Making space for influence: Danjoo Koorliny and decolonising evaluation to measure systems change

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Author: Doyen Radcliffe MAICD
Bajja Yungayimanha Collaboration

Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the Larrakia people as Traditional Owners of Garramilla/Darwin and pay my respects to Elders past and present.

I also recognise Noongar Elders, leaders and communities who shaped Danjoo Koorliny, alongside the Danjoo Koorliny Co-Directors and team, CSI UWA evaluation team, Lotterywest, participants and boundary partners.

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A simple 30-minute story

What I want people to take away

The focus is not only what happened — but what shifted.

1. **Why influence?**
   The evidence gap in systems change
2. **What is the model?**
   Five dimensions of Indigenous influence
3. **How was it assessed?**
   Rubrics, yarning, triangulation and boundary partners
4. **What does it mean?**
   First Nations evaluation, self-determination and practice

Three key messages

Influence is a measurable pathway of Aboriginal-led systems change.

Decolonising evaluation strengthens rigour when Indigenous and Western methods are held together with integrity.

Place, relationships and cultural authority make evidence more useful and accountable.

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Why influence?

Making the evaluation gap visible

The challenge

Conventional evaluation often looks first for outputs, short-term outcomes and visible policy change.

Aboriginal-led systems change often begins earlier: in cultural authority, trust, listening, relationship and institutional behaviour.

This creates a gap between what communities' experience as impact and what institutions recognise as evidence.

My framing

Influence helps me see change while it is being seeded, carried, strengthened and embedded over time.



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Danjoo Koorliny context

Walking together towards 2029 and beyond

Danjoo Koorliny is an Aboriginal-led systems change movement established in 2019 to support Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to walk together towards 2029 and beyond.

Social

wellbeing, justice, families and community

Environmental

Country, water, land and care

Cultural

arts, language, identity and belonging

Economic

Aboriginal business, income and wealth

Cultural grounding

The evaluation treated story, Country, spirit, lived experience, Elders' reflections and cultural authority as evidence — not just as background context.

Influence diagram

How change travels before formal outcomes appear



Influence is cumulative: not every activity reaches structural change, but each can seed the conditions for later systems change.

The loop matters: influence moves back through relationships, learning and accountability.

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The Five-Dimensional Indigenous Influence Model

A practical way to ask: where is change moving, and how is it travelling?

Cultural influence	Learning, identity, language, Country, cultural grounding and Aboriginal knowledge being authorised.
Relational influence	Trust, collaboration, Elders' governance, reciprocity and accountability strengthening over time.
Behavioural influence	People listen, decide and act differently because Aboriginal knowledge has shaped their practice.
Structural influence	Governance, policy, funding, institutional design and advisory structures begin to shift.
Transformational influence	Worldviews, values, definitions of success and long-term accountability are reoriented.

The dimensions are connected. I do not use them as separate boxes; I use them as a sense-making lens.

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Influence rubric

Assessing depth without replacing story

0

No evidence

No observable evidence in the available data.

1

Emerging

Early recognition, trust-building or patchy change.

2

Established

Regular use in practice, relationships or governance.

3

Deeply embedded

Aboriginal worldview and authority shape decisions.

How I used it

- The rating is based on triangulated evidence, not opinion alone
- The scale is applied across all five dimensions for a total score out of 15.
- The number supports the story. It does not replace yarning, Elders' reflections or cultural judgement.
- The purpose is to show depth, movement and vulnerability of influence — not to create a pass/fail score.

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Rubric detail by dimension

What emerging, established and embedded influence can look like

Cultural	Emerging: cultural learning recognised	Established: Aboriginal knowledge informs practice	Embedded: cultural authority shapes decisions
Relational	Emerging: trust is being built	Established: reciprocal collaboration is routine	Embedded: accountability is held with Elders/community
Behavioural	Emerging: people reflect and intend to act	Established: practice shifts are visible	Embedded: Aboriginal-informed action is normal practice
Structural	Emerging: policy or governance conversations begin	Established: processes and roles are adjusted	Embedded: systems allocate authority, resources and power
Transformational	Emerging: worldview disruption is named	Established: values and success measures shift	Embedded: the system redefines purpose and accountability

I read these descriptors alongside story, context and relationships — never as a checklist separated from Country or community accountability.

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Evidence and method

How the evaluation was grounded and made credible

Integrated lenses

Ngaa-bi-nya and OECD criteria were held together so Aboriginal-led and Western evaluation lenses could strengthen rigour without displacing cultural authority.

Data sources

- surveys and participant comments
- yarning and interviews
- observations and documents
- case study evidence
- Co-Director reflections

Analysis approach

- thematic analysis
- Triangulation
- outcome harvesting
- influence rubrics
- boundary partner sense-making

Cultural interpretation

The framework organised evidence without stripping away story, yarning, deep listening or cultural meaning.

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What the evidence showed

Influence was strongest through learning and relationships, with emerging systems change

987
Learning comments
story, knowledge, reflection, truth-telling

739
Collaboration comments
relationship, inclusion, belonging, healing

323
Action comments
motivation, leadership, practice change

34
Systems change comments
centring Aboriginal views and brilliance

Boundary partner influence scores



The strongest evidence sat in cultural and relational influence. Structural and transformational change was present, but still depended on institutional embedding.

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Case study: Kep Katitjin – Gabi Kaadadjan

practical example of influence moving into government practice

What changed

ADWER placement worked within Danjoo Koorliny, enabling Aboriginal cultural leaders and government to co-create a waterwise action plan.

Why it matters

Noongar language and Aboriginal water knowledge were given legitimacy in a state government plan, with broader influence across agencies.



Longer-term signal: the work disrupted usual ways of working and showed how cultural and relational influence can become structural change.

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What this means for First Nations evaluation

Influence is how change travels

Authority

Elders, communities and cultural governance must help define what change means.

Evidence

Story, Country, relationship, spirit and lived experience are valid evidence.

Rigour

Rigour is strengthened through relational accountability, triangulation and cultural interpretation.

Self-determination

Evaluation should strengthen community decision-making, not only satisfy funder reporting.

Before systems change, people must be influenced. Before structures shift, relationships must shift. Before transformation is visible, cultural authority must be recognised.

Reflective activity: choose one dimension and ask what evidence of influence would be meaningful, culturally safe and useful in your own context.

Thank you

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