PART TWO

Issues related to learning for change

CHAPTER 6
Education as economic and individual development: Toward education through occupations
W Norton Grubb

In regions and countries experiencing economic problems, the use of schools to enhance economic development often leads to narrow forms of vocational education and training. However, this tactic is usually counter-productive, and services neither employers nor youth themselves well. This chapter will outline a broader and more integrated approach to occupational preparation, drawing on developments in several developed countries facing roughly the same economic challenges. The advantages of linking youth to both school and future employment are clarified.

With changes in employment, a common pattern in advanced countries is to call on schools to reform, in order to prepare individuals for new forms of work. Most obviously, this has been the pattern behind the efforts in many countries to define the 'key'or 'core' skills required in production driven by new information, communication, and research-based technologies. However, this pattern also holds when regions go through economic changes, including the waxing and waning of different sectors. While the particulars of this process vary—depending on whether the industries in decline are agricultural or industrial, and on the possibilities for new sectors to emerge—the impulse to use schools in the process of economic development and transformation is common.

Such reforms obviously reinforce the pressures on schools to emphasise occupational purposes over the other purposes—intellectual, moral, or political, for example—that formal education might serve. However, these occupational pressures can be interpreted in either narrow or broad ways. When they are narrowly constructed, the result is a turn to a traditional kind of vocational education—one that prepares individuals for specific jobs in entry-level positions, All too often this approach, common across the English-speaking countries, has led to forms of occupational preparation that seem inequitable because they prepare students for second-class occupations, and that are criticised for being too distant from the academic subjects that lead to the highest-status occupations as well as serving more intellectual purposes. And job-specific preparation requires precise forecasts of employment opportunities; otherwise students are trained for jobs that don't exist, undermining both individual mobility and the very economic development that motivated the reform.

An alternative is to adopt broader forms of occupational preparation, particularly those that integrate vocational and academic education. In part, these efforts respond to demands for a skilled workforce for high-performance workplaces, where flexibility, independence, and a broader range of higher-order skills are necessary. In addition, they respond to the uncertainty about what employment will be available since they are not focused on specific jobs, but rather on broad categories of occupations. They also help resolve status problems created by the separation of vocational from academic education; particularly in Europe, such reforms have been developed in order to equalise the 'parity of esteem' between academic and occupational education. In effect, these reforms imply that both vocational education with its overly-specific training, and academic education with its tendency to become too abstract and decontextualised, have abandoned the requirements of work.

Developments in different countries
Such efforts at developing integrated programs have taken place in a number of countries. In the United States, integration efforts begun during the 1980s were supported by federal legislation in 1990. By now a number of innovations have developed under several

different names; some have called these efforts 'education through occupations', to stress the Deweyan roots of such reforms; others have referred to them as 'college and careers', reflecting the dual purposes of preparing secondary students for further education or employment or a combination of the two; others have labelled them 'school to work' programs or even the 'new vocationalism'. In Great Britain, the vocationalisation of education after 1976, when Prime Minister Callahan highlighted the country's competitive problems, led to a variety of experiments. Pressure for more accountable forms of vocational education generated the narrowly vocational National Vocational Qualifications; then, in recognition that a broader approach incorporating more academic skills was necessary, the General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) were created in 1992, incorporating several 'core skills' and intended to reduce the 'academic-vocational divide' and establish 'parity of esteem' with academic credentials. In Australia, the 1993 Wiltshire report argued for the integration of academic and vocational education, with an emphasis on creating different academic and vocational pathways through secondary schools while preserving options for post secondary education. Apparently the articulation of key competencies has encouraged schools to adopt integrated programs; perhaps 40 to 60 per cent of secondary schools now have such programs, usually 'parallel' programs in which students take both academic and occupational courses, with little integration at the level of the classroom. Integration practices are also appearing in Canada, particularly in locally developed programs of 'applied academics'.

However, approaches to integration vary widely. In some cases, vocational programs simply incorporate standard academic content—math drills, conventional reading comprehension, short essays—without integrating them with any vocational content or shifting to more constructivist teaching. GNVQs appear to be particularly susceptible to such 'bolt-on' approaches: despite a debate about embedding core skills in vocational applications (in place of non-embedded approaches), the key skills are taught as separate modules, by different instructors, using conventional materials drawn from academic instruction. This in turn undermines the purpose of 'bridging the academic-vocational divide' because there isn't any bridging within instruction itself.

More elaborated forms of integration include 'applied academics' courses, which present the content of reading, writing, math, or basic science with their vocational applications. Still more substantial efforts involve matching academic and vocational instructors, in 'learning communities' where two or three academic and vocational instructors co-teach several related courses.

Restructuring secondary schools

Some of the most promising practices—at least in the United States—are forms of integration that change the basic structure of the secondary school:

- Career academies operate as schools-within-schools. Typically, four teachers collaborate: one each in math, english, and science, and one in the occupational area that defines the academy—health, electronics, pre-engineering, transportation, finance, tourism, or any of a number of broad occupational groupings. Each class of students takes all four subjects from these teachers, and they stay with the same teachers for two or three years. Other subjects—social studies, history, foreign languages, and other electives—are taken in the 'regular' high school, outside the Academy. One essential element, then, is that a group of teachers works with one group of students and with each other consistently, over a period of years. The opportunities for coordinating their courses, including special projects that cut across three or four

classes, are substantial; and because each academy is focused on a cluster of occupations it becomes relatively natural to integrate occupational applications into academic courses. A second essential element is a relationship with firms operating in the occupational area of an academy. Firms typically provide mentors to all students, often send individuals to talk about particular aspects of their operations, give tours of their facilities, and offer summer internships for students. These represent other sources of instruction and motivation (cognitive, behavioural, and financial) in addition to those provided by teachers.

Academies also create communities of both students and teachers, because of their small scale—contrasting with the chaos and anonymity of large high schools. The community of students is crucial to teaching methods involving cooperative group work, and the community of teachers helps not only with curriculum integration, but also with identifying problems that individual student have. Since teachers come to know individual students much better than can most high school teachers, it is harder for students to become 'lost' in an academy. Entering an academy requires a choice on the student's part, with all the benefits associated with active choice—including greater interest in the academy's subject and a closer identification with a school that has been voluntarily chosen. At the same time, the need for students to make *informed* choices forces the issue of guidance into the open, and many schools instituting academies have found it necessary to improve their counselling.

- In some schools, students choose a cluster, or career path, or 'major', often at the beginning or end of tenth grade. As in the case of academies, clusters are usually broad occupational or industry-based groupings, reflecting local labour market opportunities. The cluster then structures the curriculum for the remaining two or three years of high school, with students taking some coursework in the occupational area of the cluster—often a two-period class over the entire two-or three-year period—while other subjects are taken in regular classes 'outside' the cluster. Some schools provide recommended sequences of academic courses; and a few schools have replaced conventional discipline-based departments with departments organised along occupational lines, so that students take all their conventional academic courses within the cluster. The organisation provides focus for each student; each cluster has an obvious theme, and the required course sequence reduces the 'milling around' so common in high schools.

Clusters are somewhat like academies, except that every student elects a cluster or major. Clusters therefore have all the potential of academies to create a focus within which curriculum integration can take place and communities of both students and teachers can develop. The conception of clusters has been widely promoted at both federal and state levels: the School-to-Work Opportunities Act requires students to choose 'career majors' no later than the beginning of the tenth grade, and several states have recommended 'curricular paths' or 'focus areas' for all students.

- Occupational high schools and magnet schools emphasise preparation for clusters of related vocations. These include magnet schools developed as mechanisms of racial desegregation, many of which have an occupational focus—in electronics, computers, or business, for example—as well as magnet schools intended to enhance the quality of education. Every student within an occupational school is enrolled in a curriculum incorporating courses related to the magnet's focus, though the number of these courses ranges from the relatively trivial—two or three courses within a four-year sequence, creating a magnet school in name only—to the substantial.

Occupational high schools are similar to academies and clusters except that the scale is larger—the 'cluster' is school-wide. There are obvious advantages for curriculum integration: since all academic teachers are preparing students within a broad occupational area, the incentives to incorporate applications and examples from this particular occupation are strong, and the resources to do so—especially the occupational teachers with whom examples and exercises can be developed—are right at hand. Just as academies do, occupational high schools can also develop cultures supporting cooperation among teachers in the development of curriculum. Occupational high schools are also excellent examples of 'focus schools'—schools with clear missions, organised to pursue their educational goals and solve their own problems, innovative as the need arises, and operating with clear social contracts that establish responsibilities for teachers, students, and parents.

Academies, schools offering clusters or majors, and occupationally oriented high schools vary in their scale, of course, but they share certain distinctive features:

- They all specify related academic and vocational courses for students to take, imposing some coherence on the 'shopping mall high school'.

- They all provide teachers from different disciplines a reason for meeting regularly around curriculum issues, increasing opportunities for cooperation and integration among all disciplines, including those considered academic and vocational.

- The combination of academic and vocational content allows students to plan either for post secondary education, or for employment, or for the combination of employment and further education that has become so prevalent. Students in magnet schools often consciously follow a 'two-track strategy' or 'parallel career planning'. As one senior in a magnet school commented: 'This is my last year, and I'm going to get my cosmetology license. After I get my license, I'll just go to college for business. If one doesn't work out, I'll go to the other'.

- In theory, these practices allow for the integration of occupational content not only with the academic subjects considered to have the most utilitarian value—math, science, and 'communications skills' from English—but also with those subjects that have been entrusted with the moral and political purposes of education: literature, history, and social studies. Indeed, an occupational focus may be a way to engage students in subjects that they generally dislike—for example, by exploring the history of technology and economic development, or the politics surrounding employment and technological change, or the themes of meaning and alienation around work. This approach could also redress an imbalance that dates to the common schools of the 19th century: the preoccupation with preparing a citizenry for democracy has given political issues a central role in the curriculum, while economic issues and debates have never been prominent.

- Most schools with these practices have used broad clusters of related occupations rather than the occupation-specific focus of traditional vocational education—transportation rather than automotive repair, business rather than secretarial and clerical occupations, manufacturing technologies rather than welding, or the broad range of agriculture-related occupations rather than farming. This provides opportunities for exploring a greater variety of academic topics, avoiding the problem of having modestly skilled jobs dictate the teaching of relatively low-level academic content. It allows students to explore a wider variety of careers, and to understand how occupations are related to one

another. And, if broadly structured, clusters can reduce the class, racial, and gender segregation common in high schools, as students from different backgrounds with varied ambitions come together—for example, as health clusters include both would-be doctors and those who aspire to being practical nurses, as an industrial technologies and engineering path includes both future engineers and those who think they will become workers on a local assembly line.

• Students must elect academies or clusters, and in some cities can choose among magnet schools as well. This provides the advantages associated with the choice of a school; but it also requires students to think, early in their high school careers, about their occupational futures. Typically, schools which have adopted academies, clusters, or a magnet theme, have been forced to confront how students make choices, and have usually ended up strengthening counselling or developing more active forms of guidance and counselling.

• The use of occupational clusters provides a natural opportunity for linkages with appropriate post secondary programs, and with employers in those occupational areas in school-to-work programs. These linkages need not seem contrived, as they often are in the comprehensive high school, since academies, clusters, and magnet programs have already focused the curriculum on occupations of interest to post secondary institutions and to particular employers.

In many small-scale efforts at integrating academic and vocational education, the dominant purpose of integration is the incorporation of certain academic or competencies into occupational programs. However, the more substantial efforts I have just described in the United States—and perhaps their counterparts in Australia—represent a considerable transformation of both vocational and academic education, creating a new synthesis by using broadly-defined occupations to provide the context for learning both academic and technical competencies.

The connections to John Dewey

Such schools exemplify the ideal of 'education through occupations' that John Dewey (1916) articulated eighty years ago. Dewey argued that academic and vocational education (or 'learning' versus 'doing', or theory versus application) should not be separated, and that broadly occupational content provides the most appropriate materials for learning: 'Education through occupations consequently combines within itself more of the factors conducive to learning than any other method'. His reasons sound remarkably modern: he argued that teaching should be contextualised ('exercised within activity which puts nature to human use') and should concentrate on the student as a social being rather than an autonomous individual, and that occupations provide the most powerful way of accomplishing both. He also argued that a broadly occupational focus would avoid passive, didactic teaching based on contrived 'school' materials; and he feared that conventional schooling would otherwise narrow the education of those going into lower-skilled occupations. And Dewey consistently criticised overly-specific preparation—'trade training'—since it not only narrowed the scope of education and created inequities for some, but also because it 'defeats its own purpose' as changes in employment take place and narrowly-trained individuals are unable to adjust. This is, of course, the fear that narrowly designed vocational education may undermine economic development and individual mobility instead of furthering them, particularly in periods of change and uncertainty.

It is, of course, too soon to predict what will happen to the various movements for more integrated forms of schooling. In the English-speaking countries, where the academic 'pipeline' is so dominant, there are many obstacles to creating a distinctively different form of schooling. Teachers and administrators have to be prepared in new ways; institutional practices need to change; new forms of assessments must be developed; and parents and employers need to understand the advantages of integrated forms of instruction, as well as being able to identify when inadequate and low-level reforms masquerade as 'education through occupations'. The evidence for the effectiveness of various integrated approaches is still sparse—necessarily so, as with all new reforms. However, the evidence from the United States is generally positive. Moreover, integrated programs provide ways of furthering both economic development and individual development, and of responding to changes in employment without risking obsolescence or undermining the other goals of schooling, in ways that no other reform can provide.

References

Dewey, J 1916, *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*, Macmillan, New York.

Further reading

Achtenhagen, F & Grubb, WN (forthcoming), 'Vocational and occupational education: Pedagogical complexity, institutional diversity', in *Handbook of research on teaching,* 4th edn, ed. V Richardson, American Educational Research Association, Washington, DC.

Grubb, WN 1995, *Education through occupations in American high schools,* vols. I & II, Teachers College Press, New York.

Youth and unemployment: Educational pathways or tracks that lead nowhere

John Williamson and Angie Marsh

Work as we know it is changing and, as a consequence, so must education. Unfortunately, one of the major aspects of the labour market at present is the high level of youth unemployment. Polices and strategies introduced by governments to counteract the issue of youth unemployment have had a major effect on the development and transition to adulthood and employment of an increasing number of young people now deemed to be at risk.

This chapter focuses on the implications, arising from the implementation of these strategies, for young people reaching school leaving age (completion of Grade 10), particularly those in regional Australia. Consequences of these implications are discussed from the perspective of a study of regional Tasmanian youth, who are eligible to seek employment and enter the workforce and who do not choose to continue with a further two years at school.

Youth unemployment: Is there a problem?

Work is a defining activity; we use it to talk about our present self and to indicate who we might want to be. At the same time, work itself, is being redefined in terms of when and where it is done, how it is done, and even what we mean by work (Matathia & Salzman 1998). In this revolution we can see some of the forces in operation—globalisation, information and communications technology and so on—but we do not know what the world of work will look like in 10 or 20 years. The contours of the future nature of work are not fully clear but at present getting a job and earning a wage is still a very strong signal in indicating a transition from youth to adult and, importantly, from dependence to independence, in our society.

The importance of early work experience is recognised by Sweet (1998) who has described it as the major stepping stone to adult working life for the great majority of Australians since the end of World War 2. Historically and traditionally, particularly in regional Australia, this notion of the individual moving from school to full-time work has been linked very closely to the notion of what it means to be an adult. It has been a kind of cultural necessity. However, now, in a situation where we have seen a predominantly male labour force be replaced by one in which women are rapidly approaching half of the total, and that same workforce move from manufacturing, skilled and manual occupations to service occupations, and where full-time work is no longer accepted as the norm, it is very difficult in some senses, for youth to have the same opportunities as earlier generations.

The nature of the problem

The changes to the nature of work outlined above—the move to more women joining the workplace, the shift from secondary to service industries, the casualisation of jobs and so on—can be seen to result in:

- a significant loss of employment opportunities for youth, and many full-time jobs gradually being replaced by part-time and casual work;

- young people leaving school at the completion of compulsory education being deemed 'at risk' in the transition to full adult status; and, if this is the case,

- of not gaining work; or
- of joining the increasing numbers of disadvantaged youth who find themselves unable to escape from the cycle of insecure, casual, temporary and part-time work (Wooden 1998).

Government's actions

One consequence of broad government macroeconomic policy, particularly the concern to curb inflation, has been the rise in youth unemployment. Marginson (1997) notes that during the period from 1966 to 1980, despite a significant increase in population, there was a decline in the full-time labour market for teenagers, that is, those who typically would have left school as soon as they were able to and sought work. Since the 1970s the unemployment rate for this group has fluctuated around 20 per cent. Australia is not alone in confronting this issue; in the UK, for example, few young people enter the job market at 16 and 17 and upwards of one quarter of the population of working age are dependent on government assistance of one kind or another (Meadows et al. 1996).

Government's recognition of the youth employment issue has resulted in an array of long- and short-term training and employment programs—the focus of which has changed over time. Recent studies both within Australia and overseas have looked at patterns and trends in employment program implementation and delivery. Withers and Batten's (1995) review, a broad examination of Canadian, UK and US literature, dealing with the problems of youth employment opportunities, reveals what they term an 'economic intention' underlying many of the education programs. That is, governments are deliberately linking educational and employment programs through statements about competencies rather than subject matter content and so on. This link between education and employment is not unique to the English speaking countries. For example, the OECD (1996) report of several prominent European countries also underlines the economic orientation of their policies and practices.

Given the Australian tendency to 'policy borrow' or in broad terms to emulate what happens in the UK and, increasingly, the USA, it is not surprising to see the move to competencies, the vocationalising of secondary school curricula, and that education and employment have become more closely integrated. At the present time, however, despite many attempts and efforts, including government labour market initiatives or youth development strategies, the challenge of youth unemployment has not been resolved (Carson & Daube 1994).

Marginson (1997) argues that two broad strategies, to ameliorate these developments and the issue of youth unemployment, have been implemented by Australian federal governments since the 1980s. The first strategy involves changing the locus of government policy for the problem of youth unemployment. This is characterised by a shift in emphasis from the lack of jobs in the workplace to the individual's need to be 'job-ready' as a main determinant of employment. This emphasis, in broad terms, has shifted the onus of responsibility from government to the individual. Government and industry are no longer cast in the position of being primarily responsible for the provision of jobs for youth or for job creation. The shift places the onus of responsibility on the individual to gain further education and to become employable in the new technological age. This focus upon the individual while ignoring the broader socio-politico-economic context is surprising given the central role this cluster of factors play in a modern society. Batten and Russell (1995), for example, contend that the Government's preoccupation

with the individual while forgetting the structural causes of disadvantage such as unemployment, which leads to poverty, only tells half the story. Marginson draws some of the threads in the government's approach to the youth unemployment problem in the following:

> Education programs were seen as the medium for changes in behaviour, and the means for shifting responsibility for job creation from government to the individual, using techniques of self-management and self-improvement acquired in education. However, if education programs were to work in tandem with unemployment and labour market strategy, they had to be vocationalised (1997, p. 171).

The second strategy is a variant of the first. Here there is a similarity in the emphasis—focusing on the individual as a more highly skilled prospective worker—but the mechanism is different. It involves retention of young people in secondary school for two more years, which ensures that young people are better equipped to meet the challenge of the new employment opportunities while, at the same time, relieving the youth job market of many 15- to 18-year-olds and the government of the embarrassing responsibility for an increasing number of unemployed youth and the cost of unemployment benefit. The emphasis is now squarely placed on youth and their lack of readiness for the workforce. The creation of labour market education programs and prolonged retention in schools has led to prolonged dependence and delayed transition to what was formerly seen as full adult status within the society.

In adopting these two broad approaches Australia is following other developed countries down very similar youth employment/education pathways. However, without independently evaluating the policy directions and programs we are, unfortunately, experiencing the same conundrums and we are open to the same criticisms as those reported by the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe (1998). The EU Council in their assessment of extending the length of time of compulsory education, introducing vocational work-oriented programs, and ostensibly ensuring that the youth of the country do not suffer disadvantage, reported:

> It is unfortunate to note that young peoples' aspirations and expectations are often defined and managed by adults who have become experts in proposing strategies through which they can exclude young people from decision-making processes and social educational benefits while, at the same time, appearing to offer participation and acquisition at all levels on a silver plate (Council of Europe 1998).

What are the possible implications of leaving school before Year 12 for regional youth?

It has been described above how the shift in government presentation in the 1980s of the issue of youth unemployment has moved from one of job availability to one of individual job readiness. At the same time there also has been a strong emphasis on transition education programs in senior secondary schools. In this context, what are the implications, particularly in regional areas, for early school leavers?

The emphasis and focus of the new strategies of inclusion and retention were initiated to ensure that the majority of young people, particularly those who do not wish to continue with higher education, are made ready for transition into the workforce. The emphasis is on learning workplace generic skills and competences, through training programs and work-related education programs, for entrance into the new sophisticated world of

technologically-assisted workplaces. Those young people who leave school at the completion of compulsory education, of whom regional Australia has a higher percentage (Lamb 1997) than their urban peers, are at risk of exclusion and therefore of not fulfilling their aspirations and expectations.

Senior secondary schools as the focus for transition education

There are significant changes occurring in senior secondary schools in terms of curricula, teaching approaches, methods of assessment and links with the world-of-work. However, the apparent emphasis on learning for work—in a narrow economic sense—and the explicit new role of the senior secondary schools to equip young people for transition to adulthood and employment is a fundamental shift in the way we traditionally have viewed the upper secondary years of schooling. The present focus on retention and vocational education in senior secondary schools, following policy changes at the state and federal level of government, means that young people who leave at the end of the compulsory education years receive minimal or no educational preparation for future work. It means that, in practice, they are left to establish their own transition pathways with little or no support. Many of these young people end up on the treadmill of casual, seasonal, part-time, low paid employment and dead-end-jobs, interspersed with months or even years of unemployment. If there are no alternative pathways for them to re-enter training or education, they are the most vulnerable as they have no mechanisms by which to acquire the skills and vocational knowledge needed to enter worthwhile full-time positions.

The push for minimum relevant 'credentials'

Without formal post school vocational training in place, as a mechanism for early school leavers to gain qualifications, they are further disadvantaged when competing with credentialled school leavers. The first recommendation of the Australian Education Council Review Committee's report (see Finn 1991) established some minimum credentials as a means of joining the employment pathway. New formal qualifications, such as trainee certificates, were seen as instruments for access to the workforce and, it was envisaged, by the year 2001 almost all 20 year olds should have attained at least a higher level traineeship (Finn, 1991). Unless carefully monitored and supported by readily accessible pathways this initiative could further disempower young people who might be forced to leave school at the completion of compulsory education. In short, there needs to be proposed and implemented a national training requirement for 16–19 year olds and support for small firms to improve their training programs.

A small percentage of young early school leavers, and those in regional areas to a greater degree than city youths, are more fortunate in gaining worthwhile employment. In the past, in many instances, this reflected the nature of employment in the agricultural industry. This has changed significantly as we see the march of technology in agriculture and the resultant shedding of labour. However, regional employees in the trades areas have a preference for early school leavers as apprentices. The higher wage cost of employing older youths who have no more specific job-related skills than a 16-year-old, has prohibited the employment of older youth. This is changing, however, and the implementation of labour market programs, linked to senior secondary schools' education programs and traineeships, along with senior secondary education qualifications, present a persuasive incentive to employers to select the credentialled applicant. It needs to be ensured that the early school leaver who has work skills and knowledge, which was developed through employment, will not be devalued by certificated courses.

The Tasmanian study

A recent Tasmanian study of early school leavers (Williamson & Marsh 1999) and their attempts to gain employment, highlights many of this chapter's earlier points relating, inter alia, to the emphasis on individual responsibility to be job ready, the needs of early school leavers, the consequences of exclusion from workplace knowledge and vocational education, and training at the critical juncture of transition. As respondents the youth were very aware of major disjunctions in their educational experience and the links it had with the world-of-work. Some of the particular issues they highlighted will be considered below.

Perceived problems with high school curriculum

All of the youth in the Tasmanian study (Williamson & Marsh, 1999), when reflecting on their high school educational careers, often after months of unsuccessful job-seeking experience, reported on the inadequateness of what they did at school to prepare them for the pathway to the world-of-work. Table 1 presents some of these data. It is interesting to note that the large majority (N=63) reported negative comments about the five questions relating to the relevance of school subjects to assist them when they left school and tried to enter the workforce. The respondents interviewed describe an initial but not strong understanding of the importance of good literacy and numeracy skills. They also describe that typically they did not perceive school as relevant and attuned to their aspirations and needs.

Table 1: Respondents' perceptions of appropriateness of school work and of work experience

Responses	Relevance of subject	Interest in subject	Work information	Training information	Work experience	Total answers
Positive	7	7	2	3	14	33
Negative	12	12	18	15	6	63
Missing	1	1		2		4
						100

While the data show that negative responses to four of the five questions are often double the positive responses, the question relating to work experience reverses the order. Here more respondents report they are positive about the work experience opportunity provided to them. However, the respondents also say that work experience was not helpful when they were seeking future employment because it typically was a one-week orientation into the workplace and this did not provide, in their view, an appropriate level of skill or experience. They also recounted that the emphasis in their schools was for further education in a senior secondary school, and while information regarding the availability of education programs or TAFE courses abounded, information relating to assistance with joining the workforce was non-existent.

On the unemployment pathway

For the youth in this study the pathway to work is not easy. Since leaving school nearly a year ago many have begun to feel the restrictions that lack of money presents, namely: to adequately support job searching; boredom; and increasing community rejection. Many report negative experiences in their job searches, including competition from a large number of others for the most menial of jobs, and the sense of isolation and 'aloneness'

after being rejected by employers, who in many instances, it was reported, provide no feedback on the reasons why they were unsuccessful. Increasingly they related experiencing a community view of them as failures. Many saw themselves in a 'no-win' situation; they perceived pressure from the official welfare agencies and an insistence on them gaining work, but with no assistance to help them. They described their experience with case management and job clubs in generally critical terms with phrases such as 'haven't we been through enough?'

However, not all attempts to assist them are perceived negatively. For example, when they take part in short training programs which have an emphasis on gaining generic skills and knowledge in specific areas of work, they at first perceived this as returning to school with all its negative connotations. However, from a rejection phase they related a progressive change of perception along a pathway to acceptance and then enthusiasm for the programs. For many this culminated in an emerging excitement as they learned knowledge and skills they saw as relevant to the workplace. Many reported their confidence grew from the knowledge that they could become proficient in workplace skills and ultimately acquire a recognised certificate in an area of employment. Comments such as: 'Why couldn't they do this at school?' and 'They treat you like adults here' underlined their realisation that learning could be enjoyable and relevant to their personal goals and aspirations.

Individual credentialism: The key to the pathway?
For many of the youth their positive attitudes towards the programs they were completing were, at the same time, cause for some concern. Several spoke about the way the programs separated them from other youth who didn't have the opportunity, for whatever reason to participate. They saw they would need to have a series of programs available if they were to be employable in jobs that were likely to change as described above. In a sense one can see they are beginning to reflect on and grapple with the enunciated approach that sees the individual having the responsibility for getting him/herself job ready.

Clearly in response to the question, 'What is the key to the pathway?', for young people when they have left school, vocational training programs with no waiting period provide the key. The Tasmanian study shows that with the emphasis in senior secondary schools for vocational education and training, workplace introductory programs and industry/education and training programs, leaving school early effectively precludes young people from gaining the knowledge and skills with which to make the transition from the world-of-school to the world-of-work, carrying with it the connotations about adulthood and so on outlined earlier.

Implications for regional sustainability
As discussed earlier, the outcomes of early school leaving in regional Australia are more disadvantageous. With the technologisation of agricultural practices and the resultant redundancies of labour, permanent low-skilled farm work no longer exists. Employment in the trades, traditionally apprenticeship-based, also now tends toward older school leavers with relevant certificated skills. To gain these skills and have any chance of success in their future, young people are forced to leave families and familiar environments, at an age when they need parental guidance and protection, and travel long distances to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to compete for worthwhile full time employment. Therefore, young people growing up in regional communities are becoming increasingly more alienated from the broader community life and its support.

This division also severs the community's links with its young, emerging adult population, creating further fragmentation to the structure of regional communities.

Conclusions

The Tasmanian study on which this chapter is based, like many other studies (see for example, Sweet 1998; Marginson 1997; OECD 1996; Batten & Russell 1995), are suggesting that the issues of youth unemployment, how schools may forge more productive partnerships with business, the nature of relevant curricula, and so on need to be revisited. The simplistic criticism of youth being responsible for their own unemployment because they are not willing to work, is not appropriate. A change in the understanding of the concepts of youth and education and community is needed. The Tasmanian study demonstrates the importance of the integration of community, employment and education agencies and the need for a more holistic approach to education for lifelong learning. Also support mechanisms for young people, not just through the transition from school-to-work phase, are required. Finally, while written in the context of the Northern Hemisphere, the EU Council has some appropriate thoughts on the broad picture, which is also applicable to Tasmania:

> The changing nature of modern youth has far-reaching implications for youth policies. Youth policies today can only be effective if they provide sustained support to individual development rather than seek to mould personalities; facilitate and inform individual choices rather than bluntly discipline; awake for (life-long) learning rather than impose standard knowledge in standard ways and then register educational and labour market failure … (Council of Europe 1998)

References

Batten, M & Russell, J 1995, *Students at risk: A review of Australian literature 1980–1994*, The Australian Council for Education Research Ltd, Melbourne, Vic.

Carson, E & Daube, L 1994, *Employment development: Do young people benefit?*, National Clearing House for Youth Studies, Hobart, Tas.

Council of Europe 1998, *European youth trends 1998*, Youth Directorate, Research Papers http://www.coe.fr/youth/research/papers.htm.

Finn, B (Chairman, Australian Education Council Review Committee) 1991, *Young people's participation in post-compulsory education and training*, AGPS, Canberra.

Lamb, S 1997, *School achievement and initial education and labour market outcomes*, Research Report No. 4: Longitudinal surveys of Australian youth, Australian Council for Education Research, Hawthorn, Vic.

Marginson, S 1997, *Educating Australia: Government, economy and citizen since 1960*, Cambridge University Press, Sydney.

Matathia, I & Salzman, M 1998, *NEXT: Trends for the future*, Pan MacMillan Australia, Sydney.

Meadows, P et al. 1996, *Work in—or work out*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, London.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 1996, *Successful services for our children and families at risk,* Centre for Education Research and Innovation, OECD, Paris.

Sweet, R 1998, 'Youth: The rhetoric and the reality of the 1990s', in *Australia's youth: Reality and risk,* ed. Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Sydney, pp. 5–22.

Williamson, J & Marsh, A 1999, *Early school leavers at risk: Vocation education and training or unemployment?* Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, Hobart, Tas.

Withers, G & Batten, M 1995, *Programs for at risk youth: A review of American, Canadian and British literature since 1984*, Australian Council for Education Research Ltd, Melbourne, Vic.

Wooden, M 1998, **'**The labour market for young Australians', in *Australia's youth: Reality and risk*, ed. Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Sydney, pp. 29–50.

CHAPTER 8
Using communication and information technologies to empower women in rural communities

Margaret Grace

In Australia, as in other parts of the world, there is considerable interest in many quarters in the potential of new communication and information technologies to contribute significantly to the revitalisation of regional communities. However, much remains to be understood about the social factors which affect the success of innovative technology applications. Research conducted by the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) indicates that gender significantly affects not only access and use of communication and information technologies, but also rural community development. By focusing on rural women's perspectives on communication issues, this research has revealed a need for the development of 'soft' technologies to ensure that both social and economic development occurs in an integrated way in regional, rural and remote communities.

Introduction

Like their urban counterparts, many women in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia are now working the 'double shift' of paid employment as well as home and family management. In the agricultural sector some are working a triple shift of family, farm and off-farm employment. In recent years rural women have campaigned successfully for recognition of the value of their contributions, particularly to agriculture. Their public profile has increased quite dramatically, and they are now being encouraged to take leadership roles in rural industry organisations. It is evident that women are emerging as important players in the management of change in regional, rural and remote communities.

While women in rural and remote Australia are quite diverse in terms of lifestyles, occupations and ethnic backgrounds, they share a strong vested interest in communication issues and many commonalities as communicators. Their interest in communication derives from their diverse occupational and community interests, and from common concerns with family and kinship maintenance. Rural women still typically assume a major responsibility for the care of husbands, children and the elderly, and for the education of their children. They are therefore especially concerned with health and education services both as consumers and as providers.

For such women, the availability of reliable telecommunications is a vital issue. The more remote they are, the more critical this issue becomes. Paradoxically, those who have the most need, have the least access.

Using email in participant research

This paper draws on two recent participative research projects, which focused specifically on rural women's use of communication technologies. Researchers at the Queensland University of Technology conducted the projects. Findings are reported in more detail in Grace et al. (1999) and Grace, Lundin and Daws (1996).

The use of electronic mail which this paper reports was embedded in the action research methodology of the second (1996–97) project which was funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC) collaborative research grant. It involved the participation of over 200 women from various parts of Queensland and collaboration with seven 'Industry Partners'. The partners included several State government departments, Telstra Corporation and Pegasus Networks. This structure enabled the project to create links between the rural participants and the industry partners and contributed greatly to its effectiveness.

The project's aims included enhancing rural women's access to communication and information technologies, and assessing the impact of women's use of such technologies on their participation in small business development, community development, research, consultation, and planning.

The participant methodology included the conduct of consultative and awareness-raising workshops in each year of the project in ten widely separated locations in Queensland. At each location, we encouraged women to try using electronic mail as part of their participation in the project. The term *wechat*, short for 'women's electronic chat' was devised to describe this part of the project. By early in 1997 the group communicating regularly by email comprised five members of the research team, three or four women from the industry partners, and about 15 women from various parts of rural and remote Queensland.

From March 1997 onwards the email communication was expanded with the establishment on the Pegasus Networks server of a mailing list called *welink*, which had the stated intention of linking urban and rural women. A vibrant online community including women in other Australian States and in other countries rapidly developed. By July 1997 there were already over 90 subscribers and postings reached 100 messages per week. Well over half of the participants were from rural and remote locations (Grace et al. 1999).

Welink soon developed a life of its own with a strong sense of community and a high degree of sense of ownership by the participants, who successfully urged QUT to continue to operate the list beyond the length of the project. Women who have participated in *welink*, have set up at least two other electronic mailing lists for rural women, using *welink* as a model.

The research team has tried to identify the reasons for the success of these online initiatives. The accessibility of electronic mail, which is a relatively low-tech facility, and its cost effectiveness in comparison with the telephone for rural people, are obvious factors. It is also clear that the online communication is meeting a very real need for social interaction with other women for many women in rural and remote Queensland, who can be socially isolated not only by distance but also by the restricting aspects of rural community cultures. The fact that the use of email was embedded in a research methodology, which incorporated community development processes, is another contributing factor.

Gender is also an important factor. The communication has developed in ways which reflect women's distinctive communicative styles and with which they feel comfortable. The communication style has been conversational rather than focused on information exchange or debate. Most messages cover more than one topic, and frequently incorporate

humour and storytelling. Reports of daily doings are interwoven with the exchange of information and opinion about a wide range of topics including the weather, health matters, family matters, recreational interests and local, national, and international events. Personal problems are shared and supportive responses are received. The friendly atmosphere, which the women have created on both *wechat* and *welink*, reflects the high value they place on connectivity. This is a feature of women's communication patterns noted by feminist scholars (see, for example, the work of sociolinguist Deborah Tannen 1992).

Impacts of participation in *wechat* and *welink*

Positive impacts on individual participants, which have been recorded by the research team, include:

- Better access to information.
- Reduced social isolation resulting in better stress management.
- Increased confidence from gaining competency in using the technologies and accessing a wider range of information and opinion.
- The creation of employment and small business opportunities. Examples include a woman who teleworks for the Office of Rural Communities from a remote sheep station, and a woman who set up her own small business in basic computer training and home support.
- Empowerment. Needing their voices can be heard and understood is a burning issue for many people in rural and remote Australia. The regular online communication enabled information from women in 'the bush' to reach women in the city who were strategically placed, for example, in tertiary education institutions and the public service.

Impacts at local community or regional level include:

- Raised awareness about communications issues and other issues affecting rural communities.
- The facilitation of access to funding for community projects.
- Enhanced leadership capacity and public profile of rural women.

Actual and potential application of communication and information technologies by women in regional, rural and remote communities

The QUT research indicates that as they gain access to email and the Internet, women in rural, regional and remote communities will use information technology in combination with a range of other communication technologies they already use such as the telephone, facsimile transfer, UHF and VHF radio and audio and videoconferencing. The following are some of the contexts in which such women are likely to apply these technologies.

Family and kinship maintenance

Those women who have participated in the online conversations created by our research projects are already using email to communicate with distant family members, including children who are at boarding schools and universities.

Networking

Computer mediated communication is already being used to overcome the tyranny of distance facing regional, state-wide and national rural women's organisations. For example, email can enable more frequent, faster, less costly communication between dispersed committee members and can facilitate the networking of rural women's groups and organisations nationally and internationally. This has already occurred for the Queensland Rural Women's Network which, as a result of its members' participation in the QUT research, readily adopted email for regular communication between its widely dispersed management committee, used *welink* for widespread networking, and then secured a large grant from the Rural Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) for further applications and training.

Health

Both professional health workers and women who are caring for their own and their families' health are using the Internet to access health and safety information. Some isolated women are using the Internet and email to access support networks for sufferers of particular conditions or disabilities and their carers, and there is potential to create electronic networks which will enhance professional support of isolated rural health workers.

Education

The applications of advanced communication and information technology in distance education and open learning are well known. These applications apply at all levels, from primary schooling through to advanced postgraduate study. Women in rural and remote areas are involved with the progressive introduction of information technology as education professionals, as students and as parents, especially those who are home tutors for pupils of the schools of distance education.

Agriculture

In the past decade significant changes have taken place in the economics of family farming which have resulted in many women increasing their involvement in both managerial and manual aspects of farm work. Our research suggests that on family farms, it is often the female partner who has the better keyboard and clerical skills and the greater interest in information technology. The farming and grazing women who attended our workshops were resourceful, caring, and deeply committed to their husbands, families, and local communities. Such women are a precious and strategically significant resource for Queensland agriculture. Many of these women can see the potential for new technologies to improve both their efficiency as farmers and their quality of life, and they are prepared to learn.

Small business development

According to a report of the Tasmanian Women's Consultative Council (1996), women comprise nearly one third of small business operators in Australia. Other research (for example, Still & Chia 1995) indicates that the survival rate of small businesses operated by women is higher than that of businesses operated by men, and that if such trends continue, women will eventually outnumber men in small business, both as proprietors and employees.

Communication and information technologies offer the following potential strategic opportunities for women in business:

- enhanced access to relevant information, training and business services;
- access to resources such as World Wide Web sites;
- use of the World Wide Web as a stimulus for creative ideas;
- diversification and pluriactivity of primary producers through women's small business and teleworking activities;
- facilitation of cooperative action by primary producers to engage in value adding of their products, including beef and wool, and to create collaborative commodity data bases and access new markets;
- enhanced market access through the commercial aspects of the World Wide Web, for niche marketing of agricultural products, arts and crafts products, and farm tourism;
- opportunities for small business development in information industry services and training provision;
- opportunities for teleworking both through networks of individuals and through
- telecentres;
- opportunities to be involved in the development of social infrastructure to support teleworking such as marketing facilities, including the development of employer and client databases;
- enhanced business and professional networking for women through the creation of online networks.

There is potential for projects which would aim to promote women's small business enterprise by providing training in information technology and creating online networks. Networks of geographically dispersed women who were actual or potential small business proprietors could be formed, using a community development model which would include some face-to-face workshopping and basic training, supplemented by teleconferences and frequent online communication.

Implications for regional sustainability

There is much more to the use of communication and information technology for rural revitalisation than providing the technical infrastructure and assuming that the community will take advantage of it. In *Engines of Empowerment*, an insightful analysis of the applications of information technology for the creation of healthy communities in the United States, Milio (1996) argues that more attention should be given to the development of accompanying social infrastructure or 'soft' technologies.

Part of the social infrastructure is the consideration of social justice issues. To ensure equitable access, the effect of factors such as gender, ethnicity, age and socioeconomic circumstances must be addressed. It has been argued (Spender 1996) that women have been largely excluded from the design and development of information technology, and are at risk of being disadvantaged as users. The QUT action research project specifically addressed this issue by providing female-friendly, awareness-raising processes and by supporting women to gain access. Many rural women were then quick to adopt the technology and apply it in innovative ways. This has important implications for rural community development and regional sustainability.

Women also have valuable perspectives and skills to contribute to the development of the social infrastructure which will ensure that technology is put to the service of community. The occupations and interests of rural women tend to transcend conventional social science categories and their daily lives exhibit a high degree of integration of economic and social activity and concerns. Women therefore tend to develop the more holistic perspectives, which are necessary for the management of change, as rural communities move into the 21st century.

In summary, the particular significance of women as users of communication technologies for rural community development lies in:

- the diversity of their paid and unpaid activities, interests and responsibilities;
- changes in women's social roles, including their greater participation and leadership in paid employment, agricultural management, community development, and public life;
- women's distinct communicative capacities and styles, and
- women's capacity to integrate social and economic issues.

Conclusion

The QUT action research project was successful in creating a vibrant online community which facilitates communication among women in rural and remote parts of Australia and which links them with urban women and women in other countries. This occurred because the electronic communication was embedded in a research project methodology characterised by community development processes, and because it addressed a real need, the social isolation of women in rural and remote situations. Women's distinctive communicative styles also contributed to the creation of this virtual community.

One of the most important outcomes of the online communication has been the empowerment of the participants. This empowerment derives from the supportive nature of the communication between the women; and the links forged between women in regional, rural and remote communities and women who are strategically placed in universities, government and industry.

By focusing on rural women's perspectives, which integrate economic and social issues, the QUT research has revealed the need for 'soft' technologies or social infrastructure to be developed in association with 'hard' infrastructure. The initiation of community development processes, including the flexible delivery of appropriate training in information technology, were identified as crucial elements of such social infrastructure.

Through their diverse social and productive roles, their communication skills, and their holistic perspectives, women are well equipped to take leading roles as innovators and managers of change. Their enhanced access to the new communication and information technologies will be crucial to the realisation of this potential. Gender is thus a significant factor in the capacity of communication and information technologies to stimulate rural and regional community development.

References

Grace, M, Lennie, J, Daws, L, Simpson, L, Previte, J, Lundin, R & Stevenson, T 1999, *The new pioneers: Women in rural Queensland collaboratively exploring the potential of communication and information technologies for personal, business and community development,* QUT, Brisbane.

Grace, M, Lundin, R, & Daws, L 1996, *Working and networking: Women's voices from elsewhere*, Centre for Policy and Leadership Studies in Education, QUT, Brisbane.

Milio, N 1996, *Engines of empowerment: Using information technology to create healthy communities and challenge public policy*, Health Administration Press, Chicago.

Spender, D 1995, *Nattering on the net: Women, power and cyberspace*, Spinifex Press, North Melbourne.

Still, L & Chia, B 1995, *Women and leadership series: Self-employed women four years on,* Working Paper Series (No. 1), Edith Cowan University, Perth.

Tannen, D 1992, *That's not what I meant!*, Virago Press, London.

Tasmanian Women's Consultative Council 1996, *Women and small business: A Tasmanian perspective*, Tasmanian Women's Consultative Council Report to the Minister for the Status of Women, the Hon. Denise Swan MHA.

Working smarter not harder:
Regional disability-based organisations.

Harvey Griggs

Disability-based organisations in general have traditionally provided care, support, work, and occupations for people with disabilities, in a system supported by subsidies from government and charity from the community. This has led to organisations in the disability sector heavily depending on outside help such as cash and in-kind donations; volunteer workers and helpers; and 'favourable' treatment and concessions from suppliers and customers, for both day to day operations and long-term growth. Such organisations are facing growing economic pressures, particularly in regional areas, as well as the changing nature of the disability industry, as it struggles to provide the traditional environment for its clients.

Managers and boards of management of many disability-based organisations have decided that the way to manage the change is to be more responsible for their own destiny and to base their operations on commercially viable businesses. The management base for this new paradigm needs to be strengthened, as evidenced by a recent profile of northern and central Victorian non-government disability sector managers. This base must be broader and deeper than is currently the case, encompassing the full spectrum of management functions from a business as well as a social perspective.

Introduction

For most Australians, but particularly the employed, the last 15 years or so must seem to have been a continuous escalation of dramatic changes. There have been changes to industry structures incorporating a lowering of trade barriers and acceleration of the internationalisation of markets; economic changes incorporating recession and unemployment, volatile interest and currency rates, and production and information technology 'revolutions' incorporating organisations changing shape to become leaner, faster, and more flexible. And all this is quite apart from the vast array of environmental challenges and issues that have emerged.

These changes have not been quarantined to urban Australians. In fact, it is arguable that these changes have had a comparatively greater deleterious impact on regional Australians and the communities in which they live, due to the comparatively fewer employment options for people living and working in those areas, than urban Australians. Further discussion of the specific nature and degree of the impact has been included elsewhere in this book and will not be repeated here. Suffice to say that regional Australia is in crisis.

Perhaps it is *because* of this impact however, amongst other reasons, that the Federal government has formulated a Regional Australia Strategy. In this strategy, the 1998/99 objective for regional Australia is to provide the economic, environmental and social infrastructure necessary for Australia's regions to realise their potential, and the Federal government has taken a broad range of policy and program initiatives across all its portfolios to achieve its aim.

It is pleasing to see that many of these initiatives go further than merely looking at financial or economic responsibilities, and focus on important social aspects, including those relating to people with disabilities. It is this aspect of people with disabilities, the

organisations that support them, and particularly the management of those organisations, that will be the focus of this chapter.

Challenges for the disability sector

The loss of population from regional areas often leaves behind the most disadvantaged—the aged, the sick, and the disabled, and this in communities which are undergoing the all too familiar accompanying downward spiral of regional infrastructure. The disability infrastructure that is left has another set of challenges to overcome, quite apart from the generic change issues already mentioned above. These key challenges for disability agencies and their managers in Victoria and Tasmania have been:

- Changes in policy directions of State government including:
  - Purchaser-provider relationship with funded agencies
  - Compulsory competitive tendering (CCT)
  - New service delivery models
  - An emphasis on client-driven service systems
  - A demand for specific output measures
- Moving towards unit-based funding
- Continued process of deinstitutionalisation
- Reprofiling and restructuring of the sector
- An emphasis on productivity
- Shifts in the industrial relations framework
- The changing role of committees of management
- Growing sophistication of service users and other key stakeholders
- Growing importance placed on quality measures
- Growing importance of change management skills

(Adapted from Non Government Disability Training Unit (NDTU) 1996)

The key stakeholders and these broad themes are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Challenges and stakeholders for the disability sector
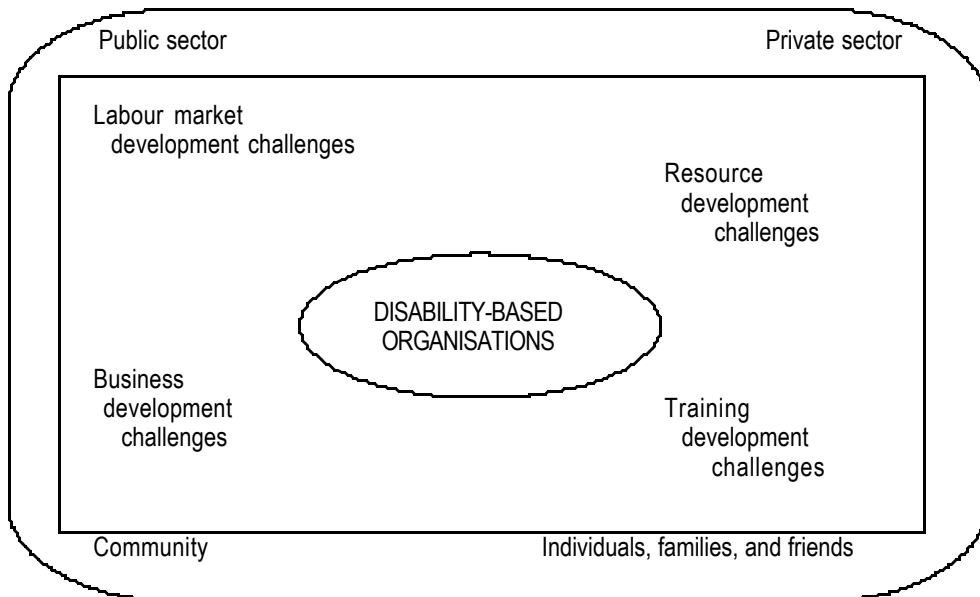
It is clear that, in the face of the generic and specific challenges referred to above, the human service-driven, self-help philosophy, which started many disability-based organisations, must drive the change to find new ways to provide for individual growth and fulfilment. At the same time, commercial and economic security to cater for the long-term future of those organisations must be pursued by those responsible.

Challenges for management

Many management teams and their boards or committees in the disability sector have, encouraged by their sponsors who are predominantly governments at various levels, decided that the way to manage these sector challenges is to be more responsible for their own organisation's destiny, and to base their operations on commercially viable businesses and/or management practices. Certainly the government dollar is becoming harder to obtain and sustain, and now comes with more stringent accountability and performance standards, and with market-driven policies. But the key reason why the commercial management approach is not only preferred but required, is that the emphasis has changed from a purely internal one (on the client with a disability) to incorporating an external focus—on the customers and stakeholders. Governments at all levels have always had an interest in determining if the community has access to an appropriate level of publicly-funded services. Measuring the extent to which this has been achieved is increasingly focusing on the organisational outputs and outcomes by which efficiency and effectiveness are measured.

The degree to which management teams and their boards and committees will be successful in their endeavours will, to a very large degree, depend on the calibre of the people involved. There seems to be a general consensus that education and training is a major contributor to enhanced performance at individual (e.g. Bartel 1994; Guzzo, Jette & Katzell 1985), organisational (Ichniowski et al. 1995; World Bank 1995; Holzer et al.

1993), and national (e.g. Clare & Johnson 1993; Norris 1993; Hicks 1987; Martin Report 1964) levels. Perhaps Porter (1990, p. 628) best summed up the situation when he said that, 'Education and training constitute perhaps the single greatest long-term leverage point available to all levels of government in upgrading industry.'

In the context of the disability sector, government is the most significant stakeholder in terms of finance, and in addition to or perhaps as a consequence of this, is at the forefront of education and training and sector reforms aimed at improving client-driven outcomes. The 'lever' for these outcomes is seen as being management.

In addition to the generic education and training studies referred to above, a number of other, wider studies concerned the relationships between managerial characteristics and organisational performance (e.g. Norburn & Birley 1988; Virnay & Tushman 1986; Child 1974). These broader studies take the view that the three constructs of planning/strategy, top management characteristics (specifically education and training), and organisational performance are all-necessary in understanding the process by which top management influences organisational outcomes. The characteristics of top management do not, however, have an independent effect on organisational performance. Rather, it is the institutionalisation of these characteristics into the planning processes of organisations that has the greatest impact on performance, all other things being equal.

From a management education perspective, the Ralph Report (1982) clearly stated that managerial effectiveness was enhanced by high-quality management education, thereby enhancing organisational performance.

This chapter will briefly examine the above issues as they relate to a pilot project conducted which involved 53 managers of provincial and rural Victorian disability-based organisations. This exploratory study generally identified key criteria of the managers, and in particular, sought to gain an understanding of the general extent of management education and training issues as well as developing a structure for data gathering in later phases of the research project.

The management profile

The management workforce profile was developed as a descriptive study. Developing the profile consisted of discussions, workshops, and cluster group meetings with 53 managers and supervisors of 27 disability-based organisations located in central and northern Victoria who were gathered together for an industry training project. The area sample was representative of agencies in the region as it included managers from most of the agencies located there.

The primary goals of undertaking this exploratory profiling were:

1. To gain an appreciation of the general extent of management education and training and issues in the top management team.

2. To prepare part of a draft questionnaire for later use in data gathering from a wider sample.

The participants represented agencies whose workforces ranged in size up to 100 employees, but did not include any agencies from the Melbourne metropolitan area. Some agencies were represented by more than one manager, and managers came from different functional areas in agencies.

Findings

Based on the sample, the profile showed that the typical manager in the non-government disability sector is: employed by an organisation with less than 30 staff; an Australian born female aged between 30–49 who has worked in the disability sector for between one to ten years, most of which have been as a manager; post-secondary qualified with a tertiary or postgraduate qualification; not formally management-trained or qualified, and does not belong to a member of a professional management association (see Appendix 1).

Age

The single largest group of managers (47 per cent) was the 'baby-boomers' i.e. Managers aged between 40–49. These managers were spread uniformly amongst different-sized agencies, although slightly higher proportions than average were located in rural areas (52 per cent compared to the overall average of 47 per cent). The second largest group of managers were those aged between 30–39 (28 per cent), and these managers were predominantly employed by agencies in provincial cities (41 per cent compared to the overall average of 28 per cent), and in agencies with workforces of between 11–30 people (35 per cent compared to the overall average of 28 per cent).

Gender

Three-quarters (74 per cent) of managers were women, and they were equally represented across the range of agency sizes, as were the males. Males were represented proportionately higher in provincial cities (36 per cent compared to the overall average of 26 per cent), while females were represented proportionately lower in provincial cities (64 per cent compared to the overall average of 74 per cent).

Country of origin

Almost 80 per cent of managers originated in Australia and a slightly higher proportion than average were located in smaller agencies (87 per cent compared to the overall average of 79 per cent). The only other significant grouping was that from the United Kingdom which represented 13 per cent of the sample. These managers were more often found in larger agencies (19 per cent compared to the overall average of 13 per cent), although there was no distinction between rural or provincial areas.

Disability-based employment

Two-thirds of managers (68 per cent) in the sample reported having worked in the disability sector for up to ten years, with 15 per cent having spent more than 15 years. Almost half (47 per cent as compared to the average of 40 per cent) the managers in smaller agencies had sector experience of between 1–5 years, and the largest group (42 per cent) of managers with the same level of experience were located in rural areas.

Managerial experience

Almost three-quarters (72 per cent) of managers had overall managerial experience of up to ten years, and almost half (49 per cent) of those surveyed had up to five years. There did not appear to be any significant differences between the length of managerial experience of managers employed in either the different-sized agencies, or agencies in rural or provincial areas, although 57 per cent of managers in larger agencies had more than five years' managerial experience as compared to 47 per cent for medium and smaller agencies.

Educational history
More than half (51 per cent) of all managers had undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications; with a higher proportion than average for postgraduates (40 per cent compared to the overall average of 30 per cent) being located in smaller agencies. A significantly higher proportion (45 per cent compared to the overall average of 30 per cent) of managers in provincial cities possessed postgraduate qualifications, and a significantly higher proportion (32 per cent compared to the overall average of 23 per cent) of managers in rural areas possessed only secondary qualifications.

Management education background
Over half (57 per cent) of all managers in the sample did not have any formal management qualification. This situation was slightly better in provincial cities where 50 per cent of managers possessed either tertiary or postgraduate management qualifications as compared to 39 per cent of managers in rural areas. Double (27 per cent as compared to 13 per cent) the percentage of managers in provincial cities possessed tertiary (non-degree) management qualifications as compared to their rural counterparts, while the reverse was the case with postgraduate management qualifications (five per cent as compared to ten per cent). Interestingly, the highest proportion of managers with postgraduate management qualifications came from agencies with a workforce of between 1–10 people (13 per cent compared to the overall average of eight per cent).

Professional management associations
There was a wide array of memberships cited by participants, and the 'management-relatedness' was difficult to determine in some cases. The only organisation listed by more than one manager was the Australian Institute of Management (four respondents). Over three-quarters of managers (77 per cent) did not belong to any professional management association, and this was exaggerated in rural areas (84 per cent compared to the overall average of 77 per cent). Just over two thirds (68 per cent) of provincial city managers did not belong to any professional management association. Eighteen per cent (compared to the average of 11 per cent) of provincial city managers belonged to 'other' associations. The larger agencies showed a higher proportion than average of relevant memberships, particularly the Australian Institute Management.

Discussion of profile
The findings of this preliminary, exploratory study, although tentative, reveal a managerial landscape with many interesting features. Preliminary chi-square tests do not reveal any statistically significant differences at .05 level of significance. However, some of the findings are intuitive and support previous research. For example, the generally low levels of management-related qualifications and professional management association memberships reflect the kinds of concerns enunciated in the Karpin Report (1995) which considered that one of the keys to quality management in the Australian workforce generally was the provision of quality management training.

Also, the predominance of women found in this study is consistent with the preponderance of women in the social and community services sector of 87 per cent as reported in the 1994 Industry Training Plan of the Social and Community Services Industry Training Board (The Resolutions Group 1996).

Not only should such quality management training be provided however, but it must also

be taken up by managers in the sector. Further research is required to determine whether or not those managers who possess management-related qualifications and/or professional management association memberships undertook such study or joined the association(s) prior to their employment in the sector.

In any event, the concerns about the management base identified by organisations in the sector seem well founded.

Of interest also is the preponderance of males in provincial cities and women in rural areas. Further research is required to determine the reasons for this phenomenon, and for the apparent progression from commencing employment in the sector in rural areas, moving to provincial cities for mid-career experiences (30–40 years of age), and then returning to rural agencies.

There is a clearly identified need for management education and training in rural agencies where 61 per cent of managers do not possess any management qualification at all. It is in such areas (two thirds of the sample), where the bulk of smaller and medium-sized agencies are located, that managers are required to be competent across a wide range of conceptual and technical areas. It is also in such areas where the provision of suitable training opportunities and the acquisition of such skills are problematic.

The fact that the study was comprised of managers from 27 agencies in a geographical area devoid of any really large agencies (those with a workforce of over 100), and excluded agencies from the Melbourne metropolitan area (where some two thirds of agencies in Victoria are located) means that the generalisability of the results to the wider Victorian population of some 150 agencies administered by the Non-Government Disability Training Unit may not be valid. Further research will be conducted during 1998/99 involving all Victorian and all Tasmanian agencies in the same categories.

Implications for regional sustainability

The challenge for stakeholders, the sector, and the organisations themselves is somewhat akin to that facing the Federal government in relation to attracting suitably qualified medical practitioners to regional Australia. Attracting, retaining, and encouraging management of regional disability-based organisations to undertake suitable education and training will enhance the client-driven outcomes of such organisations, and ensure the provision of quality services to those disadvantaged people left behind. There is no shortage of community-minded people willing to serve the cause of disabled people in regional Australia. Such people are quite passionate about the cause, and the need to retain an adequate level of disability-based infrastructure. Also, there is no shortage of management training programs. However, there needs to be more choice available for managers in relation to the context of available courses, i.e. there are many generic management courses offered by training providers both public and private, but few courses offered by such providers which specifically provide for the business/social blend for management in the disability sector. And even fewer provide for flexible deliveries so those regional managers are able to suitably access such courses.

What is required is communication—managers do not always know what management training is available, and even when they do, are not always able to access relevant training. Many agencies, particularly in Victoria and including regional areas, have already had Agency Training Plans for management prepared. The training needs of management have already been identified. Now is the time for governments and peak sector bodies to

ramp up the communication process, and perhaps where appropriate, to prompt and assist agencies and clusters of agencies to become registered training providers and develop suitable programs of their own. Adequate levels of funding must be made available to facilitate the process.

In the long term, the investments that governments make in developing regional management training and education and peak sector bodies, will enhance the regional disability infrastructure, and encourage agency self-sufficiency.

Conclusion

In the face of many generic, regional, and industry-specific challenges, managers of disability-based organisations are reacting by introducing commercial practices and techniques into their operating systems. There is considerable evidence that education and training enhances performance at individual, organisational, and national levels. In relation to individuals, this education and training is institutionalised into the planning processes of organisations and has the greatest impact on performance. The low levels of management education and training in rural areas are a worrying indicator of organisational performance in those areas.

References

Bartel, A 1994, 'Productivity gains from the implementation of employee training programs', *Industrial Relations*, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 411–425.

Child, J 1974, 'Managerial and organisational factors associated with company performance', *Journal of Management Studies*, no. 11, pp. 13–27.

Clare, R & Johnson, K 1993, *Education and training in the 1990s*, Office of Economic Planning and Advisory Council, Background Paper, no. 31, AGPS, Canberra.

Guzzo, RA Jette, RD & Katzell, RA 1985, 'The effects of psychologically based intervention programs on worker productivity', *Personnel Psychology*, no. 38, pp. 275–292.

Hicks, N 1987, 'Education and economic growth', in *Economics of education: Research and studies,* ed. G Psacharopoulos, Pergamon Press, Oxford, pp. 101–107.

Holzer, HJ, Block, RN, Cheatham, M & Knott, JH 1993, 'Are training subsidies for firms effective?', *Industrial and labour relations review*, no. 46, pp. 625–636.

Ichniowski, C, Shaw, K & Prennushi, G 1995, *The effects of human resource management on productivity*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge.

[Karpin Report] 1995, *Enterprising nation: Renewing Australia's managers to meet the challenges of the Asia-Pacific century*, Report of the Industry Task Force on Leadership and Management Skills, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

[Martin Report] 1964, *Tertiary education in Australia*, Report of the Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia to the Australian Universities Commission, Government Printer, Melbourne.

Non Government Disability Training Unit (NDTU) 1996, *Supervisor and management training needs analysis*, Department of Human Services, Fitzroy, Victoria.

Norburn, D & Birley, S 1988, 'The top management team and corporate performance', *Strategic Management Journal*, no. 9, pp. 225–238.

Norris, K 1993, *The economics of Australian markets*, 3rd edn, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne.

Porter, M 1990, *Competitive advantage of nations*, MacMillan, London.

[Ralph Report] 1982, *Inquiry into management education*, vols I and II, AGPS, Canberra.

The Resolutions Group 1996, *NDTU Supervisor and Management Training Needs Analysis Report,* Department of Human Services, Fitzroy, Vic.

Virnay, B & Tushman, ML 1986, 'Executive succession: The changing characteristics of top management teams', in *Academy of management best paper proceedings*, Academy of Management, New York, pp. 155–159.

World Bank 1995, *World development report: Workers in an integrating world,* Oxford University Press, New York.

Appendix 1

Management Association		Workforce size				
		1–10	*11–30*	*31–100*	*over 100*	*Total*
None	freq. dist.	12	14	15	0	41
	per cent	80%	82%	71%	0%	77%
AIM	freq. dist.	1	0	3	0	4
	per cent	7%	0%	14%	0%	8%
AHRI	freq. dist.	0	0	1	0	1
	per cent	0%	0%	5%	0%	2%
AISA	freq. dist.	0	0	1	0	1
	per cent	0%	0%	5%	0%	2%
Other	freq. dist.	2	3	1	0	6
	per cent	13%	18%	5%	0%	11%
Total frequency distribution		15	17	21	0	53
Total per cent		100%	100%	100%	0%	100%
Management Association		Location				
		Rural	*Prov. City*	*Melbourne*	*Other*	*Total*
None	freq. dist.	26	15	0	0	41
	per cent	84%	68%	0%	0%	77%
AIM	freq. dist.	2	2	0	0	4
	per cent	6%	9%	0%	0%	8%
AHRI	freq. dist.	1	0	0	0	1
	per cent	3%	0%	0%	0%	2%
AISA	freq. dist.	0	1	0	0	1
	per cent	0%	5%	0%	0%	2%
Other	freq. dist.	2	4	0	0	6
	per cent	6%	18%	0%	0%	11%
Total frequency distribution		31	22	0	0	53
Total per cent		100%	100%	0%	0%	100%

Support networks and trust: How social capital facilitates learning outcomes for small businesses

Sue Kilpatrick and Rowena Bell

The chapter examines a learning community of farm businesses (a community-of-practice rather than a geographic community). It traces the way in which the community deliberately structures its activities so as to develop and accumulate social capital. The chapter also examines the outcomes of the use of social capital in learning processes of members. Much of the literature on social capital focuses on trust as the central element (Cox 1995; Fukuyama 1995; Putnam 1993). The farmer learning community develops a high level of trust among its members, however trust is not the most important element in bringing about and sustaining changes. The support network created by the community is the single most important factor in facilitating the changes, which the members make to their business management practice. It is argued that trust is a by-product of getting to know other members of the community and developing shared values. A strong and effective support network for change is created as a result of knowing others' strengths and weaknesses and valuing a climate of openness in which members are able to challenge others and be challenged.

Introduction

Social capital (networks, values, trust and commitment) facilitates learning and change in communities by oiling the processes of accessing and acquiring new knowledge, skills and values. The literature on social capital argues that high levels of social capital lead to strong economic performance (Putnam 1993). Development and maintenance of a strong economy requires an ability and willingness to adapt in the light of external pressures and opportunities. This in turn requires businesses to make appropriate and successful changes to their practices. This chapter considers how social capital is used by a group of small businesses as they make changes, which improve business outcomes.

Learning, change and economic outcomes

There is considerable interest in ways in which individuals, enterprises, industries, communities and society as a whole can be encouraged to be responsive and adaptable in the face of a wide range of opportunities and threats. Government is interested in how individuals and communities can be resilient in the face of economic threats such as the loss of a major employer and how industries can respond to opportunities and threats. Businesses of all sizes are urged to take advantage of opportunities arising from changes in domestic and global markets.

Adaption and change are learning processes during which people, individually and as groups (including organisations and communities), develop new knowledge, skills and values. The role of formalised learning in the form of education and training in those functions which require adaption to change is well established (Kilpatrick 1996; Bartel & Lichtenberg 1987).

Work on the learning society emphasises the link between learning and responsiveness to change (Young 1995). The literature on learning organisations recognises that organisations adapt and grow through learning (Senge 1993). Change is a cumulative process which builds on existing knowledge and practices through interactive learning. Organisations which adapt and change as a result of interactive learning activities are learning organisations.

Social capital, learning and change

Economics explains how goods and services are produced by enterprises using physical capital and human capital. Recent work suggests that human capital works more effectively in conjunction with social capital, where social capital is the networks, norms or values and trust or commitment that are present in a group, community or society (Putnam 1993; Coleman 1988). Better outcomes result when people use their knowledge and skills along with the knowledge and skills of others, through interactions which use networks, shared values and the commitment of others to the group. Putman's (1993) study of Italy found that regions with a large number of small firms which engaged in a mix of competition and cooperation, where there was a high level of horizontal integration, were economically successful. The flexibility that came from high horizontal and low vertical integration in the economy allowed the firms and their regions to succeed in a fast-moving economic world.

Small farm businesses, learning and change

In this chapter we examine a group of farm businesses who learn together with the objective of making changes in their businesses. We explore whether a social capital framework can help explain the processes whereby their learning results in changes in their businesses.

Individual farms have small workforces, with consequently limited opportunities for interactive learning within the 'organisation'. Small family farm businesses, with single or dual operators comprise 74 per cent of all Australian farm businesses. They are less likely to make changes to farming practices than those with larger management teams (Kilpatrick 1996). The farm businesses which are the subject of this study seek interactive learning opportunities outside the business. The changes which they make are an outcome of both the knowledge and skills within an individual business and the use of the knowledge and skills of others.

Groups and support

The knowledge and skills of other farm businesses are accessed through an informal group support network, which is developed through participation in structured group activities. There is a large body of literature about how effective groups are created (e.g. Corey & Corey 1997. This literature concentrates on the stages of group development, and the characteristics that lead to effective groups, such as cohesion, atmosphere, leadership, rules and procedures and group norms, and on interventions that improve group effectiveness in achieving group goals. There is literature about 'in-group' support of members. There is little literature which discusses how formal groups influence or support their members beyond or outside the group structure.

Theories of group development divide the behaviour of groups over time into between three and six phases. The first phase is 'hesitation and testing' or 'forming'. Middle phases are labelled 'conflict and frustration', 'growth of security and autonomy' and 'confrontation' or 'storming', 'norming' and 'performing'. The final phase is called 'separation' or 'resolution

and recycling'. Interpersonal trust has been identified as central to the success of group processes. The phases of group development can be observed in the farm business group in this study.

The achievement of individual goals such as increased profitability, which is a goal of the farm business group that is the subject of this chapter, usually require a change to practice or behaviour. Support appears to play an important role in the decision to change, in implementing change and in continuing with a new practice once implemented (Kilpatrick 1996; Rogers 1995). Models of decision making such as the innovation-diffusion model as described by Rogers (1995) include a final stage which involves support of others. Yet there is a relatively small amount of literature on groups as support networks for changes made by individual members, for the purpose of achieving individual goals.

Methodology

This chapter examines some of the findings from the study of a group of farm business managers who are members of Executive Link^{TM}, a 'learning community' which is described below. We observed an Executive Link^{TM} meeting, and conducted a focus group with 15 volunteers. Following the meeting, we developed a semi-structured interview questionnaire which we administered to nine volunteer members at their businesses. The researchers were particularly interested in examining the way group members could develop and maintain a 'healthy' group and how this assisted individuals in the group to make changes in their lives and their businesses.

What is Executive Link^{TM}?

Executive Link^{TM} consists of farm businesses which meet for regular nonformal education and training in several Chapters in eastern Australia. Each Chapter consists of a number of Boards made up of around six member farm businesses and their owner/managers. The Boards provide management advice to their members, who are free to accept or reject that advice.

Members must complete a prerequisite farm management training course. Each meeting has an experiential component based on members' workplace (business) situations, and a training component, usually featuring an external trainer or facilitator. In the first component, farm businesses in each Board share information about the physical and financial performance of their businesses with the intention of learning how to better manage their businesses. Training topics in the second component range widely from self development topics such as positive thinking to management topics such as getting the most out of financial statements.

Most members of Executive Link^{TM}, like the majority of Australian farm businesses, are husband and wife partnerships, although multi-generation farm businesses are represented. Typically, all members of the businesses management team attend Executive Link^{TM} meetings. Being a member of Executive Link^{TM} demands being open to change, and requires a demonstrated commitment to training (the prerequisite course). From earlier work on change and training in farm businesses (Kilpatrick 1996) it is safe to say that the members of Executive Link^{TM} are not typical of Australian farm businesses.

Building support networks

Executive Link^{TM} meetings are structured so as to facilitate learning. The farm management consultants who facilitate the meetings actively seek out and incorporate good practice in

adult learning and techniques for working in groups. A major aim of Executive Link[TM] is to assist its members to make changes in their businesses. Here we focus on the way in which the Boards build support networks which facilitate change, but first we look briefly at the changes made by member businesses.

Whilst in this chapter we emphasise the role of support and advice which members provide to each other, it must be made clear that advice and information from outside the Board and outside Executive Link[TM] are also important to the success of the members' businesses. Executive Link[TM] training sessions and the contributions of the facilitators introduce outside ideas into Executive Link[TM]. These external inputs influence the changes which Executive Link[TM] members make to their businesses.

Business changes

The business owners attribute the changes they have made to physical and financial management to their participation in Executive Link[TM]. The changes, which can be summarised as better use of inputs, have contributed to an average 60 per cent increase in business profitability for all continuing member businesses. A few businesses have moved out of the industry after assessing their situations and their likelihood of medium- to long-term viability.

The business managers use tools, such as benchmarking, and other knowledge gained from Executive Link[TM], when making what are often major changes to the way they run their businesses. However, it is the support of fellow members which 'oils' the process of learning and implementing new practices, and which is vital in ensuring that major changes are made. This member sums up the advantage of the support of the group:

> There are so many farmers out there doing lots of work and putting in lots of effort, and just getting nowhere. And with a small amount of training and focussing, and a bit of back up, and a bit of support... it just works so beautifully. [Executive Link[TM] member 1]

The following quote is from one of a group of Executive Link[TM] members who helped a fellow member make decisions about a major change in direction for the business. They describe the experience as positive for the group as well as for the member who was helped:

> There was tremendous commitment to... go to that [Board member's] place... We went on a Saturday and most of us were in the middle of shearing... I had to get people to do my work for me and the other members of the Board were in the same boat... We just had to do it, and it worked really well and we all gained from it. [Executive Link[TM] member 4]

There are processes and stages that the groups go through before they become effective support networks. At Executive Link[TM], the training sessions, structure, rules and procedures for the residential meetings are deliberately designed to create effective groups. The processes are described in our earlier paper (Kilpatrick et al. 1999). There are outcomes of participation in the Executive Link[TM] for the members as individuals in terms of self-confidence and development of interpersonal communication skills, and outcomes for the Boards which allow them to function as a support network for their members.

A capacity to provide support

The process of building a capacity to operate as a support network emerges from the data. The structure, procedures and rules foster a climate in which all ideas are valued: one member commented that there is no such thing as a stupid question, or a stupid idea. Whilst the structure of Executive Link™ and the deliberate creation/fostering of effective groups assist in building Executive Link™ Boards into support networks, it is possible to identify more generally applicable prerequisites for developing a support capacity. The prerequisites, which follow sequentially, are: (1) a high level of personal self-confidence of the individual members (at least in the context of their group) and a high level of interpersonal communication skills, (2) getting to 'know' each other as individuals, developing shared values and trust, (3) coming to regard each other as credible sources of support and advice, and (4) commitment to the Board and fellow members, or being prepared to 'put in'.

1. *Personal development: self-confidence and interpersonal communication skills*

Before they are able and willing to give effective support to fellow Board members, people must get to know themselves and their own strengths and weaknesses. This member has come to realise that she can contribute useful ideas stemming from her non-farming background. After being in Executive Link™ for about 18 months, she now feels confident to contribute.

> [Executive Link™] gives you a lot more confidence in the decisions that you make ... It really does make you feel as if you're part of something … and that you do have a contribution to make, even if it is just ... ideas which are totally non-farming orientated. [Executive Link™ member 6]

Improving interpersonal skills of listening, empathy and being able to take on various roles in the group, such as keeping the group on task and leadership, assists the group's development.

2. *Knowing each other*

'Getting to know' others, combined with shared experiences during Executive Link™ meetings, establishes a climate of openness in which members feel free to challenge others and are open to constructive criticism. The Boards learn effectively because the members value the climate of openness which encourages the challenging of others' practices.

The Executive Link™ members said that getting to know each other and building trust were necessary before sensitive issues were introduced or discussed by members. Changes in these sensitive areas were the changes that permitted the businesses to make major improvements in performance. Once they got to know each other better, they started to refer fundamental problems or issues to the Board. Members talked about the change in the nature and depth of problems and issues brought to the Boards over time:

> At the first couple of meetings ... everybody was so nice to each other. No-one's got any problems ... whereas now, it's going [the Board is working]. The people who didn't have any problems have got the biggest problems. [Executive Link™ member 8]

Knowing others share your outlook helps because it provides support as you go about the overall management and operation of the businesses.

Trust, along with rapport, develops as the groups gets to know each other as people.

> Suddenly I was with a group of people who understood our problems because they all had the same. That was a good feeling ... now there is enough trust, trust and care. [Executive Link^{TM} member 3]

Several members linked trust not only with getting to know their fellow members, but also with an incident where group members are exposed to the criticism of the group, or with a crisis for a member.

> When you get well into it you're pretty exposed, and once you've been exposed you build that trust and then the dynamics start, what you hearing here in some of the older groups you move on from those smaller issues into that deep stuff. [Focus group]

3. *Credibility of group/members as sources of support*
Board members had to get to know each other before they could regard each other as credible sources of advice and support. Support from Boards as changes were made only came after the members understood each other, and after they developed some shared values and trust.

As people got to know each other, they developed a sense of belonging, and a sense that all group members could make valued contributions. Only at this stage are they able to decide whether fellow members and the group as a whole are credible as sources of support. That is, whether reassurance, advice or practical help from the Board would be worth accepting. A member attending his second meeting commented that he was unsure how much notice he should take of advice from his Board, whereas this member of 18 months clearly regards his Board as a credible source of information and advice:

> Everyone's got a strength, and why not pool your resources and say ' Well, he's good at that, I'll ask him how to do it!'. It's a quicker way of finding out than bumbling around trying to do it yourself! [Executive Link^{TM} member 7]

This Executive Link^{TM} member sums up the advantages of having others available for interactive learning who are regarded as credible sources of advice and support:

> You can employ a consultant anytime you like ... but ... he only has one point of view. One-on-one consultancy is never going to be as powerful as the group consultancy because everybody in our Board or in the group has got an area of expertise ... So it's got a lot more bang for your buck. [Executive Link^{TM} member 1]

4. *Commitment (being prepared to 'put in')*
Commitment featured in the focus group and workshop conversations. Commitment reveals the presence of a norm of reciprocity. The existence of commitment to the Board is demonstrated by spontaneous actions which benefit others. One Board helped a member establish a computerised accounting system. Others speak more generally of actions which have helped them as they make changes to their businesses.

> We went to an auction the other day, and we bought this computer for [a fellow member] ... [He's] got a lot to offer. These things work both ways

> ... it's a complex web, and I'm sure if you help other people then you might get someone [to help you]. [Executive Link™ member 8]

Several members talked of an unspoken feeling of commitment, which members can draw upon when needed for dealing with difficult times.
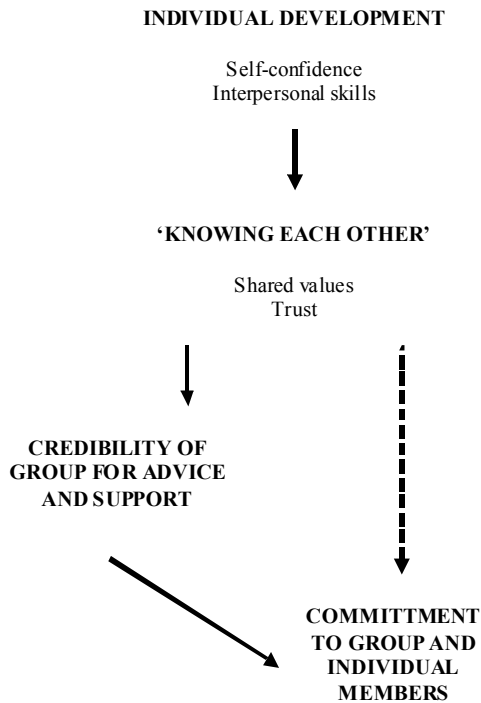
Not all the Boards are equally effective relative to others that have been established for the same length of time. The less effective Boards offer less support to their members. This member business is in a Board which does not contact each other between meetings.

> There's an inclination for the Board members to say 'you go away and do that'. We don't really get in touch with each other and say ' how are you getting on, can I help in any way' ... We could be a lot better. That's where we need that contact between the meetings. [Executive Link™ member 9]

The development of a support network: A model

Executive Link™ builds a support network for its members which assists members as they make changes to their business practices. From our observation of Executive Link™, and interviews with its members, the process whereby the Executive Link™ support network develops over time can be illustrated by Figure 1.

Figure 1: The development of a support network

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

Self-confidence
Interpersonal skills

'KNOWING EACH OTHER'

Shared values
Trust

CREDIBILITY OF
GROUP FOR ADVICE
AND SUPPORT

COMMITTMENT
TO GROUP AND
INDIVIDUAL
MEMBERS

Conclusions

Are the support networks of Executive Link^TM social capital?
Our examination of Executive Link^TM, a group of farm businesses that learn together with
the objective of making changes in their businesses, reveals that social capital is built by
the group. As they learn together, the members generate horizontal social capital, as
observed by Putnam (1993) in his study of Italy. The social capital is used as members
make changes to their businesses. Consistent with the literature cited (Putnam 1993;
Coleman 1988), better outcomes result for Executive Link^TM members when they use their
knowledge and skills along with the knowledge and skills of other members. We suggest
that the social capital which 'oils' the change process for Executive Link^TM members is
knowledge of each others' expertise, other strengths, and weakness, along with recognition
that fellow members are credible as sources of support and advice. The social capital
manifests itself as a commitment to act for the benefit of fellow members. Several members
talked of an unspoken feeling of commitment, which represents a store of social capital
which can be drawn upon when needed for dealing with difficult times.

The structure of Executive Link^TM facilitates the development of the support network, first,
by systematically developing self confidence and interpersonal skills in training sessions

and as the Board members work together; and second, by providing shared experiences in training sessions and Board sessions. There is evidence that Executive Link[TM] follows the stages of group development described by Corey and Corey (1997), Benjamin et al. (1997) and Jacques (1991).

Executive Link[TM] is an example of a learning community which achieves positive economic outcomes because it is adaptable and willing to change. Member businesses are more resilient because the group acts as a support network that assists businesses as they make changes to take advantage of opportunities and minimise the effects of threats; the change processes use the social capital of the community. Members are committed to the group; there is a norm of reciprocity that leads to spontaneous actions for the benefit of others.

While the development of support structures which assist people to make change are recognised as being important, the potential for these structures to be duplicated for other business groups may be limited. The highly structured nature of Executive Link[TM], the high level of commitment and the recognition by participants of the need to change are significant factors in its success. Further work is needed to ascertain how the process described here whereby Executive Link[TM] members develop their support network can be transferred to other settings.

References

Bartel, AP & Lichtenberg, FR 1987, 'The comparative advantage of educated workers in implementing new technology', *The Review of Economics and Statistics,* vol. 69, no. 1, pp. 1–11.

Coleman, J 1988, 'Social capital in the creation of human capital', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 94, Supplement S95–120.

Corey, M & Corey, G 1997, *Groups: Process and practice*, Brooks/Cole, Pacific Grove, California.

Kilpatrick, S 1996, *Change, training and farm profitability*, National Farmers Federation, Canberra.

Kilpatrick, S, Bell, R & Falk, I 1999, 'The role of group learning in building social capital', *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 129–144..

Putnam, R 1993, *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy,* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.

Rogers, E 1995, *Diffusion of innovations*, 4th edn, The Free Press, New York.

Senge, P 1993, *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*, Century Press, London.

Young, M 1995, 'Post-compulsory education for a learning society', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 141–164.

CHAPTER 11
Groups that learn and how they do it

Elizabeth Kasl

For the last decade there has been a growing recognition that understanding small teams and their capacities to learn is key to understanding organisational capacity for creative engagement with the challenges of a rapidly changing world. In his influential book on learning organisation, Peter Senge (1990) writes, 'teams, not individuals, are the fundamental learning unit in modern organisations ... unless teams can learn, the organisation cannot learn' (p. 10).

My premise for this paper is that Senge's appraisal about the critical role of the team in creating a learning organisation is equally useful in understanding how small groups can be a strong force for community learning and transformative change. Drawing from my own experiences as well as the published work of others, I describe strategies for small-group learning, distinguish between learning and task modes in small groups, and offer a vision for how community learning practitioners might support small-group learning.

Three contexts for understanding small-group learning

Since my understanding about small-group learning is blended from three different contexts, I begin by describing briefly each context.

In case study research on team learning, Kathleen Dechant, Victoria Marsick and I (Kasl, Marsick & Dechant 1997) have studied how group learning processes and conditions change qualitatively as teams move through different modes of learning. We call these modes: fragmented, pooled, synergistic, and continuous.

In the *fragmented* mode, individuals learn separately, but the group does not learn as a holistic system. Members retain their separate views and are often not committed to working as a group. In the *pooled* mode, individuals begin to share information and perspectives in the interest of group efficiency and effectiveness. Sometimes, small clusters of individuals learn together, but the group as an entire unit does not learn; there is not yet an experience of having knowledge that is uniquely the group's own. In the *synergistic* mode, members create knowledge mutually. Divergent perspectives are integrated through dialectical processes that create shared meaning schemes. Simple phrases or metaphors from the team's experience often become code words for more elaborate meanings. Because each individual contributes to the team's knowledge, individuals integrate team knowledge into personal meaning schemes. As a result, knowledge created in a synergistic mode is frequently shared outside the group. Our concept of the *continuous* mode describes a team in which synergistic learning becomes habitual (Kasl, Marsick & Dechant 1997, pp. 230–231).

The second context from which I draw my understanding of small group learning is the practice of cooperative or collaborative inquiry, which for me, springs from two sources. In June of 1990, I joined other scholar-practitioners in what became a long-term commitment. We wanted to create and advocate new forms of collaboration in the academic workplace (Group for Collaborative Inquiry 1993), and we wanted to experiment with experience-based methods for research about transformative learning (Group for Collaborative Inquiry 1994). To symbolise our belief that knowledge is created in relationship, we chose a group name, which we use for publication.

A few months after helping to form the Group for Collaborative Inquiry, I discovered a collection of case studies published by Peter Reason as examples of new paradigm research (Reason 1988). In this volume, Reason describes cooperative inquiry as a research method, noting that it is closely linked with a process originally described as experiential inquiry by John Heron in 1971. Intrigued, I invited students from the Adult Education Guided Independent Study (AEGIS) program at Columbia University's Teachers College to explore with me this method as a possible dissertation strategy. Five adventurous students responded, and during the next three years they studied systematically how learning is experienced through the process that they named collaborative inquiry. Since the culmination of their project, I have continued to learn and practice this method—in the classroom, in the community, and in advising new dissertation projects.

The third context that informs my experience is my current practice as a teacher. I am deeply immersed in an innovative graduate program that has as a central tenet the importance of learning community. Students and faculty intentionally create learning community among themselves so that they can use their experience as a laboratory for learning how such communities form and sustain themselves (Elias 1997; Kasl & Elias 1997). During the third year of the program curriculum, students are required to create public demonstrations of what their group, as a community, has learned about transformative learning and change in human systems.

Group learning

I now draw from my experiences to explain why I believe small groups can be a strong force for community learning. My proposition is rooted in the concept of synergistic learning as my colleagues and I define it in the team learning model. The synergistic mode describes a process in which the group creates knowledge that all members endorse, that all members had a part in creating, and that all members can explain in their own words from the perspective of their individual and the group's experience. When a group operates synergistically, it creates a mutually held knowledge base from which actions can be agreed upon and taken. I propose that when small groups are learning in a synergistic mode, they provide a catalyst for community learning and transformative change because numbers of individuals share a knowledge base that they may infuse into environments outside the learning group, creating the possibility for greater community learning.

Playing on the title of this paper, 'Groups that learn and how they do it', I now examine the characteristics of groups that operate in the synergistic learning mode of learning, and then the strategies they use to support this capacity.

Groups that learn . . .

Cooperative and collaborative inquiry processes promote development of groups that operate in the synergistic mode. In his recent book, which summarises 25 years of reflection and practice, John Heron (1996) explains:

> Co-operative inquiry is a form of participative, person-centred inquiry, which does research with people not on them, or *about* them ... There is intentional interplay between reflection and making sense on the one hand, and experience and action on the other. There is explicit attention ... to the validity of the inquiry and its findings. There is a radical epistemology for a wide-ranging inquiry method that can be both informative about and transformative of any aspect of the human condition ... (pp. 19–20).

The process of learning from personal experience through extended, systematic cycles of reflection and action with others, is what the Teachers College doctoral students set out to study when they posed the research question, 'How is learning experienced in collaborative inquiry?' In their phenomenological analysis of six different collaborative inquiry groups (Bray 1995; Gerdau 1995; Smith 1995; Yorks 1995; Zelman 1995), they found that learning was experienced as:

- A striving for equilibrium between the individual and the group.
- Enhanced access to non-linguistic knowing.
- An empowering process.
- Energising.
- A change in critical subjectivity and critical inter-subjectivity.
- Having a boundary-less quality.

In the graduate program in which I currently work, the cohorts of adult students who are charged with the task of becoming learning communities also use extended, systematic cycles of reflection and action. As part of its demonstration of competency as a learning system, our fifth cohort conducted a phenomenological study addressing the question, 'What is the soul of Cohort 5?'. The cohort of 18 students identified five essential themes of soul, a quality that I think of as the group's extraordinary capacity to communicate authentically and respectfully, particularly about differences in race, gender, and sexual orientation. The themes of soul identified are:

- capacity for multiple perspectives;
- self awareness;
- improvisation;
- spiritual nature, and
- love, compassion, commitment.

Combining the two studies, I sketch a portrait of the small learning group that functions in the synergistic mode. Groups that learn synergistically must be composed of individuals who have capacity for self-awareness as well as recognition of and respect for others' perspectives. Although all members should enter the group with a minimum level of these capacities, the group should work consciously to promote capacity development—rationally and analytically through practicing critical subjectivity and critical inter-subjectivity, and spiritually through practicing love, compassion, and commitment. Groups that learn are ready to improvise, ever attuned to the emergence of learning possibilities. Members' non-linguistic knowing is often helped to emerge from the tacit to the explicit because the group is open to possibility and respectful of each member's potential for contribution. Individuals who experience group learning feel empowered by their new knowledge and often leave the learning group with more energy than they had at the beginning of the meeting. Because the learning is created from members' life experience and with each member's full participation, participants in learning groups do not distinguish boundaries between their group's learning and their lives. Thus, they infuse their learning into the larger community.

. . . And how they do it

In our research on team learning, my colleagues and I identified five learning processes used by teams in the two case studies: framing, reframing, experimenting, crossing boundaries, and integrating perspectives (Kasl, Marsick & Dechant 1997).

Curious about the strategies that enable teams to learn, Victoria Marsick and I undertook an analysis of several written reports of team or group learning (Kasl & Marsick 1997). We selected 20 reports that described groups that learned, at least part of the time in the synergistic mode as we defined it. Seven cases described learning in the workplace where the team had been vested with a management or problem-solving task, two described the learning experienced by research teams, and 11 described the learning experienced by cooperative or collaborative inquiry groups. Group size ranged from three to 20. With the exception of four groups, members were typically middle-class, white professionals. There are three cases from Great Britain, one from Australia, one from Canada, and 15 from the United States. We identified six strategies that we named as follows:

- Action/reflection processes.
- Finding meaning, not forcing it.
- Keeping faith in the midst of chaos and ambiguity.
- Going public.
- Embracing differences, learning from conflict.
- Reconceptualising time.

When he describes validity in cooperative inquiry, John Heron writes about coherence—among the cooperative inquirers, between the cooperative inquirers and their lived experience, and among the findings posited from the inquiry. He describes many strategies that cooperative inquirers can implement in order to maximise the likelihood that their inquiry will achieve coherence. These strategies for achieving meaningful group learning, or validity procedures as Heron (1996, pp. 131–157), calls them are:

- Research cycling.
- Balance of divergence and convergence.
- Balance between action and reflection.
- Use of descriptive, evaluative, explanatory, and applied reflection.
- Challenging uncritical subjectivity.
- Chaos and order.
- Management of unaware projections.
- Sustaining authentic collaboration.
- Open and closed boundaries.
- Variegated replication.
- Concerted action.

Strategies discerned from the case studies of learning groups are similar to the strategies prescribed as validity procedures by Heron. Groups that learn use extended cycles of action and reflection, including processes of framing, reframing, experimenting, and integrating perspectives. Members at times focus inwardly, and at other times readily cross boundaries between their own group and others. They learn how to be comfortable with chaos, ambiguity, and conflict because they understand that these states of being are potentially a cauldron for generative learning if they can also balance divergence with convergence, challenge uncritical subjectivity, manage unaware projections, and sustain authentic collaboration. 'Finding meaning/not forcing it' is a component of what Heron calls explanatory reflection, referring to various strategies for taking a group outside analytic modes of knowing, such as establishing norms for story-telling, experiential exercises, using art and metaphor, or intentionally allowing the group to go 'off task' by

engaging in associational thinking that on the surface seems not to be moving the agenda forward.

Two of the strategies identified from the analysis of the 20 case studies are not directly related to Heron's discussion. These are 'going public' and 'reconceptualising time.'   Kasl and Marsick (1997) explain:

> [P]reparing to share the group's knowledge with an audience outside the group was a catalyst for learning. The process of preparing interim oral reports for outside funding agents consolidated learning for two groups of community women. Experiencing respectful appreciation from their audiences precipitated in the women new respect for the importance of their work as well as growing self-confidence … When groups prepared written reports, the process of reflecting on written words uncovered differences in perspectives that had not before been visible, and served as an impetus for further learning ... Workplace teams experienced the preparation of reports for managers or clients as an impetus for learning. In all cases, the act of going public was associated with a deadline, and therefore forced the group into an accelerated process of confirming the knowledge it had been creating ...

> When groups perceive themselves to be created to address a particular task, the pressure of task accomplishment makes group learning difficult ... This tension between learning and output is highly evident in the way in which the group experiences time. We suggest that group learning is enhanced when groups learn to reconceptualise time as a resource because they can then: generate ideas for which relevance is not immediately apparent; cycle back and forth between action and reflection, taking time to develop skilfulness with reflection; and create a context for shared history that leads to new ways of thinking, feeling, or acting. Research reports support our hypothesis, but also suggest that groups experience difficulty in reconceptualising time in this way if members perceive their focus primarily as getting the job done, and if nothing is done to assist members to think about time differently (p. 252).

Distinguishing between learning and task modes

Several of Heron's prescribed validity procedures mention a balance between opposites. I suggest that a group's orientation toward learning and task is another pairing that calls for balance. When groups reach convergence without adequate experience of divergence, when groups force convergence or acquiescence by stifling diverse perspectives and critical subjectivity, when they allow action to outweigh reflection, when they impose order too quickly in order to escape members' fear of chaos, ambiguity, or running out of time, they prevent themselves from learning. At such moments, group members are likely to perceive their goal as the accomplishment of a task. If the task calls for generative learning, the group impedes its own effectiveness in a paradoxical pursuit of task efficiency. At the same time, as demonstrated by the strategy called 'going public,' turning to task can catalyse and accelerate group learning. Groups need to develop a metacognition of how to move back and forth between task and learning modes, and be deliberate in creating opportunities to make those moves.

Small groups and community learning

I close with a story about the interaction between small group and community learning, based on experiences in the program in which I currently am teaching. My story is about how learning in a number of different small groups is gathering force to create community

learning in my institution, as well as in the larger community. The learning is about white consciousness, how it perpetuates racism, and how white people might take action to make change in their institutions and communities.

This learning began in 1993, when a new program was started within the institution. A student tells the story of how the new program catapulted the institution into learning about white consciousness here.

The Story of the MIX
by
Mat Schwarzman

We are the MIX, the Multicultural Inquiry eXchange, and this is our creation story. Our group is the second residential doctoral cohort in the new School for Transformative Learning at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. We began our graduate work in August 1993 with a six-day intensive orientation, to be followed by monthly weekend meetings. At that time, the group consisted of two faculty and nine students. Both faculty and eight of the nine students were European Americans; one student was African American. Six of the group were women, five were men.

During the August intensive each member made an hour-long autobiographical presentation. Combining anecdotes, images, songs, and chronologies, each attempted—passionately but carefully—to disclose personal information that seemed relevant for fostering understanding among people who were about to begin a long and no doubt difficult journey. Victor, the African American member of the group, was one of the last. As he spoke, it was clear how different his story was because of its emphasis on how the colour of his skin affected his life. A powerful silence came over the group.

As someone accustomed to being in white-dominated situations where his experiences were likely to be unique, Victor tried to protect himself from the likelihood of further probing by requesting beforehand that his story be left to stand on it own, without discussion. 'This is necessary for a lot of people of colour,' he observed. 'Otherwise, we can be turned into objects of white people's curiosity.' Nonetheless, Suzanne, a white woman in the group, pressed Victor to keep sharing his experience. Two or three times he refused her request, 'feeling,' he later explained, 'dangerously close to tapping into a reservoir of pain and anger that my life's experience has taught me not to share with unsuspecting white people.' Suzanne wanted to know more, learn more, understand more, and eventually posed a question that propelled Victor to the explosion that he desperately wanted to avoid. 'This is just how it starts,' he wrote later, 'and it ends with racist stereotypes of violent African American males being reinforced perfectly.'

No-one in the group remembers many of the details of the next few minutes. In many ways, they're unimportant. The situation was charged and raw. Many arguments were made concerning the implications of Suzanne's and Victor's argument. Some agreed that he was being reverse-racist, others felt Suzanne was being unfeeling if sincere, and still others argued that this type of incident was going to continue unless something was done about the radically imbalanced racial dynamics in the group. Some members threatened to leave if steps were not taken to remedy the situation. Others threatened to leave if they were.

After a break, an animated debate continued, not only during that day, but also over the remainder of the residency. Eventually, the group agreed to lobby the school administration for support to reopen admissions in order to recruit students of colour to balance the learning community. Collectively, the group drafted a letter to the Dean and secured a promise of recruitment scholarships. Members pledged to organise an aggressive recruitment effort and participate actively in the accelerated admissions process.

By its September cohort weekend, the MIX had become a group of 19 students. Thanks to an incredible organising effort to which almost every member contributed, eight new people of colour joined the cohort—three African American women, two African American men, a Chicana, a Chicano, and a Chinese American. Since that time, whites have been in a minority in the MIX.

Writing from the vantage point of two years later, it is clear that this opening episode in our history is central to who and what the MIX is. Having to unearth, expose and negotiate deeply held beliefs and ways of being in order to be and work together has profoundly transformed almost everyone in the group. At every turn, race and ethnicity are lenses for understanding human systems and for deconstructing social issues. All whites in the MIX acknowledge being profoundly affected by their experience in the group. Expecting to learn about what it means to be African American, Latino, and Asian American, they have instead most deeply and transformatively learned what it means to be *white ...* (Kasl & Elias 1997, p. 23).

Mat begins his essay by explaining that he is telling the creation story of the MIX. He is also telling the creation story of community learning about white consciousness in the institution. In 1996, as part of its public demonstration of its competence as a learning system, the MIX created a research paper, based on its own experience as well as theory and research of others, about the relationship between transformative learning and multiculturalism. Although this formal paper is important, it is not the key to understanding how knowledge moved from the MIX to the larger community. The key explanatory concept is the 'boundary-less quality' of group learning. All of the white people in that cohort took their growing consciousness into their lives. Faculty inside the MIX became a conduit for new insights into the larger program; students inside the MIX interacted with students in other cohorts and programs. A chain of effect can be charted: the cohort that followed the MIX engaged in a six-month cultural synergy process on racism, a process rooted in a strategy of having groups develop racial consciousness within race groups, before attempting to dialogue across race groups (Barlas et al. in press). The next cohort included as part of its group competency demonstration, a cooperative inquiry conducted by four students on the effects of white norms and consciousness.

During this cohort's public event, just completed in 1998, the white consciousness, cooperative inquiry team challenged the attendees to action. Responding to that challenge, two teams are now making action plans. A group of students and faculty of colour is designing a formal course in cultural consciousness for students of colour, and is at the same time making plans to collaborate on scholarly projects. A group of white students and faculty is finalising plans to convene a number of cooperative inquiry groups, each of which will explore some aspect of white consciousness. We are providing a coach who will be available to give technical assistance with the cooperative inquiry method, and are planning a culminating conference so that all groups can come together and share their knowledge about white consciousness. Reaching outside our program to invite

participation, we already have faculty and students from sister colleges in the San Francisco Bay area who plan to join our inquiry.

A final reflection

In telling my story about how small groups that learn can create learning in the larger community, I mentioned specifically one characteristic of the learning group—boundary-less quality. I could now retell the story, demonstrating and amplifying how this story illustrates all the characteristics and learning strategies described in this paper. Time and space prevent such a retelling, but I invite the reader to engage with the story through the lens of the concepts described in this paper—characteristics of groups that learn and the strategies they use to do it.

I believe that community learning can be served when practitioners who hope to foster community learning focus their efforts on developing capacity in the community for small group learning. An important factor in the story I just related is the fact that we have spent five years developing basic inquiry skills. The inquiries that people have pursued have been about a great variety of topics, but now that we are launching a project in which the community focuses on one topic, we have a critical mass of people who are well-practiced in learning through systematic cycles of action and reflection, using an extended epistemology, with attention to validity.

Even if a community has nurtured its skilfulness in small-group inquiry, there are daunting challenges for the community learning practitioner. Often, we focus on community learning when there is a need for change and when constituencies have a stake in the direction of the change. Returning to the example of my story, I note that one of our biggest challenges will be to struggle with some participants' desire to hasten the learning process for others. There is an all-too-human temptation for would-be inquirers who have already learned about a topic to want to 'teach' others what they have come to know. In the case of our project, some participants may be more focused on the task of changing the oppressive structures created by white consciousness by prodding others into action, than they are on the process of engaging in an inquiry where all learn authentically from personal cycles of reflection and action. Those of us who are the primary impetus for the project are prone to the same mistake. We believe that learners are most likely to change significantly when they learn authentically from their own experience, and at the same time, we want them to discover particular truths about white consciousness. Herein is a great paradox for community learning practitioners. The kind of learning that we hope we can foster cannot be shaped or controlled. We can put processes in place, but then must stand back so the learning has space to take root and time to grow.

References

Barlas, C, Cherry-Smith, A, Rosenwasser, P & Winlock, C (in press), 'Synergic inquiry in action: The expansion of racial consciousness', in *Synergic inquiry: Leveraging differences for transformative action,* eds Y Tang & C Joiner, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Bray, J 1995, 'The Noetic Experience of learning in collaborative inquiry groups—From descriptive, hermeneutic, and eidetic perspectives', *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 56 (07), 25247 (University Microfilms No. AAC95-39779).

Elias, DG 1997, 'It's time to change our minds: An introduction to transformative learning', *ReVision,* vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 2–6.

Gerdau, J 1995, 'Learning in adulthood through collaborative inquiry', *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 56 (07). 25247 (University Microfilms No. AAC95-39807).

Group for Collaborative Inquiry 1993, 'The democratisation of knowledge', *Adult Education Quarterly,* vol. 44, no. 1, pp. 43–51.

Group for Collaborative Inquiry 1994, 'A model for transformative learning: individual development and social action', *35th Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings,* University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, pp. 169–174.

Heron, J 1996, *Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Kasl, E & Elias, D 1997, 'Transformative learning in action: A case study', *ReVision,* vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 20–27.

Kasl, E & Marsick, V 1997, 'Epistemology of groups as learning systems: A research-based analysis', *Crossing Borders, Breaking Boundaries, Research in the Education of Adults, An International Conference: Proceedings of the 27th Annual Conference of the Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults (SCUTREA)*, Birbeck College, University of London, London, 1–3 July, pp. 250–254.

Kasl, E, Marsick, V & Dechant, K 1997, 'Teams as learners: A research-based model of team learning', *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, vol. 33, no. 2, pp. 227–246.

Reason, P (ed.) 1988, *Human inquiry in action: Developments in new paradigm research*, Sage, Newbury Park, CA.

Senge, P 1990, *The Fifth Discipline: The art and practice of the learning* organization, Doubleday, New York.

Smith, LL 1995, 'Collaborative inquiry as an adult learning strategy', *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 56 (07), 2533 (University Microfilms No. AAC95-39867).

Yorks, L 1995, 'Understanding how learning is experienced through collaborative inquiry: A phenomenological study', *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 56 (07), 2534 (University Microfilms No. AAC95-39884).

Zelman, A 1995, 'Answering the question: How is learning experienced through collaborative inquiry?', *Dissertation Abstracts International,* 56 (07), 2534 (University Microfilms No. AAC95-39885).

Spiritual impact statements:
A key to sustainability

Patrick Bradbery, G (Jock) Fletcher and R (Bob) Molloy

Regional development has, in the past, paid little attention to the spiritual or social context, or indeed the human interconnectedness of the region. Rational economic criteria are developed and implemented through a policy process which is predominantly used as the basis for specifying the appropriate development pathway for a region, although more recently ecological impact statements and community-based processes have been included. There has also been very little attention given to the concepts and practice of civil society or social capital. Whilst some attention may be provided to Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander sites in developing regional development plans, little or no attention is given to discernment of the spirit of the land or its people, in the region itself. In this chapter, the importance of including such discernment in planning and implementing development is identified. It is argued that sustainable development of a region by necessity includes consideration of the natural, human, and spiritual resources of the region.

Introduction

Following the path of regional development which has paid little attention to the spiritual and social context has led to impasse situations, most graphically illustrated by the Hindmarsh Island Bridge dispute, but repeated on a smaller scale throughout Australia and on many scales throughout the world. Perhaps even more disturbing are the developments that have taken place without any such intervention, when it is only after the event that the damage is recognised and lamented.

This chapter deals with the question of what is meant by the term spirituality then moves on to a presentation of what is proposed as an ideal image of regional development. It describes some aspects of the present policy reality, and considers what needs to be done in order to facilitate the movement from the present reality towards the ideal image.

Spiritual—what does that mean?

What is it that we mean when we use the word spiritual? The *Microsoft Word 7 Thesaurus* suggests 'ethereal, airy, holy or religious', as alternatives to the word spiritual. The *Penguin Dictionary of Religion* suggests that:

> The singular concept (of spirit) defies definition. Denoting the form of being which has no distinctively material properties, 'spirit' (derived like its equivalents in many languages from words for breath or wind, as invisible, yet powerful and life-giving), connotes life, consciousness, self-activity. RELIGION is often regarded as having to do with 'the things of the spirit', what is spiritual (Hinnells 1984, p. 310).

This then leads us to the concept of the sacred, which may be confined to humans, or more typically is extended in some way beyond the human, not necessarily to the extent of regarding other entities as ensouled. Durkheim suggested that:

> All known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic. They presuppose a classification of all things, real and ideal, of which men think into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by two distinct terms which are translated well enough by the words *profane* and *sacred*. This

division of the world into two domains is the distinctive trait of religious thought; the beliefs, myths, dogmas and legends are either representations or systems of representations which express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers which are attributed to them, or their relations with each other and with profane things (1912, p. 52).

Mircea Eliade (1983), while accepting Durkheim's argument that the sacred/profane distinction is at the centre of the theory of religion, broke with Durkheim over a central issue. Like Durkheim, Eliade insists that the sacred and profane are 'wholly other'; the sacred is of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural 'profane' world. However, for Durkheim, the sacred is not an intrinsic property of things but is rather a title bestowed by humans on other persons, places or things, while Eliade reverses this relationship. For him, it is the sacred, which acts upon the human subject.

The sacred for Eliade (1975) is an active property of things. The sacred is saturated with being. It is real. In contrast, the profane is chaotic and unreal. A prime function of the sacred is to 'found the world', to provide a point of orientation.

In the context of this chapter, we would like to emphasise the unifying aspect of the sacred. We have chosen to express this unification as *interconnectedness*. Thus when we are referring to the spiritual impact of developments, we are referring to the effect that it has on the interconnectedness of human with human, but also on the interconnectedness of the human with plants, animals and inanimate objects as well.

Sacred space

Sacred spaces and times are among the most common, visible forms of religious expression. Clearly delineated from ordinary or profane space or time, they are the major matrices and foci through which religious systems make contact with what is deemed holy. A major effect of these concepts is 'to show that religiousness is not just a matter of beliefs but also of *observance and ritual participation*' (Smith 1995, p. 945, italics ours). From this we can derive the notion that a space and/or a time that is observed, and becomes a focus of ritual participation, can be regarded as a sacred space or time.

It is important to note also that space can be designated as sacred by virtue of its strategic significance to the occupants or users of the space. In this sense, the sharp delineation of the sacred and profane adopted by Durkheim, and less so by Eliade begins to blur.

> The adjective *sacred* connotes both dedication to a transhuman purpose, and powerful, in the sense that participants acknowledge a superhuman connection at these specially defined junctures. … Space can have a sacred aspect in an even more elemental, territorial sense by virtue of the intensity and strategicness of the social boundaries it signifies, eg. hearths, thresholds, homes, villages, or 'the motherland' (Smith 1995, p. 945).

We can extend this lack of distinction even further when we include the wide spectrum of sacred space configurations that exist from culture to culture. Thus it is possible to envisage sacred space ranging from the natural landforms of the Aboriginal Dreaming, through the local church or synagogue or mosque, to the palatial cathedrals of Europe, and even to structures not commonly associated with religion, such as sporting arenas. Who among us would be game to tell a Melburnian that the Melbourne Cricket Ground is not a sacred place?

We would also argue that so-called *heritage sites* are further examples of sacred spaces. These act as memory banks for the community which allows it to more readily recall a time when a significant interconnecting event occurred in that place. In this sense, it may be connecting the present with the past that is significant. Again, Smith claims:

> Sacred space sometimes forms around places that are associated with great events in the memory of the community. Scriptures, myths and legends recount sacred histories that tell of the miraculous or world-founding deeds of gods and ancestors performed at certain sites, (1995, pp. 945–46).

In summary then, we put forward the proposition that the interconnectedness of humans with one another and with their environment is an expression of unity or wholeness. The vehicle for this interconnectedness is the soul or spirit of the person and/or environmental objects. The manifestation of the presence of such a spirit or *djang* as it is called by some Indigenous Australians, in a place is designated as the sacredness of the place or site. The sacredness of a place may be related to its immediate impact on the interconnectedness of the people living in, or otherwise using that space. Alternatively there may be a more tenuous relationship with past events and/or people, which are of spiritual significance. Using this sense of sacred, we may include heritage sites as sacred sites.

The ideal image

If we accept that a greater level of interconnectedness is a desirable goal, then we can start to imagine a state of being where such a goal is at least in the process of being achieved. This imaginal process can then be transformed into some more or less concrete characteristics which can help us to identify whether we are approaching or receding from such an ideal state. This is not to deny that ultimately what we are seeking is somewhat like Pirsig's (1976) concept of quality, i.e. ultimately it is something that we intuit rather than approach from the purely rational approach of measurement.

As a starting point for this process, and in no way wishing to limit it, we would suggest that a society in which there was a high degree of interconnectedness would be one in which there were relatively high levels of:

1. Community involvement.
2. Subsidiarity (decisions being made at the lowest possible level—'grass roots').
3. Collegiality (decisions made by the group affected rather than by an individual or sub-group for the group).
4. Creativity.
5. Systems thinking (an interconnected world view).
6. Physical and mental health.
7. Cultural awareness.
8. Meaningful employment.
9. Respect for other people and their rights and entitlements.
10. Egalitarianism (not to be confused with uniformity).

It is fairly self-evident that we as yet do not have a range of measures available to us for the evaluation of these characteristics. One of the challenges then, is to develop such a range of measures. In the interim, it is possible for us to use some 'positive negatives' or

'mirror' indices, which we do have available in order to get some sense of whether our spirituality is increasing or decreasing.

These so-called mirror indices are measures of the absence rather than the presence of spirituality, and would include things such as:

1. Crime rates.
2. Morbidity indices.
3. Suicide rates.
4. Size of the 'health' budget.
5. Distribution of wealth.
6. Distribution of income.
7. Family breakdown rates.
8. Unemployment rates.

It is important once again to emphasise that these are all second or third order measures of spirituality or a 'sacred society', and any such measures need to be in some sense congruent with the intuitive sense of the sacred or spiritual essence of a place or community. It is vital that we do not lose sight of the essentially numinous nature of the concepts with which we are dealing. We cannot directly measure the *djang* or spirit of a sacred site, nor of a community.

Discerning the sacredness of a place or the spirituality of a community is more likely to be achieved by listening to people, particularly the Elders. By listening to a community's stories, songs and poetry, by interpreting their art works, by studying the ways in which they depict the interconnectedness of people with one another and with their environment, we are more likely to form an accurate perception of the presence or absence of spirit.

However, as two of the authors have argued elsewhere (Fletcher & Bradbery 1995, p. 16), taking this step will involve a risk, a risk of being wrong. There are no formulae every situation is different.

The present reality

In the present reality of regional development, there is little concern for matters beyond the economic and the rational. Even the adoption of the Environmental Impact Statement process is one that is heavily charged with a perception of the economic impact on the environment rather than using spiritual values, values which recognise our interconnectedness with nature and with our yet unborn progeny.

Drawing on a paper written by one of the authors (Fletcher 1997) we present below a summary of the regional development policies of the former Labor Federal government and the current Coalition government's regional development policies.

The previous (ALP) government's regional development policy consisted of:

- A regional vision, regional economic development strategies and the implementation of specific initiatives.
- The establishment and operation of regional groups.
- Best practice approaches, management tools for regional development practitioners and training.
- First-stop shops for program delivery.

- Partnerships and the establishment of consultative mechanisms.

Whilst this regional development policy acknowledged bottom-up processes and community participation, which are consistent with a spiritually-imbued approach, the implementation policies for the strategy remained vague and indeterminant, with individual regional development organisations carrying the vanguard. This of course could be a most appropriate way to implement a spiritual dimension, but it requires a more profound development of consciousness than currently exists.

The current (Liberal-National Coalition) government's approach to regional development can be seen as a series of independent measures that are initiatives for regional Australia, with many of these arising out of different Ministerial portfolios. It is not a regional development policy as such nor does it have any apparent philosophical framework or cohesive strategy. Further, there is no reference to process and analysis as the two legs of regional development. Essentially, it is a top-down policy approach, which is traditional interventionism, with no bottom-up based processes, which are essential to the development of a more holistic or spiritual approach to development. Absent from the policy is any concept of community self-reliance (subsidiarity).

Thus, although it can be argued that the regional development policy of the former ALP government is more consistent with moving towards the ideal we are proposing, neither policy is capable of moving far from the *status quo*.

Moving from the present reality towards the ideal image

If the aim of regional (or other) development is sustainability, this means acknowledging an interrelated concept of civil society, social capital and spirituality within an integrated community-based process. Understanding this in both theory and praxis means recognising what regional (or other) communities are, and what they could become. As part of this integrated framework, civil society can be conceptualised as a self-managing community facilitated by government. This raises questions about the appropriateness of our present form of government for achieving this outcome, but that is an issue that needs to be addressed elsewhere.

A fundamental part of this holistic framework is social capital, which represents the trust, openness, norms and networks within a community. What is most significant within this system is that any attempt to harness voluntary cooperation is easier in a community where there is an inherited stock of social capital in the forms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement. This sort of integrated system would lead to sustainable regional (or other) development through a facilitative pathway, subject to a collective consciousness.

The development of that collective consciousness is a spiritual process. It is one that takes account of the interconnectedness of the people, of the sacredness of place, and which uses sacramental processes to further enhance that interconnectedness or spirituality. (A sacramental process is one that embodies that which it signifies—in the vernacular it 'walks the talk'.)

It is on this basis that we argue that the fundamental process on which regional (or other) development plans should be grown is the process of spiritual discernment. This process, which would include listening with the heart as well as the head to the Elders (and others) in the community, and identifying trends in appropriate indicators, can provide the sustainable foundation on which environmental impact statements and then cost benefit analyses can be built. The outcome of the process of discernment, which we have labelled

a Spiritual Impact Statement, would once again allow us to integrate the concepts of a community, which is based on, place (sacred sites) and a community of interests (interconnectedness).

Such an approach would allow us to adopt a truly sustainable approach to development. However, it would be foolish to underestimate the change of consciousness that is required for us to bring such a change about. Until we have brought back together the disparate parts of our individual psyches and then the collective ones of our local communities, we cannot hope to heal the divisions, which are rampant in our national psyche. Such a healing process is an essential part of the consciousness raising that will allow the introduction and use of spiritual impact statements and hence make sustainable development more than an illusion.

References

Durkheim, E 1912, (tr. 1961), *The elementary forms of the religious life*, Allen & Unwin, London.

Eliade, M 1975, *Myths, Dreams, and mysteries: The encounter between contemporary faiths and archaic realities,* Harper Torchbooks, New York.

Eliade, M 1983, *From primitives to Zen: A thematic sourcebook of the history of religions,* Collins, London.

Fletcher, GA & Bradbery, PJ 1995, 'Spirituality and management—Contemplation time', Paper presented at *Annual Conference of Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management,* 3–6 December, Townsville.

Fletcher, GA 1997, 'Human interconnectedness as a critical dimension for agribusiness outcomes from regional development policies', Paper presented at *Rural Australia: Towards 2000 Conference,* 2–4 July, CSU, Wagga Wagga.

Hinnells, JR (ed.) 1984, *Penguin Dictionary of Religion,* Penguin, London.

Microsoft Word 7 Thesaurus 1995, Microsoft Corporation, USA.

Pirsig, R 1976, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An inquiry into values,* Corgi, London.

Smith, JZ (ed.) 1995, *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Religion,* Harper Collins, San Francisco.