

Indigenous workplace policies: the crucial role of Indigenous management

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Abstract

Indigenous employment is a critical policy area in Australia, with businesses adopting targeted workplace and recruitment practices to increase their levels of Indigenous employment. However, non-Indigenous-owned Australian businesses are still struggling to meet their Indigenous employment targets, and the national gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment rates remains wide. Despite the increased popularity of Indigenous-specific workplace and recruitment policies, there is a lack of research that aims to determine their associations with Indigenous employment. This paper addresses this gap by surveying 680 non-Indigenous-owned Australian businesses,

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detailing the uptake of various Indigenous-focused workplace and recruitment practices and their associations with Indigenous employment. The study finds that there is limited uptake of policies and practices such as Reconciliation Action Plans, cultural competency training, and Indigenous employment strategies, and some scepticism from respondents about their efficacy. OLS and negative binomial estimations could not demonstrate consistent associations between the implementation of these policies and Indigenous employment. However, the paper finds a significant association between the presence of Indigenous people in management positions within non-Indigenous-owned businesses and higher rates of Indigenous employment. This finding is consistent with previous research, which suggests that Indigenous-led approaches lead to improved Indigenous employment outcomes.

Keywords

Indigenous employment, Indigenous leadership, workplace and recruitment policies

Introduction

Indigenous employment, recruitment, and retention have been a long-standing focus in Australia, with the bulk of this history post-European settlement marred by discrimination and exclusion of Indigenous people from the labour market (Leroy-Dyer, 2021). In 2008, a commitment was made to halve the gap in Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment rates within a decade as part of the 'Closing the Gap' national agenda (Australian Government, 2009). However, progress towards closing this gap has not been substantial, with employment rates for Indigenous (51%) and non-Indigenous (74%) peoples in Australia remaining divergent (Monem and McDonald, 2023). While Indigenous employment is a continued focus for Australian governments, private organisations are also developing an enhanced focus on increasing their levels of Indigenous employment, with a multitude of workplace and recruitment approaches being implemented to meet these aims (Business Council of Australia, 2023). These approaches include (but are not limited to) Indigenous employment targets and strategies, Indigenous identified positions, Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs), and cultural competency training (Burt and Gunstone, 2018; Gray et al., 2012; Reconciliation Australia, 2021; Schepis, 2020). Such policies can be viewed as a growing requirement for workplaces, not only given the historical context that has prevented Indigenous people from accessing the workforce (Leroy-Dyer, 2021) but also in the continuation of discrimination within the workplace. There is a significant amount of recent literature that details that Indigenous peoples face significant barriers within Australian workplaces, such as instances of workplace racism and a lack of cultural safety (Brown et al., 2020), tokenisation and undervaluation of skillsets (Menzel, 2022; Thunig and Jones, 2021), and poor retention outcomes (Biddle and Lahn, 2016). As such, the development of formalised policies and practices is a method to address not only Indigenous underrepresentation

in the workforce but also to ensure that Australian workplaces respect and value and are safe for Indigenous people. However, there has been limited analysis of their overall uptake across Australian businesses and their associations with Indigenous employment. The inequitable labour market outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations of Australia are largely a consequence of the ongoing impacts of colonisation (Altman, 2000). Employment and business ownership as an outcome is influenced by a number of overlapping factors, such as education, health, incarceration, caring responsibilities, and socioeconomic status – all of which are likely to impact the labour market outcomes of Indigenous people more acutely (Biddle and Yap, 2010; Hunter and Hawke, 2001; Langton, 2011). Australian institutions operate within a system that has benefited from the exploitation of Indigenous people’s labour, rights, and lands (Altman, 2000; Harkin, 2020; Kidd, 2007), yet often treat Indigenous peoples as ‘at fault for their own circumstances’ (Myfanwy Miley and Read, 2018) and consequently as underserving of equitable opportunity. The interpretation of colonialism as an ‘event’ as opposed to a ‘process’ (Wolfe, 2006) contributes to the location of Indigenous disadvantage within the labour market as detached from its historical and continuing context and remains tarred with racist framings of Indigenous peoples and work (Bargallie, 2020; Leroy-Dyer, 2021). As such, individual non-Indigenous Australian institutions are historically and/or currently unsympathetic or not conscious of the significant barriers to entering the workforce that Indigenous peoples face, before even discussing the significant amount of racism that plagues Australian workplaces (e.g. Bargallie, 2020; Brown et al., 2020).

In contrast to the majority of Australian institutions, which are non-Indigenous-owned and/or -led, Indigenous-owned businesses support substantially high rates of Indigenous employment (Eva et al, 2023a). Indigenous entrepreneurship has a long history in the Australian continent (Foley, 2000, 2003), with the Indigenous business sector experiencing significant growth in recent years (Evans et al., 2024b). Klyver and Foley (2012) discussed the role of social networks in influencing entrepreneurial activity, and in the case of Indigenous entrepreneurs, this involves being motivated to create employment for Indigenous people (Eva et al, 2023b). This stems from Indigenous entrepreneurs being more likely to maintain Indigenous social networks, and similarly being more cognoscente of the factors that inhibit or limit Indigenous participation within the labour market. However, Foley (2010a) detailed how colonisation, dispossession, and urbanisation have disrupted cultural ties and social capital for many Indigenous people post-European contact. This context is important, as while it is reasonable to presume that Indigenous-owned businesses may have enhanced access to an Indigenous workforce within their social networks in comparison to non-Indigenous-owned businesses, this should not be relied on as a key explanatory factor in divergent rates of Indigenous employment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses (Hunter, 2015). Moreover, the characteristics of the Indigenous business sector (such as its industry and geographical profile) do not explain the divergent rates of Indigenous employment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses (Eva et al, 2024b). Recent research articulates how Indigenous businesses create these starkly positive Indigenous employment outcomes (Eva et al, 2024a), detailing Indigenous approaches to governance

within these organisations that value and pursue holistic and deliberate approaches to supporting Indigenous employees (Evans and Williamson, 2017; Faulkner and Lahn, 2018; Ryan and Evans, 2020). Despite these significant Indigenous employment outcomes, the practices of the Indigenous business sector have yet to be adopted within the broader Australian economy. Extensive existing literature details the distinct characteristics of Indigenous entrepreneurs that delineate them from other forms of entrepreneurship (e.g. Foley, 2003, 2006; Peredo et al., 2004). This involves the utilisation of Indigenous knowledge, community-focused approaches to value creation, and responses to broader historical, cultural, and political factors that acutely impact Indigenous populations. The foundations of Indigenous-led institutions are then built on the leadership and management approaches of Indigenous peoples, which have been characterised as collective and collaborative (Ryan and Evans, 2020), of high investment (Evans et al., 2024c), and committed to creating positive outcomes of Indigenous communities (Eva et al, 2024a). Subsequently, these characteristics are the main explanatory factor for the high rates of Indigenous employment within Indigenous-owned businesses (Eva et al, 2024b). This is not to depict Indigenous peoples as a monolith nor Indigenous peoples' leadership and management styles as uniform but to highlight the potential for impact on Indigenous employment outcomes that Indigenous management might also have within non-Indigenous businesses.

Given the increasing focus on Indigenous employment both from the government (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020) and the private sector (Business Council of Australia, 2023), it is crucial to understand what policies and practices are in place in Australian businesses regarding Indigenous employment. As recent research has detailed the workplace dynamics of Indigenous-owned businesses to explain their high rates of Indigenous employment (Eva et al 2023a, 2024a), this paper focuses specifically on non-Indigenous-owned businesses, given their divergent Indigenous employment outcomes (Hunter, 2015). Through a survey of non-Indigenous-owned Australian businesses, this paper reports on the uptake of Indigenous-focused workplace and recruitment policies, the presence of Indigenous management in businesses, and their correlation with Indigenous employment. This paper contributes to the evolving Indigenous employment policy environment by highlighting the potential effectiveness of Indigenous employment approaches.

Literature review

Indigenous employment and non-Indigenous institutions

The ongoing 'gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment rates (51% vs 74%) prevails despite a decade of specific federal policy focus through the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Monem and McDonald, 2023). There has been (and continues to be) a hyper-fixation on Indigenous peoples and barriers to employment. These often relate to a deficit framing of Indigenous peoples concerning several socioeconomic and socio-cultural factors that impact employment (Forrest, 2014), which explicitly or implicitly identify Indigenous peoples as at fault for their own exclusion from the labour market (Klein, 2014). This framing ignores the deficits of Australian institutions

which contribute to the underrepresentation of Indigenous people in the workforce. A multitude of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars continue to highlight and explain the deficits of (non-Indigenous-led) Australian institutions in creating work environments that are safe for Indigenous employees (e.g. Bargallie et al., 2023; Conway, 2020; Conway et al., 2024; Faulkner and Lahn, 2018; Jones, 2023; Leon, 2023; Leroy-Dyer and Menzel, 2023; Pearson, 2022, to offer a limited, recent set of examples). Recent surveys of Indigenous peoples within the workforce have consistently demonstrated that over 50% of respondents cite recent instances of racism within the workplace (Brown et al., 2020; Minderoo Foundation et al., 2022; Polity Research & Consulting, 2022). Such instances have contributed to poor Indigenous staff retention (Biddle and Lahn, 2016; Brown et al., 2020). Where the majority of Australian organisations are not Indigenous-led, the implementation of Indigenous cultures, knowledge, and experiences are often not reflected within the governance of these organisations (Eva et al, 2024a). This can create a disconnect between Indigenous employees and the business and further create barriers to Indigenous employment. This reflects a significant limitation for non-Indigenous institutions to recognise their biases (Conway et al., 2024; Leroy-Dyer, 2009). Given the inherent power imbalance that is the vast majority of institutions across Australia being non-Indigenous-led, it is through a non-Indigenous lens that Indigenous experiences are re-told (DiAngelo, 2011). This is a contributing factor to why Indigenous employment is vastly higher in Indigenous institutions as opposed to non-Indigenous institutions (Eva et al 2023a), as Indigenous perspectives are centred and understood within these institutions rather than marginalised, misunderstood, or ignored (Eva et al 2024a). This will likely continue to be a significant issue with Indigenous representation in Australian businesses below the Indigenous proportional population rate (2.2% v 3.8%, ABS, 2021a, 2021b), and Indigenous representation in management positions estimated to be even lower (1.3% per ABS, 2021b; or 0.7% as per Minderoo Foundation, 2022).

For the majority of organisations across Australia that are not Indigenous-owned, multiple workplace-level approaches are being undertaken to attract and support an Indigenous workforce. While there may be a diversity of formal and informal approaches undertaken by individual organisations, this paper focuses on policies and practices prevalent amongst the existing literature and available policy documents, which maintain Indigenous employment as a focus. Therefore, the remainder of this literature review focuses on the existing literature and current debates regarding RAPs, cultural competency training, Indigenous employment strategies, and their potential relationship with Indigenous employment. Additional exploration of Indigenous governance within an institution also impacts Indigenous employment, such as seen in Indigenous-owned businesses. Given the ongoing commitment to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment rates, it is important to interrogate the efficacy of the strategies currently undertaken by Australian organisations to meet this aim.

Indigenous employment strategies

Government and large private organisations maintain publicly accessible Indigenous employment strategies (alternatively, Aboriginal workforce strategies). These strategies

vary in their scope depending on the circumstances of individual organisations. For example, the Department of Health and Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's (2021) Aboriginal Workforce Strategy includes commitments to Indigenous employment targets, Indigenous-focused workplace education and training, and celebrating Indigenous cultures. While the private organisation, the Coles Group (2023) maintained similar commitments, they also have a workforce across Australia and maintain specific commitments to Indigenous employment specifically in rural and regional areas. A central piece to strategies such as these is specific employment targets for Indigenous peoples, often in line with the Indigenous population rate, often cited as 3%, but is 3.8% per the most recent Census estimate (ABS, 2021a). These targets intend to ensure that Indigenous people are proportionally represented within the workforce; however, targets such as these are not without criticism. An overemphasis on numeric targets can ignore the value of job creation for Indigenous peoples (Eva et al, 2023b) and risk organisations meeting targets through creative accounting (Aston, 2022). Moreover, while progress towards overall Indigenous employment may be an area of focus, representation in management and executive positions can remain low (Minderoo Foundation, 2022), and poor Indigenous staff retention can be overlooked (Biddle and Lahn, 2016). Nevertheless, Indigenous employment strategies are a focus for an increasing number of organisations and merit investigation into their potential uptake and impact.

Reconciliation action plans

Since 2006, Reconciliation Australia has provided the resources and infrastructure for organisations to develop RAPs (Reconciliation Australia, 2021). RAPs provide a framework for organisations to develop and implement specific, targeted, and quantifiable commitments towards reconciliation and are intended to facilitate a level of accountability for organisations toward their aims (Gunstone, 2020; Lloyd, 2018). RAPs can be designed to suit the capabilities of different organisations, with Reconciliation Australia having developed a tiered framework to support organisations who are just commencing their RAP through to organisations who have maintained and built on their RAP over several years (Reconciliation Australia, 2021). Individual RAPs contain many different Indigenous-focused actions, which reflect the capacities and aims of individual organisations. For example, the Australian National University as of 2021–2022 held an 'Innovate' RAP, the second of the four levels of RAPs, and maintains several specific commitments relating to building stronger relationships, implementing targeted policies, and incorporating Indigenous perspectives into organisational practices (Australian National University, 2021). However, as is the case with many RAPs, Indigenous employment targets are a key area of focus. Reconciliation Australia releases annual 'RAP Impact Reports', with the 2023 report detailing that within the 1873 RAP organisations, they employed 76,953 Indigenous people (Reconciliation Australia, 2023a). Reconciliation Australia undertakes an annual survey of organisations with a RAP which captures a number of data points useful for cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis (Reconciliation Australia, 2023b), however, publicly available analysis is limited

to what is published in the Annual RAP Impact Reports (Reconciliation Australia, 2024b). For example, it is unclear that there is analysis on whether Indigenous employment in these organisations is growing, the nature of this employment, and the breakdown of management positions of Indigenous staff. It may well be the case that businesses that make multiple commitments through the adoption of a RAP subsequently increase their rates of Indigenous employment (and/or retention)– but this is yet to be empirically demonstrated.

There is a significant amount of scepticism about RAPs and their value, given their potential to be used as marketing instruments rather than positive commitments. For example, Rio Tinto maintained the highest level of RAP and was (and continues to be) a significant employer of Indigenous people (Parmenter and Barnes, 2021). However, after the destruction of the Juukan Gorge, Reconciliation Australia (2020) revoked Rio Tinto's RAP due to the significant breach of relationship with the affected Puutu Kunti Kurama and Pinikura peoples. The implementation of RAPs within workplaces in Australia, as identified in the Gari Yala Report (Brown et al, 2020), showed more positive workplace experiences for Indigenous employees, but only where Indigenous employees saw authentic commitments to actions beyond words. This is further reiterated in the perspectives of Indigenous business owners who, while acknowledging the benefits of RAPs, maintain reservations and scepticisms of non-Indigenous organisations' delivery on commitments and framings of problems within their RAPs (Eva et al, 2024a; Jones et al., 2024b). Interestingly, The Woort Koorliny Report (Minderoo Foundation, 2022) revealed that of Australia's largest employers, those without a RAP had higher rates of Indigenous employment than those with a RAP, but that the promotion and retention outcomes of Indigenous staff in RAP organisations were substantially better.

Cultural competency training

Many organisations undertake workplace training for staff in response to an increasing awareness of biases and prejudices within the workplace. These maintain varying focuses that aim to facilitate enhanced education and influence practice within the workplace, for example, concerning gender equity (Williamson and Foley, 2018), disability (Phillips et al., 2016), unconscious bias (Leon, 2022), and anti-racism (Elias et al., 2023). While the broad aim of such training may be to facilitate more inclusive workplaces, some scholars argue that such training maintains an overemphasis on individual behaviours rather than focusing on institutional practices that impact marginalised people (Applebaum, 2019; Noon, 2018). In the Australian context, Indigenous-specific workplace trainings aim to educate participants on aspects of Indigenous cultures, histories, and experiences. These trainings have different names, such as cultural safety, competency, awareness, or responsiveness training, with these different terminologies representing a spectrum of approaches from a broad education to implementation in practice (though often the terms are used interchangeably) (Fredericks and Bargallie, 2020; Kerrigan et al., 2020; Shepherd, 2019). Broadly, these training programs aim to ensure that workplace environments maintain cultural safety, which refers to creating a safe environment where people's identity is not denied, belittled, or disrespected

(Williams, 1999). While the uptake of such training appears to be increasing, Indigenous-focused cultural training faces criticism regarding how organisations truly embed these training programs (Burt and Gunstone, 2018). These authors further discuss with reference to DiAngelo (2011) that cultural competency as a concept has transformed into a more palatable form for white consumers. Framing is an essential consideration regarding cultural competency (and indeed other workplace training) by framing racism and discrimination as experienced by Indigenous peoples rather than racism and discrimination being perpetrated by non-Indigenous people. Shirodkar (2020) discussed that in the Australian context, discrimination can too often be discussed as an issue of misperception maintained by Indigenous people rather than a failure to perceive how discrimination materialises by non-Indigenous people. However, such training appears to be the cornerstone of workplace education relating to Indigenous peoples, which may, therefore, maintain a relationship with Indigenous employment. While the implementation of cultural competency training is not a uniform practice in Indigenous-led institutions (Eva et al, 2024a), the necessity to embed cross-cultural understanding within the workplace is, and as such there may be a heightened recognition from non-Indigenous businesses with Indigenous management of the need for specific training.

Indigenous cultures in the workplace

In its study on some of Australia's largest employers, The Minderoo Foundation (2022) found that in businesses where leaders cited that they consistently acknowledged country at significant internal events, this was associated with higher levels of Indigenous employment. An Acknowledgement of Country is 'an opportunity for anyone to show respect for Traditional Owners [in whose country one is in], and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to [lands and waters]' (Reconciliation Australia, 2024). This adaptation of Indigenous cultural protocol is being increasingly undertaken at the commencement of formal occasions by non-Indigenous peoples. This does not focus on employment, and notwithstanding accusations of the performative nature of some acknowledgements (Davis, 2020), their implementation in the workplace setting could be indicative of individual organisations' relationship and commitment to Indigenous inclusion. Similarly, the marking of Indigenous dates of significance, such as NAIDOC¹ and Reconciliation² Weeks is an increasing feature of corporate Australia. Again, while these are not formalised approaches to Indigenous recruitment or workplace policy, they could indicate individual businesses' attitudes and approaches to Indigenous inclusion and recognition in the workplace.

Theoretical development

This study is part of a broader research project, aiming to better articulate Indigenous employment and employment approaches within Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses in Australia. Undertaking a constructivist grounded theory approach

(Charmaz, 2017), a theoretical explanation for how Indigenous-owned businesses create their significantly strong Indigenous employment outcomes was developed (Eva et al, 2024a). This theory posits that Indigenous modes of governance help to inform organisational-level cultural competency, which enables the development of tailored and multilayered workplace practices. This maintains resonance with existing literature which details the high-commitment approaches to human resource management that Indigenous businesses undertake (Evans et al., 2024c), and the distinct nature of Indigenous institutions from non-Indigenous institutions in their practices and perspectives (Coates et al., 2023). As such, it merits exploring how Indigenous leadership may influence Indigenous employment in non-Indigenous institutions. Significant literature details the differences in Indigenous and Western understandings and approaches to leadership (Jordan and Leroy-Dyer, 2023; Ruwhiu and Cone, 2013; Ryan and Evans, 2020), highlighting the relational, non-hierarchical, values-driven, and collective forms of Indigenous leadership. This plays a crucial role in facilitating the high rates of Indigenous employment within Indigenous businesses (Eva et al, 2024a) but requires further exploration within non-Indigenous businesses.

As discussed in the literature review, non-Indigenous businesses' approach to improving their Indigenous employment outcomes appears to be focused on the uptake of individual workplace and recruitment policies. This study provides an estimation of their uptake across a sample of non-Indigenous businesses and their attitudes towards these policies. A further significant finding from the interviews in (Eva et al, 2024a, 2023b) study was that Indigenous participants were sceptical about non-Indigenous businesses' commitment to Indigenous employment and policies. RAPs, cultural competency trainings, and Indigenous employment targets were viewed negatively where participants saw them as 'tick the box' exercises, or where businesses didn't truly recognise the value or purpose of these exercises. This relates to discussions from Conway et al. (2024), who argued that there is a difference in perception as to what constitutes a culturally safe and responsive workplace, and an inability by those who are the perpetrators of racism or beneficiaries of institutionalised racism to recognise and dismantle these structures (Conway, 2020; Moreton-Robinson, 2011; Shirodkar, 2020). This might moderate the impact of individual workplace practices where they are limited in their scope, uncertain of their aim, and isolated in their uptake, where this is not seen as the case within Indigenous organisations (Eva et al 2024a; Evans et al., 2024c). This theory may further be supported via findings of The Woort Koorliny Report, which found that for non-Indigenous organisations that had RAPs, where those RAPs led and developed by Indigenous staff, these businesses had higher rates of Indigenous employment (Minderoo Foundation, 2022). Therefore, the existing literature indicates that the implementation of individual policy may not be effective in of itself, should the underlying commitment not be genuine or informed, as is more likely to be the case if it is Indigenous-led (Eva et al, 2024a; Evans et al., 2024c).

Building on the existing policy and research environment, this study was designed to estimate the rate of Indigenous employment and Indigenous employment policies in non-Indigenous-owned Australian businesses. Moreover, it sought to understand what relationship may exist between the presence of Indigenous people in positions

of management within non-Indigenous businesses, and Indigenous employment rates and employment policies. This study therefore addresses the following research questions (RQs):

1. What is the uptake of Indigenous-focused recruitment/workplace policies in non-Indigenous-owned Australian businesses, and what are respondents' attitudes toward these policies?
2. How does the presence of Indigenous managers in non-Indigenous businesses correlate with the uptake of Indigenous recruitment/workplace policies?
3. How is the rate of Indigenous employment related to the uptake of Indigenous recruitment/workplace policies, and the presence of Indigenous managers?

Method

Participants and procedure

This article uses data from a primary survey of non-Indigenous-owned businesses in Australia. The survey was designed to compare Indigenous employment rates between Indigenous-owned and non-Indigenous-owned businesses (As reported in: Eva et al, 2024b) and to detail the uptake of various Indigenous-focused employment practices and their relationship with Indigenous employment (as reported in this paper). As such, the survey items focused on two key areas:

- Descriptive and demographic questions (no. of employees/Indigenous employees, Indigenous managers, location, industry, profit status)
- Policy questions (whether a business had a RAP, cultural competency training, etc., and attitudes towards these)

Existing surveys have gained some information on Indigenous employment and Indigenous workplace practices (e.g. The Woort Koorliny Report (Minderoo Foundation, 2022), The Gari Yala Report (Brown et al., 2020), and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC) survey on cultural safety training (Hunter et al., 2021). These were used to benchmark the survey questions to ensure reliability in data collection. However, these surveys differ in this paper's scope, sample, and focus. For example, the Woort Koorliny Report surveyed some of Australia's largest employers, and while it revealed crucial findings cited in this paper, it maintains a limited number of businesses ($N = 42$). These businesses are also of significantly greater size than even the largest Indigenous-owned businesses and, indeed, most businesses in Australia. As such, it is crucial to understand the rate of Indigenous employment and uptake of Indigenous-focused workplace policies and practices in a sample of businesses that are more comparable with the dynamics of the Indigenous businesses sector, and that can provide insights into the broader population of Australian businesses. Parameters were set to meet these research aims.

The survey was distributed through the Qualtrics Research Platform to three of their research panels in 2023. The survey was delivered to ‘business owners, directors, and senior decision-makers’ in Australia. These respondents were targeted as they were most likely to have access to and knowledge of the information required about their business. Businesses that were Indigenous-owned or had fewer than two employees were screened out, as the desired sample was specifically non-Indigenous-owned businesses, noting that Indigenous-owned businesses maintain unique workplace practices (Eva et al, 2024a), and businesses with 0 or 1 employees were unlikely to maintain recruitment or workplace policies. Businesses with 20 or more employees were deliberately over-sampled in relation to their proportion in the total population of businesses, so there was equal representation of businesses with 2–19 and 20 or more employees. This strategy was undertaken for two purposes. First, to compare Indigenous-owned businesses that maintain different distributions of Indigenous employment between these two business sizes (As can be viewed in: Eva et al, 2024b). Second, it was hypothesised that larger businesses may implement Indigenous-focused policies and practices at higher rates than smaller businesses. As such, larger businesses required representation in the sample that sufficiently enabled reliable multivariate and comparative analysis. Qualtrics removed responses from the sample flagged by their system as having poor data quality. One thousand five hundred respondents completed or partially completed the survey, with the described parameters reducing the final sample to 680 completed responses. The landing page for the survey indicated the survey’s focus was workplace policy, so to not prime respondents the survey maintained an Indigenous focus. This was undertaken so that businesses could undertake the survey to determine whether or not they have any Indigenous employees.

Initially, a sample size of 500 was sought as this would be sufficient to make inferences about the population of non-Indigenous-owned Australian businesses (de Vaus, 2013). However, Qualtrics provided a final sample of 680, which allowed for the use of smaller standard errors in the confidence intervals. The Business Longitudinal Analysis Data Environment (BLADE) from 2018 to 2019 provides an estimate of the population of businesses, excluding 0 employee businesses ($N = 717,396$). Using a confidence interval of 99% (Z-Score of 2.576), a margin of error $\pm 5\%$, and a standard deviation of .5, the minimum sample is $N = 664$, calculated via $(2.576^2 \times 0.5 \times (1 - 0.5)) / 0.05^2$, as per Smith (2023) (Table 1).

Table 1. Composition of samples of non-Indigenous businesses.

No. of businesses	680
No. of employees	150,790
No. of Indigenous employees	4288
% of Employees who are Indigenous	2.8%
% of For-profit businesses	90%
% of Businesses with 2–19 employees	52%
% of Businesses with 20+ employees	48%

Measures

RQs 1 and 2 are answered via descriptive statistics presented in Figures 1 and 2, Table 2, and in text. The data is conditioned on the size of the business (2–19 and 20+ employees) and the presence (and absence) of an Indigenous manager/s. As discussed in the literature review, the researchers hypothesised the presence of Indigenous management may maintain associations with Indigenous-focused workplace policies and/or enhanced rates of Indigenous employment. To answer RQ3, regression analyses were undertaken using two distinct measures of Indigenous employment as the dependent variables. Proportional Indigenous employment is used in the OLS regression, with the value calculated for each business by $(\text{no. of Indigenous employees} / \text{total employees}) \times 100$. Table 3 presents two OLS regressions, one including all the businesses in the sample, and the other with only businesses with one or more Indigenous employees.

Similarly, two negative binomial regressions are presented in Table 4, using the number of Indigenous employees as the dependent variable. The negative binomial model is preferred model when the dependent variable is based on over-dispersed count data (Cameron and Trivedi, 2013; Note the 373 businesses in the sample with 0 Indigenous employees). The two regressions use all businesses and businesses with one or more Indigenous employees as their respective estimation samples. Using two distinct dependent variables (continuous and count data) and multiple estimations on two different samples adds to the robustness of the analysis.

Explanatory variables were used in the regression analyses to ensure that general business characteristics are controlled for, including:

- Profit status
- Business size (2–19 employees, 20+ employees)
- Geography (Major city, regional, remote)
- Industry

While the industries of businesses are included as variables in the regressions, they are not presented in **Tables 3** and **4**. Further explanatory variables relate to the policies implemented in businesses and whether or not they had a:

- RAP
- Cultural competency training
- Indigenous employment strategy
- Indigenous manager/s

These were included as they could be expressed as dummy variables (1 = yes, 0 = no) and were the key focus of this research in assessing their potential correlations with Indigenous employment. Respondents were also asked whether they undertook Acknowledgements of Country at significant internal events and whether they celebrated NAIDOC and Reconciliation Weeks. These workplace practices maintain a focus on acknowledging and celebrating Indigenous cultures, and histories, and are

not focused on employment. As such, while their uptake is of interest for descriptive analysis (Table 2), they are not included in multivariate analysis (Tables 3 and 4). As Indigenous managers are used as an explanatory variable, the dependent variables were calculated to exclude Indigenous managers from the number (and proportion) of Indigenous employees. 19 businesses were excluded from the analysis as they maintained 1 Indigenous employee who was also a manager; thus, including them would incorrectly associate these businesses as having 0 Indigenous employees. Therefore, the regression analyses used final samples of 288 and 661 businesses. The precise nature of the role of Indigenous managers was not determined in the survey.

Ethics

Ethics approval was granted by The Australian National University's HREC in December of 2022. Participation in the survey was anonymous. This survey was undertaken as part of the Making Indigenous Friendly Businesses research project funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), and it received stakeholder support from Supply Nation and Indigenous Business Australia. The authors of this article are a cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, ranging from early career researchers to long-standing scholars in the Indigenous business, labour economics, and entrepreneurship research disciplines. Relevant processes and guidelines outlined by the National Health and Medical Research Council (2018a, 2018b) and AIATSIS (2020) regarding Indigenous research were followed.

Findings

Indigenous employment in non-Indigenous-owned businesses

Respondents were asked how many Indigenous people they employed and how many of these employees occupy management positions within the business. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the proportion of businesses with one or more Indigenous employees and that have one or more Indigenous managers. Figure 1 shows that 45% ($N = 307$) of businesses have Indigenous employees and 23% ($N = 159$) have Indigenous employees in management positions within the business.

Figure 1 depicts stark differences when conditioning on the size of businesses, with a much higher proportion of large businesses with at least one Indigenous employee (71%) or at least one Indigenous manager (41%). This is not necessarily an indication that they are better employers of Indigenous people, but it could be indicative of multiple factors. For example, for businesses with a large workforce, it is more likely that they will maintain some Indigenous representation, given they are drawing on a larger pool of employees. This is highlighted in the responses of businesses that indicated they did not have any Indigenous employees, with many noting that they were small family businesses, and their families were not Indigenous.

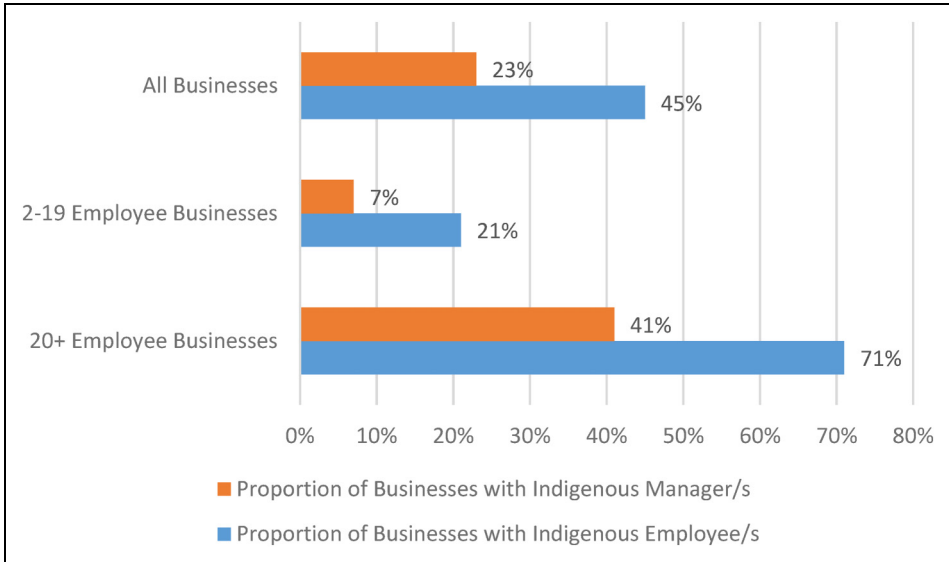


Figure 1. Proportion of businesses with Indigenous representation.

Note: This figure indicates the proportion of all businesses in each category that had at least one Indigenous employee, and at least one Indigenous manager, respectively.

Figure 2 presents Indigenous employment within the sample, conditioned on the size of the businesses and the presence of Indigenous management. These descriptive statistics should be interpreted cautiously, as the most recent Census data suggests that the Indigenous employment rate within Australian businesses is 2.2% (ABS, 2021b), indicating that the 2.8% figure cited in Figure 2 could be overestimated. However, this paper aims not to provide definitive rates of Indigenous employment but to demonstrate how Indigenous employment may be related to various factors. For example, Figure 2 indicates that smaller businesses can maintain higher rates of Indigenous employment than larger businesses. This is likely indicative of the limited supply of Indigenous employees for larger businesses, with the mean number of employees 452 for large businesses in the sample and 6 for smaller businesses. What is particularly revealing is the difference between businesses with and without Indigenous managers. Despite having a mean number of employees of 540, businesses with Indigenous manager/s have a 4% rate of Indigenous employment. This is compared to businesses without Indigenous manager/s, with a mean number of 125 employees and a 1.3% rate of Indigenous employment. This indicates that the presence of Indigenous manager/s, though only in a minority of businesses in the sample ($N = 159$), may maintain a relationship with enhanced rates of Indigenous employment.

Indigenous-Focused workplace and recruitment policies and practices

Respondents were asked whether they implemented several different Indigenous-specific workplace and recruitment policies and practices. These were asked to quantify their

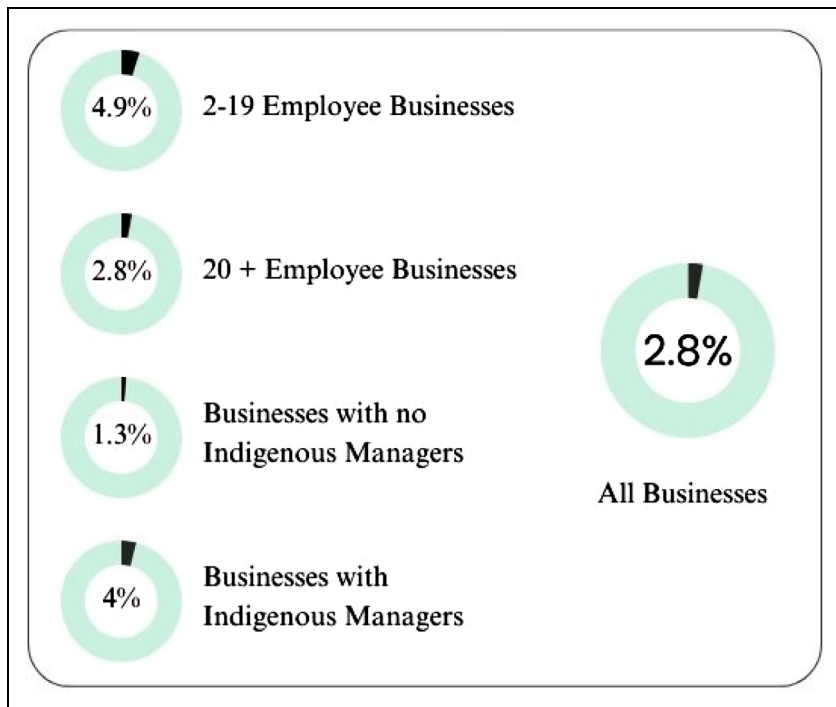


Figure 2. Proportion of total workforce who are Indigenous.

Note: These proportions are calculated by using the entirety of the workforce across all of the businesses within each of these categories.

uptake within non-Indigenous-owned businesses and determine their potential correlation with Indigenous employment. Table 2 presents these findings, conditioned on the size of businesses and the presence of Indigenous management.

As detailed in Table 2, the uptake of the listed policies/practices is minimal across the entire sample, except Acknowledgements of Country, in which 52% of businesses responded they undertake at significant internal events. Reconciliation Australia notes that over 2700 organisations have a registered RAP, which indicates that 21% of all businesses, as cited in Table 2, is likely an overestimate of the uptake of RAPs. Considering the need to interpret the sum totals tentatively, the divergences in the uptake of these policies/practices between businesses of different sizes and with and without Indigenous managers are worth highlighting. As expected, larger businesses appear to have an enhanced capacity or identified need to implement RAPs, cultural competency training, and employment strategies. Divergences in the uptake of these policies/practices are even starker when conditioning on the presence of Indigenous management. For example, Indigenous employment strategies and their associated policies are far more prevalent in businesses with Indigenous management.

Table 2. Prevalence of Indigenous-focused policy and practice.

	All Businesses	2–19 Employees	20+ Employees	Indigenous Managers	No Indigenous Managers
Reconciliation action plan	21%	11%	32%	45%	13%
Cultural competency training	19%	9%	30%	47%	11%
Indigenous employment strategy	16%	7%	26%	40%	9%
Indigenous Identified positions ^a	7%	2%	11%	21%	2%
Indigenous employment targets ^a	5%	2%	9%	19%	1%
Funding for indigenous employment ^b	10%	3%	18%	33%	3%
Celebrates NAIDOC/ Reconciliation week	32%	20%	45%	63%	23%
acknowledges country at significant events	52%	43%	62%	73%	46%

^aRespondents were only asked if they implemented these policies if they had noted they had an Indigenous employment strategy, as these were viewed as sub-categories of an employment strategy, 41% of the 111 businesses with a strategy said they had identified positions, and 32% employment targets.

^bThis question was only asked to respondents with Indigenous employees ($N = 307$), but the percentages in the table use the whole sample ($N = 680$).

This is likely conflated somewhat by the business size, given that Indigenous managers are present in 41% ($N = 134$) of large businesses and only 7% ($N = 25$) of small businesses. However, the divergences are still clearly more comprehensive than the comparison of large and small businesses in Table 2. While Table 2 demonstrates the potential relationship with Indigenous management and a higher uptake of Indigenous-focused workplace & recruitment policy & practice, we do not know if this relationship is driven by the presence of Indigenous management or the uptake of policies/practices that led to recruitment of Indigenous employees in management positions.

Barriers to Indigenous-focused workplace policies

The 539 businesses that did not have a RAP were asked what prevented their businesses from having one. Respondents were able to choose multiple responses, including free text responses. Fifty per cent ($N = 268$) indicated they were unsure of what a RAP was, 29% ($N = 158$) were unsure of their relevance to their businesses, and 23% ($N = 126$) were not sure how a RAP would be beneficial. Interestingly, only 16% ($N = 84$) indicated they did not have the time or resources to implement a RAP, and larger businesses were more likely to cite this reason (20% compared to 13%). Similarly, businesses who indicated

they did not provide some form of Indigenous-focused cultural competency training were asked about their attitudes towards it. Respondents were given a series of statements with the option to respond, 'agree', 'neutral' or 'disagree'. Forty-five per cent ($N=247$) agreed that cultural competency training was not a priority for their business, and 38% ($N=209$) agreed that it was a time and cost constraint their business could not afford. Fifty-one per cent ($N=282$) agreed it would contribute to a culturally safe workplace, and 36% ($N=197$) that it would help with Indigenous employment in their business.

Taken in totality, there appears to be a recognition from the majority of these respondents to the value these initiatives might have within their business, but that this value may not directly influence Indigenous employment.

Perceptions of racism in the workplace

Eighty-four per cent ($N=573$) of respondents agreed that racism, discrimination, or harassment aren't present within their workplace, and 89% ($N=603$) that Indigenous employees are/would be treated fairly within their workplace. These attitudinal responses do not vary noticeably when conditioned on business size or the presence of Indigenous employees or managers. These findings are perhaps unsurprising, given that it is unlikely that individuals are to self-acknowledge racist or discriminatory attitudes, behaviours, or practices. However, it is worth highlighting the juxtaposition between these findings and the findings of recent surveys of Indigenous peoples within the workplace that consistently found over 50% of respondents cited recent instances of racism in the workplace (Brown et al., 2020; Minderoo Foundation et al., 2022; Polity Research & Consulting, 2022). These findings are underscored through qualitative descriptions of experiences of racism within the workplace leading to voluntary separation from non-Indigenous organisations by Indigenous employees (Biddle and Lahn, 2016; Eva et al, 2024a). This is to highlight that the perceptions of racism in the workplace by respondents to this survey do not align with the experiences of racism reported by Indigenous employees in other research.

Determining correlations with Indigenous employment

The previous sections have detailed the rates of Indigenous employment, the presence of Indigenous people in management positions, and the uptake of select Indigenous-focused policies and practices within the sample of non-Indigenous-owned businesses. This section presents regression analyses to determine potential correlations between the presence of Indigenous management, Indigenous-focused policies, and rates of Indigenous employment (RQ3).

Table 3 presents the results from two OLS regressions on all businesses and businesses with at least one Indigenous employee, using the proportion of Indigenous employees as the dependent variable. As per the specifications detailed in the Measures section, the final number of observations in Table 3 is 661 and 288, respectively. The analysis controls for business size, profit status, geography, and industry, as well as the presence of Indigenous-focused policies and Indigenous managers.

Table 3. OLS regression of proportion of Indigenous employees for all businesses and businesses with one or more Indigenous employees.

% Indigenous employment	All businesses		Businesses with 1+ Indigenous employees	
	Coefficient	Robust Std. Err.	Coefficient	Robust Std. Err.
For-profit status	-1.56	1.83	-2.88	2.61
Large businesses (20+ employees)	0.01	0.77	-8.95*	1.70
Indigenous manager/s	6.66*	0.88	2.72*	1.02
Indigenous employment strategy	-0.22	0.83	0.45	1.13
RAP	0.22	0.66	-0.54	0.94
Cultural competency training	1.10	0.84	0.82	1.28
Regional location	1.21	0.63	2.43*	1.15
Remote location	4.84	3.33	8.34	7.42
Constant	4.18*	1.95	19.22*	3.06
No. of observations	=	661	=	288
	F(26, 634) =	7.69	F(26, 261) =	5.25

Note: The omitted category is not-for-profit businesses operating retail trade in major cities. Industry variables were used in the estimation but are not reported in the table.

From Table 3, we can see that the only variable that maintains statistical significance using the sample of all businesses is the presence of Indigenous managers ($\hat{\beta} = 6.66$, $p < .05$). For businesses with one or more Indigenous employees, the size of businesses is negatively related to proportional Indigenous employment ($\hat{\beta} = -8.95$, $p < .05$). This is consistent with the overall rates of Indigenous employment as presented in **Figure 2**. Businesses located in regional areas are positively related to proportional Indigenous employment ($\hat{\beta} = 2.43$, $p < .05$), indicating the potential influence of local labour market conditions. The 2021 estimate resident population data from ABS³ indicates that Indigenous people maintain a higher proportion of the population in regional areas (6.5%) than in major cities (2.2%). The Indigenous population rate is even higher in remote areas (30%). While the coefficient value in Table 3 is high for all businesses ($\hat{\beta} = 4.84$) and businesses with one or more Indigenous employees ($\hat{\beta} = 8.34$), this is not reported with significance, potentially due to the small number of remotely located businesses in the limited sample. Controlling for factors of profit status, location, business size and industry, we can also see that the only other variable able to demonstrate significance is Indigenous manager/s, which is positively related to proportional Indigenous employment ($\hat{\beta} = 2.72$, $p < .05$). The three policy variables (RAPs, cultural competency training, and Indigenous employment strategy) were unable to show a significant association with Indigenous employment in Table 3.

Table 4 presents negative binomial regressions on all businesses and businesses with at least one Indigenous employee, using the number of Indigenous employees as the

dependent variable. A negative binomial regression is undertaken as the count data used for the dependent variable maintains significant over-dispersion. The effect of explanatory variables is reported as the incidence rate ratio (IRR).

Table 4. Negative binomial regressions of the number of Indigenous employees for all businesses and businesses with one or more Indigenous employees.

No. of Indigenous employees	All businesses		Businesses with 1+ Indigenous employees	
	IRR	Robust Std. Err.	IRR	Robust Std. Err.
For-profit status	0.854	0.16	0.92	0.16
Large businesses (20+ employees)	0.869	0.14	0.43*	0.05
Indigenous manager/s	3.756*	0.49	1.78*	0.22
Indigenous employment strategy	0.898	0.15	0.97	0.14
RAP	1.034	0.16	0.87	0.13
Cultural competency training	1.257	0.20	1.34*	0.20
Regional location	1.432*	0.19	1.34*	0.17
Remote location	3.105*	1.22	2.30	0.98
Constant	0.034*	0.01	0.13*	0.03
ln(employees)	1	(exposure)	1	(exposure)
lnalpha	-0.020	0.11	-0.572	0.10
Alpha	0.980	0.11	0.565	0.06
No. of observations	=	661	=	288

Note: The omitted category is not-for-profit businesses operating retail trade in major cities. Industry variables were used in the estimation but are not reported in the table.

Similar to Table 3, Table 4 shows some significance in the relationship between Indigenous employment and geography and business size, though this is inconsistent across the two estimations in Table 4. For all businesses, remote location is positively related to the number of Indigenous employees ($\hat{\beta} = 3.105$, $p < .05$). Cultural Competency training is the only policy variable that can show that it is positively related to Indigenous employment across the four estimations in Tables 3 and 4, showing that it is positively related ($\hat{\beta} = 1.34$, $p < .05$), in the case of businesses with at least one Indigenous employee. The only variable that can remain consistent across the four estimations is the presence of Indigenous manager/s, showing it is positively related to the number of Indigenous employees in the case of all businesses ($\hat{\beta} = 3.756$, $p < .05$), and businesses with at least one Indigenous employee ($\hat{\beta} = 1.78$, $p < .05$). Several different estimations of these regressions were undertaken, including and excluding multiple variables to test the robustness of the findings, none of which were able to influence the overarching findings presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Discussion

This paper produces several significant findings relating to Indigenous employment and workplace-level Indigenous employment policies in Australia. Firstly, this paper shows

that most businesses in the sample do not have Indigenous employees (55%) or Indigenous management (77%). This is despite the fact that larger businesses were significantly over-sampled, with the majority of Indigenous employees in these businesses. This paper shows a limited uptake in workplace-level Indigenous-focused workplace policies, with larger businesses far more likely to have these policies in place. Intuitively, this could be explained by the difference in available financial resources between small and large businesses, but the explanations provided by respondents about why they did not have these policies do not demonstrate this. Responses revealed scepticism about these policies' efficacy, value, and purpose as central to why they did not have them in place. Taken in totality with the attitudes toward Indigenous-focused workplace policies, it appears that respondents do not see their workplaces as maintaining any significant barriers to Indigenous employment. This is highlighted by the strong response from participants who indicated that they did not see racism as a barrier to Indigenous employment within their businesses. This finding is not surprising, but illustrative of how individuals and organisations view racism as an 'elsewhere' problem (Evans et al., 2024a). Where there have been consistent surveys of Indigenous people within the workforce demonstrating their experiences of racism (Brown et al., 2020; Minderoo Foundation et al., 2022; Polity Research & Consulting, 2022), this cannot be squared with the perceptions from non-Indigenous-owned businesses who do not believe racism is present in their workplaces. Scepticism about the efficacy of individual Indigenous-focused (or diversity, equality, and inclusion) policies not only came from respondents but is evident in the existing literature (Noon, 2018; Eva et al., 2024a; Evans et al., 2024a), noting that they can be superficial. Moreover, depending on the framing and motivations of the policies, they can reinforce stereotypes and deficit narratives about Indigenous peoples, rather than focus on deeper, systemic organisational changes (Elias et al., 2023). Ultimately, the scepticism of the efficacy of individual policies by some participants in the study is vindicated by the findings, which is unable to demonstrate a correlation between individual policies and enhanced Indigenous employment. This is where the bundling of multiple policies, programs, and practices within a workplace (Evans et al., 2024c) and/or the structure of the organisation itself embedding Indigenous values and knowledge (Eva et al., 2024a) are more effective. However, the high commitment, significant knowledge, broad scope, and tailored strategy required to undertake this is perhaps far less accessible or attractive to organisations searching for a silver bullet. Indigenous-owned businesses demonstrate a significantly enhanced commitment to maintaining strong Indigenous employment (Eva et al., 2023a, 2024a), and create better outcomes as their strategies are grounded in the specific context of their potential Indigenous employees (Eva et al., 2024). For non-Indigenous-owned businesses, this understanding may not be easily developed without significant development by or in partnership with Indigenous employees, leaders, and communities within the business and local labour market.

The most striking finding of this paper relates to the presence of Indigenous managers within businesses and their relationship with multiple variables within the survey. Businesses with Indigenous managers were shown to have higher rates of Indigenous employment and were far more likely to have Indigenous-focused workplace policies. Significantly, the presence of an Indigenous manager was consistently positively

related to Indigenous employment across all multivariate analyses and maintained the strongest relationship across all estimations. It is important to note that none of these findings imply causation, i.e. Indigenous managers drive higher rates of Indigenous employment or Indigenous-focused workplace policies. This data does not tell us the role of Indigenous managers in facilitating any of these outcomes, only that their presence is significantly associated with their higher prevalence. Moreover, the consistency and strength of this correlation across multiple analyses create striking findings. They are congruous with existing literature, which details the importance of Indigenous leadership relating to Indigenous employment (Evans and Williamson, 2017; Eva et al, 2024a). Equally, an important finding is an inability to demonstrate a consistent significant relationship between Indigenous employment and Indigenous employment policies. It should be noted that the policies used in the analyses can maintain various focuses beyond employment, so their efficacy should not be parameterised solely to employment.

An issue with the association between organisations requiring the implementation of layered policies to support Indigenous employment is the implicit acknowledgement that without this focus, Australian organisations are not safe or supportive environments for Indigenous peoples. Moreover, given the costs, labour, and expertise involved in implementing said policies, it evidently excludes many smaller businesses from the capacity to provide work environments conducive to Indigenous employment. But of course, this is not congruent with the vast majority of respondents in this survey who maintain their workplaces are or would be supportive environments for Indigenous staff. This links back to some of the discussions in (Eva et al, 2024a), in which the expectation is placed on individual workplace policy to tackle societal-level problems. That is, these are not workplace-specific issues but societal problems, which permeate the workplace. As such, broader focuses are necessary than solely individualised workplace practice.

These findings present challenging questions for policymakers and business owners. Concerning Australian workplaces and their capacity for Indigenous employment, there is a disparity between what non-Indigenous businesses perceive and what Indigenous employees experience. Indigenous people with decision-making capacities within organisations may be able to bridge this gap, such as is the case within the Indigenous-owned business sector, where Indigenous approaches to leadership, organisational behaviour, and human resource management which are far more congruous with Indigenous values such that is seen in the non-Indigenous institutions of Australia. However, it is important to emphasise the recent literature, which details the overburdening of Indigenous employees with work that should be a broader organisational responsibility (Menzel, 2022; Thunig and Jones, 2021). Evidently, the representation of Indigenous people in senior management and executive positions within Australian institutions is limited (Biddle and Lahn, 2016; Minderero Foundation, 2022; Reconciliation Australia, 2023a). Higher education institutions historically have had very limited success in creating a curriculum and environment to facilitate the development of Indigenous business leaders (Foley, 2010b), however, tailored Indigenous-led programs are changing this dynamic (e.g. the MURRA program at the University of Melbourne and the Master of Indigenous Business Leadership at Monash University). Moreover, organisations have broadened their focus on Indigenous

employment to developing Indigenous employees to positions of leadership (e.g. Commonwealth Bank, 2023; JY Australia, 2024). Australian institutions have increasing avenues for the development of Indigenous leaders, and the development and equitable representation of Indigenous people in positions of institutional influence is clearly paramount. However, this is still a two-way street; Australian institutions still need to develop their capacities to value and support Indigenous leaders, with high-profile, highly experienced, and highly educated Indigenous people in leadership positions still being driven out of workplaces (e.g. Charles and Knowles, 2023; Grant, 2023; McRae, 2020).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are Australia's first and continuing inhabitants. Yet, Australian institutions and organisations are still far too incapable of incorporating Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, experience, and peoples within their structures. No Australian institution should be unsafe, discriminatory, or exclusionary of Indigenous peoples. While workplace policies have their place in informing specific and tailored practices that suit the needs of individual businesses, the pathway to ensuring all institutions in Australia are safe for, respect, and include Indigenous peoples requires a broader focus.

Limitations

The dataset this article relies on can produce novel findings; however, it maintains limitations. The descriptive and multivariate analyses demonstrate correlations between select variables but cannot demonstrate causal inferences. For example, qualitative research may explain the associations between Indigenous management and Indigenous employment in non-Indigenous businesses. The analysis also does not explain and analyse the type of management roles Indigenous people in these businesses occupy, and thus can't explain the specific impact they may have in their role. While the use of multiple regression models and two distinct dependent variables adds to the confidence of the interpretation of results, this analysis is still based on cross-sectional data. As such, a longitudinal study might better indicate how the implementation of policy or the hiring of Indigenous management may impact the business over time. As identified above, rigorous analysis of the longitudinal survey data Reconciliation Australia collects on RAP businesses would provide insightful information on the development of businesses' workplace practices and employment over time. Similarly, while the primary purpose of this paper was to determine the uptake of Indigenous employment policies and their associations with Indigenous employment, these policies have broader focuses than solely the outcome measured in this paper which was the number of Indigenous employees. A larger sample may also be able to determine divergences between different industry categories.

Conclusion

This article investigated the uptake of Indigenous workplace and employment policies in non-Indigenous-owned businesses in Australia and their associations with Indigenous employment. Using data from a primary survey of non-Indigenous-owned Australian

businesses, our findings demonstrate a clear correlation between the presence of Indigenous peoples in positions of management and enhanced rates of Indigenous employment. The findings further demonstrate the limited uptake of various Indigenous workplace and employment policies and demonstrated limited associations with higher rates of Indigenous employment. These findings are important in reiterating the importance of Indigenous-led approaches to supporting better Indigenous employment outcomes in Australia.


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Notes

1. National NAIDOC Week focuses on the celebration of Indigenous histories, cultures, and achievements (Carlson and Worrell, 2023).
2. National Reconciliation Week coincides with two significant dates in relation to Indigenous rights and recognitions (Carlson and Worrell, 2023; Reconciliation Australia, 2024).
3. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release>

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Appendix

Table A1 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the multivariate analyses presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table A2 is produced using BLADE 2018–2019 (available from ABS Table Builder, (ABS 2020), and the survey sample of non-Indigenous businesses. This table was created in order to determine whether the sample of non-Indigenous businesses was broadly reflective of the industry profile of the total population of Australian businesses. The

Table A1. Descriptive statistics of regression samples.

Variable	All businesses		Businesses with 1+ Indigenous employees	
	M	SD	M	SD
<i>Employee information</i>				
No. of Indigenous employees	6.45	18.826	14.80	26.287
No. of employees	227.70	792.528	462.93	1129.116
Proportion of Indigenous employees	4.95	9.698	11.36	11.968
Indigenous manager/s ^a	0.21	0.409	0.49	0.500
<i>Business demographics</i>				
Profit status (for-profits) ^a	0.89	0.310	0.84	0.370
Large businesses (20+ employees) ^a	0.49	0.500	0.78	0.412
<i>Policies/practices</i>				
Indigenous employment strategy ^a	0.16	0.36	0.26	0.438
RAP ^a	0.20	0.402	0.34	0.473
Cultural competency training ^a	0.19	0.389	0.31	0.464
<i>Geography</i>				
Regional ^a	0.31	0.463	0.31	0.461
Remote ^a	0.05	0.211	0.04	0.208
Number of Obs.	=	661	=	228

^aThese variables are dummy variables, meaning that businesses that do not fit into this category are equal to 0 and those that do equal to 1.

table presents the proportion of businesses in each industry across all businesses listed in BLADE, who have at least one employee. This was done to make this population as comparable as possible to our sample, which is restricted to businesses with at least two or more employees (the BLADE data were unable to be restricted to businesses with two or more employees). Table A2 thus shows the proportion of businesses in each industry within BLADE, the proportion of businesses in each industry in our sample, and the 95% confidence intervals generated from our sample. Of the 19 industry categories, 9 of the

Table A2. Industry composition of non-Indigenous samples and populations.

Industry	Proportion of businesses in each industry (BLADE)	Proportion of businesses in samples	95% confidence intervals		No. of businesses in samples
Agriculture, Forestry and fishing	6.0%	3.4%	2.0%	4.7%	23
Mining	0.5%	0.9%	0.2%	1.6%	6
Manufacturing	5.5%	4.3%	2.7%	5.8%	29
Electricity, gas, water and waste services	0.4%	1.2%	0.4%	2%	8
Construction	16.6%	10.6%	8.3%	12.9%	70
Wholesale trade	4.6%	3.5%	2.1%	4.9%	24
Retail trade	8.1%	14.1%	11.5%	16.7%	96
Accommodation and food services	7.4%	8.7%	6.6%	10.8%	59
Transport, postal and warehousing	4.1%	3.2%	1.9%	4.6%	22
Information media and telecommunications	0.9%	4.7%	3.1%	6.3%	32
Financial and insurance services	3.9%	5.1%	3.5%	6.8%	35
Rental, hiring and real estate services	4.9%	2.2%	1.1%	3.3%	15
Professional, scientific and technical services	13.4%	6.5%	4.6%	8.3%	44
Administrative and support services	4.5%	2.1%	1%	3.1%	14
Public administration and safety	0.6%	1.6%	0.7%	2.6%	24
Education and training	2.2%	5.6%	3.9%	7.3%	38
Health care and social assistance	7.2%	8.1%	6%	10.1%	55
Arts and recreation services	1.5%	4.4%	2.9%	6%	30
Other services	7.7%	9.9%	7.6%	12.1%	67

Note: Proportions in bold indicate where these are above the 95% confidence intervals, and proportions in bold and italics indicate where these are below the 95% confidence intervals.

population proportions are within the 95% confidence intervals of the sample. Five industries are above the upper value of the 95% confidence intervals, indicating that they are slightly underrepresented within the sample (Agriculture Forestry & Fishing; Construction; Rental, Hiring and Real Estate; Professional, Scientific and Technical Services; Administrative and Support Services). Four industries are below the lower value of the 95% confidence intervals, indicating that they are slightly overrepresented within the sample (Retail Trade; Information Media and Telecommunications; Public Administration & Safety; Education & Training).