Leadership in the Australian Agricultural Industry

Who gets to govern?

The determinants of Board membership in primary producer representative organisations.

Supervisors

(The late) Winthrop Professor David Plowman, AM, BEc (WA), MA (Melb), PhD (Flinders)
Winthrop Professor Tim Mazzerol, B.A.(Hons), B.Ed., MBA (Distinction), PhD
Australia – Food bowl to Asia

“Australia should be China’s food bowl”, (Forrest, 2014)

Locked in the last century’s paradigm?

Andrew Forrest, 2014, The Sydney Morning Herald
Our Journey Today

- Some history and the structure of representation
- The role of representative organisations
- The thesis of the research
- Methodology and some preliminary findings
- Conclusion
- Towards the future
The Australian Wool Industry

Debt: $2.8billion

4.7 million Bales

An economic, social and political disaster
The Australian Wheat Industry

- Wheat export kickbacks scandal
- Busted UN sanctions
- Funds funneled into Saddam Hussein’s war chest
The Commodity Network

Diagram showing the connections between different components in a commodity network.
The Role of Representative Organisations

Industry lobbyists

Wield political power

Advise Governments
Competing interests

International trade representation
Determinants of Board Membership

- Board membership of representative organisations in Australian agriculture is determined by:

- Type of social network
- Social Identity
- Conformity to group orthodoxy
- Landownership, Patriarchy and the Great ‘Man’ theory of leadership
Western Social Networks

- 94% attended private boarding schools
- Membership of same sub-committees or local councils
- Connections build Social Capital
- Having the right contacts and being in the right clusters
- Importance of gender
Open Social Networks

- Access to new information
- New contacts
- Political connections

- Open to new ideas
- Encourage entrepreneurship
- Embrace turnaround leaders
‘Closed’ Social Networks

- Social, economic and political constraints
- Built around core of trusted insiders
- Distrust outsiders and fear change
- Protect status and privilege
- Protect the network
- Stifles entrepreneurship
- Precludes turnaround leadership
Social Identity

The Homophily Principle

- We unconsciously seek out people who share our views and values

- Homophily determines ‘fit’

- Fit is fundamental to selection of new Board members
Social Identity & Merit

- Men tend to vote for men
- Women least likely elected to the Board
- But - 40% of farmers are women
- Women are not ‘real’ farmers
- Men prefer to discuss important matters with men
- School connections and friends most significant
Conformity – Direct Election Model

- Board elected by whole membership
- Candidates self-nominate
- Sitting Board members identify potential candidates
- Board has final say on policy
- Policy decisions based on available information
- Outside links highly valued
Conformity – Federation Model

- Collegiate electoral process
- Increased risk of homophily
- Annual conference decides policy
- Candidates must conform to conference decisions
- Strict conformity obligatory
- Distrust of outsiders
Land Ownership & Patriarchy

‘Son, someday all this will be yours!’

- Property rights (ownership) necessary qualification for the Board
- Ownership of the land means ownership of Industry decision making
- Important to be a ‘hands in the dirt’ farmer
- Women not seen as legitimate inheritors of the land
Leadership

“Our conceptions of leadership are locked in a time warp, constrained by the lingering archetypes of heroic warriors and wise distant fathers” (Sinclair, 1998)

- Leadership seen as a male trait
- Men seen as the natural leaders of the industry
- Significant in identifying leaders
- Family dynasty and wealth associated with leadership

- Representative organisations in Australian agriculture are largely closed social networks

- Social Identity determines Board Membership

- The Boards are dominated by ‘People like us’

- Conformity is the key to the Boardroom

- Ownership of the Land, the patriarchal culture and the ‘Great Man’ perception of Leadership are significant determinants of Board membership