiences of work, and to describe Aboriginal perceptions of work
5. To gain an understanding of the meaning of work and the choices that Aboriginal people make in relation to work

# Literature Review

## Four main Points:

- Work ideology evolves over time and is dependant on specific historical and cultural contexts
- Work is predominantly viewed from a western cultural perspective
- Aboriginal people have been exposed to markedly different western work experiences from non-Aboriginal people during the same historical periods
- Aboriginal people have a distinct work ideology - 'working for' kin and country

# Aboriginal Work Ideology

## KEY INFLUENCES

### ■ **The memory of work**

- Introduced western concept
- both positive mechanism for identity creation and as culturally oppressive

### ■ **Kinship**

- Making decisions about level and kind of participation in local social and economic systems

### ■ **Cultural Obligations**

- Flexible time management

### ■ **Family situations**

- Maintaining families in highly stressed environments

### ■ **Poverty**

- Work as basic survival

# Aboriginal Western Work experience: CDEP

- CDEP is more than just an employment program
- Political context of CDEP feeds into feelings of disempowerment
- The experience of working for CDEP is primarily perceived of as an inferior work experience

# The “Social Career”

- Western work is fraught with difficulties because it is in tension with Aboriginal cultural and social systems – it has little incentive
- Choosing a “social career” overcomes these difficulties because it functions within cultural comfort zones and uses them for individual gain

# Comments from Ngukurr

*"Not much choice in the modern world...all this trespassing onto your culture. It's gunna take time...melobat [we] need time". "*

*"...the community is really trying, everybody is really trying to work proper way...But just some problems im [it's] not easy with blackbella [Aboriginal] way and munanga [white] way together..."*

*"Blackfella like a mouse, the government like pussy cat trying to decide which way to make the mouse run and how they are going to catch him".*