

Appendix to

**What convinces enterprises to value training and
learning and what does not?**

A study in using case studies to develop cultures of training
and learning

Case studies collected by
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HARVEY BEEF

Harvey, WA

A family-owned meat processing company with 510 employees, its interest in training beyond the bare minimum is quite recent. But it is already receiving training awards and reaping business dividends.

E G Green and Sons, trading as Harvey Beef and Balmoral, is a family business which began in 1919 by Ernest George Green and his wife Emily.

Harvey Beef is a meat processing company, located in the South West of Western Australia and is described by its employees as a 'very fair, family business, with personal clients and a growing export market'. The company varies in size from 320 staff up to 510 staff in the busier months of September through to early March.

The walls of the reception area reflect the feel of the company. Impressive awards such as the 1996 Deloitte PBS/BRW Top 500 Private Companies Plaque and the 1984 CCI Company of the Year Award share pride of place with the Green's Occupational Safety and Health Policy, a Certificate of Accreditation by Aus-Meat Limited and acknowledgment of the company's recent participation in the Foodsafe Basic Foodhandler Training Program. The company also boasts being the current champion of the RCA President's Cup Golf Challenge. The company and the staff seem to be both modest and proud achievers.

Tony Bandera is now the Training Officer at Harvey Beef. He started working for Greens some 25 years ago. 'I started working here in the 70's when working in meat works was a place you went until you got a real job'. But today, there is a real sense that Harvey Beef has helped to change that way of thinking in its staff and some of that change is directly related to the new Chief Executive Officer, Gary Minton's, push for training throughout the last two years. Tony believes that 'upper management valuing the process is of significant importance to training outcomes - and they are behind it 100%'.

WHY VALUE TRAINING NOW?

There are varied reasons behind Harvey Beef's support of training. As with all meat processing companies, Greens needs to operate at a profit, it needs to produce a quality product and it needs to ensure that food safety standards are met and exceeded. Tony firmly believes that 'training is the key to maintaining the bottom line'.

Harvey Beef is also an exporter and benchmarks its quality assurance processes against those of the USA. The Plant undergoes inspections by American auditors on a regular basis to ensure it is compliant. For Harvey Beef, training of staff in safe handling procedures is not only important for profitability, it is a legal requirement.

Prior to 1998, Harvey Beef had a system of on the job learning which really took the form of people new to an area learning from those with experience. Staff requiring specific training in

occupational health and safety aspects were given access to courses run by external trainers in-house. Learning from each other is still a very important and dominant part of the learning culture but the advent of the National Training Packages in the Meat Industry brought about some significant changes in staff development practices at Harvey Beef.

Management appointed Tony as the training manager and a training committee was established to oversee training processes and to review achievements, assessments and Training Packages. The plant identified a handful of training champions: volunteers who were keen and positive toward training and highly skilled in their jobs. Financial incentives were offered for these staff to work their way through the Certificates II and III and to take on additional duties and learning in order to become trained assessors.

Tony already had qualifications as a Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) Food Inspector (level 4) but he opted to work his way through the levels of the Training Package rather than be recognised for his prior learning. In this way Tony was able to experience first hand what was involved in working through the certificates and, in a sense, became a role model for others. He worked through Certificate II and III in meat processing and completed Certificate IV in workplace training and assessing. Tony has now also completed a Diploma in Training and Assessment.

Harvey Beef had previously been closely affiliated with a private training organisation but determined that the plant should become a registered training organisation in its own right in November 1999. As Tony explained:

Many of the people working in the meat industry didn't like school and so we did away with the suits and ties. We found it was less intimidating if you got rid of the feeling of having everyone in a classroom.

At Harvey Beef a lot of small initiatives have been put in place by the assessors and committee members which have resulted in some very powerful successes. The National Training Packages were customised so that the examples and exercises were specific to their own Meat Works. The modules contain pictures of the staff working at the plant. The modules are kept small and relevant so that they don't appear too daunting.

When staff express an interest in starting to work their way through the Training Package they are shown the modules and the learning tools available to help them, e.g. books and videos. A special CD ROM has been designed to help people through the occupational health and safety standards. The CD ROM will read the written text out loud and people can take tests on line which are self paced and spell out the reasons why an answer is right or wrong. It will even cheer you on when you get the answer right!

HOW IT WORKS IN PRACTICE

Nicky Jamison, a leading hand in the packing room, was one of the original, training champions. As she describes it:

The development of the materials was a hard task but it has really been worth it. At the Meat Works training occurs on the job and then off the job in the training rooms. We use small groups, self paced books and computer programs. Recently a group from different sections of the plant went through Certificate II and III together. They gave each other tours of their own sections. It helped everyone understand more about each other's jobs and the plant as a whole. Also, some conflicts people had with each other in the past have been overcome by having people undertake training projects together.

Nicky Jamison has worked for the company nearly five years now. Previously Nicky worked in Broome and other parts of Western Australia as a cook. When Nicky started at the plant

there was no formal training program. She quickly volunteered when asked to participate in the training modules because she has always been keen to learn:

I see formal recognition of skills as a way for a person to advance and training as a way to better yourself. Doing that further training gave me the chance to become a leading hand and this month I am helping Tony with the training management side of things. I didn't finish school so getting my certificates is turning that around for me.

The training area is very hectic at this time of the year, it is June and in September the second shift begins and the numbers on the plant swell. The training area is getting a head start on training people in occupational health and safety standards, the preparation of meat and equipping people to handle the pace in the coming months. The surplus of leading hands when the shifts go from two to one has meant that Nicky is free to help with this hectic schedule of training.

There's a big influx of training at the moment as people start training to prepare for the second shift. The new packers are being signed up for Certificate II. The new recruits are from varied places. Some are seasonal workers who regularly return to Harvey Beef for the busy season. Others are from the surrounding districts and some have a long way to travel each day. The double shift this year will be different from before. Workers will have a 7-day fortnight in a two days on, two days off cycle and there will be two shifts. The change over from one shift to two and back again is a difficult period for the plant as people get used to new roles and ways of working. The early training initiative will hopefully help to reduce the problems.

Nicky has noticed that all this training has led to changes in attitude more than anything else:

People are thinking differently. When people are not aware of systems they don't understand them and don't appreciate them. When a person doesn't wash their boots now the others tell them to because they know why it is important.

Vince Holt is a renderer at the plant and also the occupational health and safety representative and union delegate. He started off at university doing a science degree, moved into corporate management and then moved to Harvey where he has worked for E G Green for the past four years.

In the rendering section there is a manager, three leading hands and eleven other full time workers. Vince explains:

Rendering is a process where the garbage from the meat gets made into five separate products; tallow, meat meal, blood meal, blood & bone and gall. The effluent ponds can be used for making topsoil. Local customers are the buyers of the tallow and there is some local and export markets for the fertilizers.

In the rendering section of the plant national standards for accreditation apply and the Rendering Association reviews the accreditation each year. Vince makes it clear 'no high quality product buyers will buy from non-accredited companies. It makes good business sense to have an accredited workforce'

Vince recently played a major role in getting management to agree to new enterprise bargain awards by showing that through training and reward schemes the renderers could increase profits and potential profits for the company.

Customers would be crazy to buy from an unqualified workforce. The selling has to be internal and external. Sell the workforce and their standards to the customers and sell the idea of training to the

workers. Through training the staff are given the confidence to know they can meet new productivity demands and expectations.

Being on the occupational health and safety committee has given Vince the opportunity to mix with management and to share ideas. He has learnt a great deal informally through being able to participate on the committee which is a joint initiative between management and unions. Vince recalls

There was a time when the blokes would walk straight through a hazard, get hurt and then make the same mistake the very next day. Training in health and safety has made them into health and safety reps overnight.

Attitudes toward training in the rendering section have not always been as positive as they are today. An original promise from management to send renderers to Wollongong for a two-week training course never eventuated and this caused a little pessimism about the new training system at first. In November the renderers attended a half-day seminar run by a person from the Eastern States on hygienic rendering. It gave them a sense of how important it was to get their job right and that thirst for knowing the *why and why not* has meant that the renderers are now working on Certificates II and III.

Vince sees the benefits of training operating on a number of levels.

Personally, training has given me some confidence. I am sure now I could do a good job as a leading hand if the opportunity came up. From a management perspective an educated workforce is easier to manage, an educated workforce sells a product and adds value. So, everybody wins every time.

Shayne Johnstone is a boner and this is his second season at the meat works. Shayne left school in Year 10. His dad told him if he could find a job he could leave school, he was so keen he found a job that very same day. The job was that of a butcher's apprentice. Many years later his trade qualification and experience as a contractor for major supermarket chains has meant Shayne is well qualified to work as a boner. Never the less, when Shayne started at Harvey Beef he had a lot to learn about working on a fast production line for a major exporter and he was given six weeks of one on one supervisory training on the line. 'I had to change my style and get quicker'.

Later Shayne was asked if he would train some of the packers in knife sharpening and he attended a three-day course in training small groups. Shayne has also completed his Certificate II and his practical work in Boning Certificate III. He has booked himself in to sit the theory component on Tuesday and showed me the carefully folded theory test he would need to study for on the weekend. Shayne is a little reluctant to do the theory parts because he finds the reading side of things hard but, his wife helps him out and so do people like Tony. He still wishes there was a CD ROM for the Boning Certificate though.

Shayne describes his experiences at Harvey Beef as great: 'I've never been happier in a job, I like the job, I like the place and I'm happy with the money'. In fact, Shayne is so happy that he undertakes to drive from Rockingham to Harvey everyday – an over 200 km round trip - just to do the job.

Of all the training he has received, Shayne is most impressed with the Yield Course which shows how you can get the most out of a body of beef. Shayne was shown how he had missed a seam when boning and it was explained in monetary figures how much loss that was to the company per year if he was to do that every time. There was an added incentive to fine-tune his skills in this area: the company has a share profit incentive for employees. 'The more accurate we are the more profits we make.'

There are eighteen boners at present and when a small group comes back with new skills and knowledge they share it with each other.

The yield training is a classic example of how training has translated to increased profits for the company. The investment in training has paid off in other ways too in that the American auditors have reported less non-conformity in the quality assurance standards.

In talking to various people employed at Harvey Beef there is general agreement that the upper management's support of this initiative has been a major advantage, and having the right people encouraging others to train is also critical.

People on the plant floor see the benefits of training as: a multi-skilled workforce, improved attitudes toward the standards and a thirst for knowledge that was missing before. Tony believes:

Training is like a religion, when you involve people, let them know what you are doing, they take it on board and see it as a benefit to themselves and to company. Staff are also aware that they are looking after their own employability by undertaking the training offered.

WHAT NEXT?

Training is now a part of the enterprise based agreements at Harvey Beef and is offered to all employees. Nearly all packers have commenced Certificates II. Staff have come along way in their thinking about training and have been really thrilled to know that their qualifications are recognised wherever they go at the end of the day. So, is the company concerned about staff leaving? Tony answers:

*There are people who might be presented with a diploma in meat management at the company's expense and are then head hunted. If you train enough people you will always have a backlog of skilled and talented staff **so don't just train a chosen few.***

The Company has embraced the importance of training to such an extent that it is currently involved in developing the AQF 5-6 competencies for the Australian Meat Industry Training Package. This requires staff attending meetings in Sydney.

Tony constantly mentions that there has been a lot of progress but there is still 'heaps of work to do'.

In terms of recruitment the company now looks for people interest in participating in training.

Nicky indicates that the workload for the trained assessors has recently become too much and others need to be trained to handle the numbers of people going through the modules.

Perhaps the closing remark should come from Nicky who said:

Production lines, by their nature, are things you give and give to and some people have been doing that for over twenty five years. Staff are working hard to complete their modules but, at the end of the day, these certificates are a way of giving back.

HARVEY NEWSAGENCY

Harvey, WA

There is nothing fancy about this country town newsagency – the skills involved in running it profitably are hardly rocket science. So the considerable amount of training and learning that bubble beneath the surface is a little surprising – and no less real just because it is mostly informal.

The Harvey Newsagency, on the main street of the small country town of Harvey, is a thriving business. A constant stream of customers comes and goes – sometimes they are 3-deep at the counter. One gentleman asks to have his 10 lottery tickets checked; a mother with young son buys a magazine and lollies; a few people queue up to place a message in the *West Australian* newspaper's death notices; one buys a sympathy card. Each day, the newsagency oversees hundreds and hundreds of such transactions.

The Harvey Newsagency is owned and managed by Mark Dennis. Two young women work there full time and there is a casual on Saturdays. Mark's wife Anky is part owner and does the bookkeeping.

It was selected as a Stage One Case Study because, on the one hand, it is typical of small retail businesses in the apparent absence and irrelevance of formal, credentialed training yet, on the other hand, Mark and his staff have established what they believe – and from the outside we felt bound to agree – is a learning culture. Of course, they did not use the term 'learning culture' and the learning involved isn't rocket science. Their tasks are more mundane than that.

As researchers, we can observe that five principal 'mechanisms' for learning are accessed by the Newsagency:

- mentoring;
- specific 'training sessions' (mostly one-offs but sometimes longer programs) organised or promoted by the Leschenault Business Enterprise Centre;
- feedback from suppliers;
- problem-solving conversations amongst Mark and the staff (and Anky);
- networking with other newsagents in the region.

But to approach this Case Study from our academic analysis of their 'learning sources' would actually misrepresent the way their learning is understood by the people involved. Mark and the others think first about what they need to know. What more might they learn which would enhance their personal contribution to - and the quality of - the business overall? With those 'needs' reasonably clear to them, they will follow through as opportunities for learning these things present themselves. There are times, of course, when 'learnings' which they hadn't anticipated become available. They grab those opportunities, too, when they can.

To show, therefore, how the Newsagency learns in context, this Case Study is presented in four sections, each about an aspect of the business Mark and the staff have learned about:

- (1) establishing the newsagency;
- (2) developing business skills;
- (3) customer service;
- (4) keeping up one's spirit.

For each of these, we have selected one learning 'mechanism'. It needs to be understood, however, that all the mechanisms can be (and have been) used in each aspect of the business – and all used in developing all the other competencies which are required for this business to run well and grow.

ESTABLISHING THE NEWSAGENCY

Mark Dennis bought the Harvey newsagency 7 years ago. He had never owned a business before – for 15 years he had been a police officer. He, and his business partner at the time, spent two years trying to learn whether this was the right investment for them. For advice, they turned first to the Newsagents' Association based in Perth. It provided a certain amount of information and, more importantly, put them in contact with other newsagents in the region.

For Mark, these other newsagents and, in particular, Peter Reuben from the very successful Collie newsagency were his key teachers. Before buying the business, he made the 45-minute trip 'up the hill' to Collie a number of times and continued to do so with Anky during their first years in the newsagency. They still consider Peter Reuben a mentor. Peter has been in the business 29 years now and, in his own words, sees himself as a 'father figure'. In the following box, Peter Reuben explains his approach to mentoring.

Learning mechanism: being mentored

Peter Reuben: owner Collie Newsagency – mentor to Mark Dennis

This industry has been good to me and I want it to be good for the others who enter it. And not just for them: newsagencies provide an important service and the whole industry needs to prosper and grow. Newsagencies in country towns are a kind of social centre – for the newsagent's family as much as for others. And that extends to a family feeling between newsagents in this region.

When people think about starting up, I suggest they come down here [to my newsagency] and work for a bit just to try it. No one has done that, but they do stop in a lot or call and ask 'what do I do about this or that?' I show them what I do. It feels great. I'm not a teacher, I could never stand up and give a speech but we talk about things. They are like my proteges. When I see Mark and the others doing well, it is very satisfying. And talking to them does help me think about how I do things.

DEVELOPING BUSINESS SKILLS

Both Mark and Peter recognise they need fresh ideas from outside the industry if they are to meet their own business ambitions. Peter solves the problem by a very active involvement in the local community. He is a past president of the local Chamber of Commerce and a member of Rotary, amongst other organisations. These connections allow him to do what in a larger enterprise would be designated environmental scanning or, more trendily, knowledge management. At a recent Rotary meeting, for example, the Perth lawyer who is developing a big marron farm near-by described the way the marron, fish-farming and tourism businesses might grow in Collie and how he rated the current local services. This is vital information and these meetings provide a 'learning space' for Peter.

Mark is more conscious of needing fresh business skills (as distinct from business intelligence). Over the last few years he has obtained his 'fresh input' by attending seminars on business development (eg, on writing a business plan) offered through the Leschenault Business Enterprise Centre which is managed by Alison Lannin. But it is important to note that Mark is a relatively recent participant in these programs. He had the newsagency for several years before he attended his first seminar. His involvement came about when he noticed a BEC competition, advertised in the local paper, to win some free training. Mark filled in the entry forms (simply his name, business, contact number) and won.

The fact that Mark had not previously attended a formal training program is hardly surprising. In addition to being at the shop all day, he operates the newspaper delivery service. This means he actually starts work at 3:30 every morning. By the time he locks the newsagency door it is 6:00 pm. The BEC courses are held in Bunbury which is a good half hour drive away. So on the evenings he goes to a session, he is lucky to be home and in bed before 11: a nineteen-and-half-hour day. And he has to be up again and lively four and a half hours later ... in the dark.

Lannin's approach to training programs for small business owners in the region is thoughtful, insightful and contributes in no small measure to the successful learning of people like Mark. In the following box she explains her approach to providing programs for small businesses like the Harvey Newsagency.

Learning mechanism: attending informal (non-credentialed) seminars and courses

Alison Lannin: manager of Leschenault Business Enterprise Centre
It is the BEC's courses which Mark Dennis has found the most helpful.

We are of value to local business for one simple reason: WE DO NOT WASTE THEIR TIME. I cannot repeat this too often: WE DO NOT WASTE THEIR TIME.

Our ways of ensuring we don't waste their time include:

- I'll never put on a course unless I've heard the presenter. Lot's of people come to my door peddling training programs. We turn away 9 out of 10. Furthermore, I will only recommend a course to a particular individual if I know he/she can profit from it.
- We find out what individual businesses need. One way of finding out that has worked for us is that I encourage them to apply for awards. By going through the criteria together, we can see their strengths and where the gaps are. But it's never threatening, I'll just say about the award: 'you start, I'll help'. By the way, we have won 1/3 of WA's small business awards even though we have only 8 per cent of the state's small businesses. We also hand deliver 800 of our newsletters which gives us a good chance to chat with our clients – just a word from them here or there can be helpful to us.
- Seminars and courses don't have to be huge. These small business people are entrepreneurial and motivated so you only need to take them a little bit further for a big leap to occur.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Short courses on customer service are available at relatively modest cost. Mark has paid for his two full-time employees, Sheree and Alana, to attend a few of these. Part of his motivation is, obviously, for the technical skills the young women will acquire. But he also recognises the opportunity these courses afford to facilitate the conversation back on the shop floor between him and Sheree and Alana. For example, shortly after Alana joined the newsagency last year, she and Sheree went to a session on building good customer relationships. As Sheree described it:

It was on answering telephones, greeting customers, learning to never complain in front of customers - that sort of thing. I knew all that from my six years working in the pharmacy as well as the year with Mark, but it was a way of helping Alana.

Similarly, when Sheree went to a more advanced course on conversing with customers, Mark accompanied her.

Learning mechanism: problem-solving on-the-job

Mark, Sheree and Alana 'at work – at talk' in the Harvey Newsagency

When things (infrequently) go amiss, they tell and retell what happened. When a customer becomes angry, or another rude, or kids try to steal something, they will analyse it in detail and repeatedly. An incident that preys on them still is how one customer responded when his child broke an object and he was asked to pay for it.

Both Sheree and Alana report that when they get a chance to meet girls from other newsagencies, one of the main topics of discussion is 'difficult customers and difficult incidents – and how good it is to find out you are not the only country town with problem customers'. Mark also thinks long and hard about how he, and the others, handle uncomfortable situations. This kind of learning is almost a boot-strapping operation. By pooling and 'chewing over' their thoughts and concerns, they draw out for themselves the lessons to be learned.

KEEPING UP ONE'S SPIRIT

Operating the Harvey newsagency and the paper delivery round is hard work. And, like so many small businesses, it is financially stressful – literally being the 'meat in the sandwich' between suppliers (and their demands) and customers (and their demands) and the bank (and its demands). While Mark's business is doing well, things still go wrong from time to time and there are no long-term guarantees. As he states matter-of-factly, 'it is hard to be resilient'. What makes it all worthwhile?

What makes all this worthwhile? It's part of building up the business. You have to grit your teeth and look at the bigger picture. Otherwise you would give up. I'm working too hard. I had pneumonia 18 months ago and I'm not properly recovered from that. I don't see my lovely kids as much as I want. My wage has been peanuts for years. But Anky and I have a ten year plan to build this up and move on to a bigger newsagency. We've gone without to do that. That's what makes it worthwhile. And, well, something else, too. I like this work – not delivering papers, but the shop, yes.'

In the circumstance, Mark Dennis and people like him need all the support they can get. Networks of colleagues are one of the surest avenues for developing resilience and learning to cope with the stresses of business. Mark is not an aggressive networker. He is not one of those people who seem to know 'everyone'. It is the relatively small network of neighbouring newsagents which Mark most relies on. That network delivers important learning. Many examples of specific 'learnings' which the newsagency has acquired from this

network surfaced during the case study, but one important underpinning aspect was the way all these 'learnings' delivered a measure of confidence and resilience for the Harvey newsagency:

Learning mechanism: networking with other newsagents

Newsagencies are subject to quite severe pressure from suppliers. 'Magazine suppliers, for example, can send you broke – you have to be very tough with them', is how one newsagent describes it. Card companies, too, have their own interests which may not wholly coincide with the newsagent's. Sales reps come to the door constantly with their toys, their gift items, their books.

Learning from newsagent colleagues about ways to deal with the magazine supply issue was an important help for Mark. But so too was the apparently more mundane example of Dot, who runs the newsagency in Waroona (20 km up the road), when she called Mark to tell him that a line of toys she had just started stocking was doing really well, and he ought to try it. Indeed, one of the greatest frustrations both Mark and Peter Reuben, the Collie newsagent, feel is when they try to offer advice to other businesses in their town and are ignored or, worse, when they feel inhibited from even trying to offer help.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

A small business like the Harvey Newsagency is not subject – at least not in any easily recognisable form – to the profound changes in the global economy and technology which tend to be driving the thrust for training/learning elsewhere in Australian industry (and internationally).

Indeed, in one sense there does not appear to be a lot to learn in running a newsagency and the changes newsagents like Mark or Peter Reuben might want to introduce are not the stuff of Nobel Prizes. Nonetheless, these businesses intend to be dynamic, to try different things - they are not interested in merely pottering along. They may not be leaping forward - there does not appear to be much leaping to be done in this industry, at least not so far as these newsagents can tell - but they do want to move forward. They want to learn. And they have found a myriad of ways to do so.

O'REILLY'S RAINFOREST GUESTHOUSE

Lamington National Park, Qld

This quiet mountain retreat is expanding in several new business directions. While the opportunities are impressive, so too are the dilemmas which the change is generating. Training and learning - in some innovative forms - are being called on to resolve the issues.

O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse is a family owned and operated business which has been going since 1926. It is located in the middle of Lamington National Park in Queensland some 150 kms southwest of Brisbane. O'Reilly's motto is '*Where strangers are treated as friends, friends as family, and family as gold.*' This has not been a recent imposition, but is a sincerely held, long-standing belief which all staff are expected to understand and implement. It permeates all that they do - but it's out of this that some of their most pressing business issues arise.

O'Reilly's not only runs the Guesthouse but also Gran O'Reilly's Store and Bistro (on-site) and Canungra Vineyards, situated some 25 kms away and down the mountain. Much of this additional enterprise is new:

- the Store was part of the original buildings but has had the Bistro added in recent years with a view to catering for more of the day tour market which often runs to hundreds of people at a time;
- the Vineyard was established two years ago after the purchase of an old house, now refurbished, and the accompanying property that has been planted with vines from which the first wines have just been produced. It has its own restaurant on-site;
- there is a hope that people visiting the Vineyards will add a short or long visit to the Guesthouse to their travel agenda but, at present they seem to be catering for different markets;
- the Guesthouse itself has recently been expanded at a cost of some \$5 million to accommodate up to 180 guests at a time.

In fact, that is O'Reilly's basic business dilemma. It essentially has three different markets.

There is their original one which consists almost exclusively of return business from people seeking a quiet retreat in traditional guesthouse style. Many guests have been coming regularly for 20 or more years. Some are now bringing their grandchildren. To accommodate the 'quiet retreat' approach, the new rooms they have built have no telephones, no televisions and no radios, though they do have tea and coffee making facilities. Each guest or family is taken to their rooms by a porter who explains all the features of the room and the Guesthouse generally. To help to keep the 'homely' atmosphere of an old fashioned guesthouse Dining Room Hostesses seat guests at largish tables for meals and individually introduce the guests to each other. Great stress is placed on staff remembering people's names and using them. (Courses are regularly held for staff to help them develop this skill.) During dinner, Tim O'Reilly or another guide will come around to each table to talk about the planned activities for the evening and the next day.

A newer market is the corporate one. O'Reilly's is increasingly being used as a base for shorter and longer term professional development and other business planning and development activities. This clientele is very different to their traditional guesthouse folk who return year after year. The unhurried, leisurely atmosphere created for these people does not sit

comfortably with business people who are accustomed to and expect a much brisker pace. This provides some challenges for staff in meeting the needs of both groups. To this end a recent shift to more in-house training has been significant. Generalised, external training doesn't usually cover such complexities.

The third and growing market is the day trippers who are generally from overseas and often non-English speaking. How to meld the day-trip 'visitors' with their other 'guests' is an on-going challenge. Originally, the Bistro was added to Grans as a way of 'feeding' the day-trippers, but recently they've been experimenting again with having some at least in the Guesthouse Dining Room as in theory, this is a more economical when preparing food, but there continues to be some ambivalence amongst staff as to the benefits of this move.

What has always distinguished O'Reilly's is its 'culture' – and the fundamental question now is how to maintain a long-standing, unique culture which is valued by customers and staff alike while converting a family business run almost exclusively by family members into a corporate entity with outsiders on the board of directors *and* dealing with the business issues of combining geographically separate and different styles of operations, absorbing new and different markets, and so on.

Training is seen as an important strategy for dealing with many of them - from the Board through to the kitchen and the store because everyone now – including family – is expected to compete on an equal footing with any other applicants for any available positions. At the management level, for example, this works as Matthew Perry, O'Reilly's general manager, explained:

Every senior manager has the opportunity for support to do further education and a number take that up. They are also encouraged to become members of the Executive Round Table and other professional support groups. If the company sponsors them, however, there is the expectation the company will get something back from that. As long as you put your case that the skills will be beneficial and you put time back into the company, you will get support. Ownership and commitment is important.

BASIC TRAINING

The Staff Handbook is explicit in stating that:

O'Reilly's believes to reach their goals, the organisation needs to have well trained and experienced staff. It is our commitment to develop all employees to their potential in order to improve job performance and satisfaction.

Basic training therefore is provided for every employee when they start there which involves a structured program of progressing through a series of job tasks. Initially this is done through an induction into O'Reilly's with their immediate supervisor. There is an expectation that staff will achieve basic competencies within the three-month probationary period. From then on there are regular performance reviews for each staff member. From the very first staff are being guided and supported in a very personal one-to-one manner.

This one-to-one training is not only done formally, however. As one staff person described it:

When you first start out in a new department you work with another person. You follow the manual and the checklists. There's always too much to learn in just a few days but everyone is always very helpful. You're encouraged to ask questions. You're not on your own at all. Supervisors are constantly asking you for your opinions. You're known by management, by everyone. You're made to feel welcome. If you don't ask you are left out in the cold.

Shane O'Reilly, the current Managing Director, is a strong advocate of structured training. One of his seminal experiences was working in the hospitality industry in South Africa. Because they were working there with people who did not share a common understanding of such apparently simple (but culturally bound) matters as the use of the cutlery on a table, which, as he pointed out 'can be laid in an extraordinary variety of ways', they found it necessary to have very explicit and complete training manuals for all tasks. With these written it is always possible for a person having trouble with a task to go (or be sent) back to the manual to see exactly what the procedure was without constant and/or aggressive reiterations from supervising staff. He introduced similar manuals to O'Reilly's.

The Food and Beverage Supervisor described how she uses the Manuals.

The Training Manuals' procedure is one in which you encourage staff to read them, to have a play (this checks the effectiveness of the Manual); then there's discussion, questions and finally the assessment (using a manual). When they've done all that, they get a certificate. Staff manuals should be the first point of reference for any staff member.

She's now looking at ways she can improve them, by adding photographs and more diagrams. She tries to spend one day a month in the office updating procedures/manuals.

One issue with Training Manuals, identified by some staff, is keeping them up to date. If they are not, they will not be used. Every time the Manuals are updated the accompanying checklists, which people work from on a daily basis, must also be updated. While some people saw the Training Manuals as unnecessarily cumbersome, others saw them as gentle, non-punitive ways of helping staff to know what is expected of them and an easy way to correct any mistakes. There is also a difference in the acceptance of the manuals in different arms of the business: staff and management at the Guesthouse seem to use them effectively while staff at the Bistro are less enthusiastic.

MULTI-SKILLING

Strong emphasis is placed on multi-skilling at O'Reilly's. There are several reasons for this. The most obvious is the fact that in a geographically remote location where most staff live on-site it makes economic sense to have staff who can fill a variety of roles. In times of high demand in one area, or a shortage in another because of, say, sickness, having staff who can readily turn their hand to the jobs in other areas has been much easier than trying to bring in relief staff. During their time there, all staff are encouraged to try out other areas, even those on traineeships, and all staff I spoke with had taken the opportunity to extend their experience and skills in this way. But, as the Food and Beverage Supervisor put it:

It's not that staff have to be multi-skilled at O'Reilly's. Some don't want to be - they find it easier to stay in just one role. But many staff enjoy being multi-skilled as it offers them a variety of duties throughout their day. The only problem with multi-skilling is that people don't always get to know one role in depth. Certainly, the check-lists have to be really up to date [to enable staff to check for themselves what is required in any particular role].

IN-HOUSE AND OUT-SOURCED TRAINING

In addition to the informal (but not accidental) in-house training done at O'Reilly's, a considerable amount of formal training is undertaken at all levels of the organisation. Indeed, it is recognised that people, even family are not likely to spend their entire lives at O'Reilly's. Portability of training, which is one of the assets of a formal qualification, is seen as important.

In the past, most of the formal training has, by necessity been provided by people external to the organisation but with the advent of Training Packages and increasing diversity in training

providers it possible to do a great more internally. Mary O'Reilly, the Human Resources Manager, has recognised that they need to have criteria in choosing the RTOs they work with – not all RTOs are equally good.

O'Reilly's has continued to take on apprentices (especially as chefs) and in the traineeship field there has recently been a front-of-house trainee and several people doing computer traineeships using self-paced modules. Who they bring in for traineeships and apprenticeships depends somewhat on the trades people they have on staff at any given time. Chefs, for example, often have their own particular ideas about what level and how many apprentices they will take, but management believes that they do need a blend of different years. Traineeships have proved to be particularly successful with several staff, because of the combination of theory and practice while they are also being paid for it. While the computer literacy traineeships really produced results, they required significant commitment from the staff who undertook them.

An interesting perspective, however, was offered by the Front Office Trainee who'd just completed his training. He felt:

The training on-the-job by Cathy [his supervisor], however, has been the most beneficial. I wasn't learning anything new in the modules – just being able to put things down on paper in words. I got much more from having Cathy looking over my shoulder.

Increasingly, once they have tried some particular type of training they will take the modules they see as most appropriate, use their own staff to adapt them for their own purposes and then apply through Tourism Training Queensland for certification. This enables them to customise their own training and target it to their very specific needs. As Matt Perry, their General Manager says, he likes 'to pick the eyes out' of the courses.

At other levels, supervisors are using the Training Packages to structure their own training for their staff. While this was clearly endorsed by staff at the senior level, in talking with other staff, it became clear that many of them also see some value in having access to external training, in such areas as Workplace Health and Safety and even in such general areas as Wine Appreciation.

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF TRAINING

Performance management is a very important part of the training process at O'Reilly's. Plans are up drawn every twelve months and goals are reviewed every six months. These are done one-on-one with the immediate supervisor. The working sheet has a section for further skills development or training. If they are seen to be of benefit to the company then financial or time support will be provided. If not, the company will facilitate it but not pay. Everyone is expected to use their initiative and seek out their own opportunities. It is always looked on as involvement. If the employee has interest and motivation then help will be provided.

Again, there is an issue of time as Performance Reviews need to be done regularly to be effective, not just at the formal planning review at six-monthly intervals. Nevertheless, Shane O'Reilly is committed to them and has been very much the driving force behind their implementation, although he is adamant that training now rest with the General Manager and the Human Resources Manager. He too sees them as a training tool, not just because each staff person's needs for further formal training are discussed at this point, but also because they are seen as an integral part of their development plan. The Performance Review provides opportunities for employees to discuss where else in the business they want to work and what plans they might have for promotion. Shane has been instrumental in devising these and insisting on their use despite the fact that are very time consuming. He has no doubts about their value.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is a key element in ensuring that the training which percolates throughout O'Reilly's delivers maximum benefits to the individuals and to the business. O'Reilly's prides itself on its communication with staff and guests alike. One telling example is that a senior manager always sits at the bar for an hour or so each night to talk casually with whoever comes along – staff or client – about 'how things are going'. The Managing Director cooks toast each morning in the dining room to talk to clients about their experiences at the Guesthouse.

The Food and Beverage Supervisor, who also lives on site, encourages 'good gossip' amongst staff as a way of recognising that gossip is inevitable but that it can be positive or negative in its intent and its effects.

More formal communication with staff takes essentially three forms, all of which are an integral part of their training strategy. These three are meetings, one-to-one coaching/mentoring and detailed written training manuals and checklists.

There is a range of meetings of different sorts between different groups of staff. The executive management team meets weekly. Supervisors meet once a week with the General Manager. Department supervisors meet every two weeks with their staff. There's also the Consultative Committee which is made up of representatives from each department who meet with the Human Resources Manager and the General Manager. This latter is a forum for raising issues, arranging functions and making staff awards from nominations by peers. They also meet every two weeks.

One of the most remarkable things about O'Reilly's is that the traditional guesthouse approach appears to happen effortlessly but an immense amount of thought, planning and skilling has gone into it. Similarly, while it appears to be so stable and long-standing, it is actually subtly adapting and changing. New ideas and ways are tried. Staff are encouraged to contribute to all of this.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

Five aspects of training and learning at O'Reilly's generate a culture which contributes to the benefits the enterprise gets from its training/learning efforts:

- There is a very definite emphasis on training throughout the organisation at all levels. This is explicitly stated and physical and financial support is provided for it.
- There is also a great amount of informal learning evident throughout the organisation though there does seem to be a certain ambivalence as to its value.
- There is a recognition that change is an integral part of survival in an increasingly competitive world. Training is seen as having an important part to play in that change whether it be in helping directors of the company to do their job better, ensuring that front office staff have up-to-date computer skills, or enabling floor staff to memorise names of the customers.
- Training itself is constantly under review. There is a conscious effort to determine what works best for whom and under what circumstances. Everyone has a part to play in this including those receiving the training.

- Finally, there is a recognition that what counts most in successfully incorporating people into the O'Reilly's 'family' or culture is attitude. There is a strong belief that skills can always be taught, but if people don't have the 'right' attitude, they won't last there. Virtually every person, including guests, who was interviewed stressed the importance of this.

PRETZEL LOGIC

Perth, WA

This rapidly growing web design company is a buzzing, dynamic place. It defies all the usual rules about companies that benefit from training and learning: it absolutely cannot find the time for formal training; what is prized knowledge one day is worthless the next; it expects to lose the talent it skills. Yet this enterprise can only be described as having a thriving learning culture.

Pretzel Logic began in January 1992 with Steve and Valerie Pretzel. They started the web design business in 1995 - a totally new industry, as well as a new business. When they began web design there was just the two of them. In April 2000 there are over 50 employees and they are growing almost weekly.

Until recently expansion has been totally funded by growth in business, though they are now looking at taking on new partners to inject venture capital and add different people to the company's board. They have had offers of takeovers in the past, but so far have resisted all comers. Nor have they sought to take over other companies, aware as they are of the difficulties of merging cultures. Almost all of their recruits to the business are new graduates from university or TAFE - or in some cases, self taught. As the business has grown they have now become aware of the need to introduce some people who have the skills to manage a larger organisation at both board and 'shop-floor' level. As Steve Pretzel put it: 'We need to employ more grown ups'.

The following information is grouped into four sections for ease of discussion:

- getting ahead, staying ahead;
- quality control;
- turning individual learning into organisational learning;
- a learning culture.

However, it is essential to realise that at Pretzel Logic these things do not operate independently – all are interlinked. In the offices and amongst the staff there is a constant buzz and excitement. What is dominant one day may not be the next. This, in essence, is one of the primary dilemmas with which they wrestle - how to maintain that energy, excitement and quest for growth and change, while at the same time exerting enough control to have everyone going in more or less the same direction and not have the entire organisation implode.

GETTING AHEAD - AND STAYING AHEAD

Pretzel Logic has no peer in WA – and is rapidly developing an international reputation as well. This presents them with a crucial challenge – having got ahead, how to stay there?

Capital creation

Growth in demand has not been able to fund capital growth indefinitely in today's markets and so one of their latest moves is to look at bringing in venture capital and with it, new directors to grow the company. Exactly what effect this will have remains to be seen, but it would be naïve (and they are definitely not that) to assume that nothing will change. At the

very least, there will be the need to respond to a different group of decision makers, who will be setting directions which may not necessarily be in accord with where staff might wish to go. These decisions may be made by people who are viewing the company from the outside and the market place, rather than from the inside and the product base. There will be a different set of imperatives to drive them.

The establishment of T3

T3 is a group of employees which has been established to research new technologies and to look at how these technologies might be integrated into the organisation. It is essentially a research and development group as it also has the responsibility for developing systems and processes that enable corporate knowledge to be recorded and reused in future projects. Until recently research was a relatively ad hoc affair. This group has been established to bring more discipline to the company's research. Whether it will also restrain some of its creativity has yet to be seen but this is a concern for their young, vibrant and energetic staff.

Communication

Communication is fundamental to the way in which they operate at Pretzel Logic - between team members, between project managers and clients, between professional peers e.g. programmers or designers, between Valerie and Steve and everyone else. As they have grown this has become increasingly difficult and gradually they have recognised that some of it, at least, needs to be systematised.

People at Pretzel Logic work in teams pooling the skills of programmers, graphic designers and new media developers, and sometimes consultants of various sorts, all held together by project managers and project coordinators (the latter are learning and practising to become project managers). The teams are changed with each new project. But their seating is arranged in groups of similar professionals which cut across different teams. There are weekly meetings amongst the project managers. The whole company meets together on Monday mornings. The PVC (Pretzel Logic Virtual Campus) which began as lunch time meetings (and still continue) is now being extended into an intranet facility to enhance communication. All of this contributes to a great deal of flexibility amongst staff and a sense of connection with many people. With the increase in size they are now looking at a more formalised induction program to ensure that new staff are rapidly absorbed into the company.

QUALITY CONTROL

This dilemma is how to maintain the quality of Pretzel Logic products, and their reputation in this area, when bringing in new people with their own ideas, values and perspectives.

Accountability

In some respects quality control (or assurance) is an issue of accountability – and that is certainly how some of the staff now see it. Who is to have authority over whom and for what aspects of their work? For an organisation which is built on a very flat structure with a great sense of loyalty and corporate identity this is not easy to orchestrate. There is no doubt however that it is something which people at various levels are realising has to be discussed and structures put in place if quality is to be maintained. Thus, PPP (Pretzel Procedures and Processes) is an attempt to develop a data base, to document and systematise the 'way things are done' at Pretzel Logic.

There is also the issue familiar in many organisations as to what sort of skills people with supervision responsibilities need to have. At Pretzel Logic project managers don't necessarily have technical skills, but without them it's hard for them to provide the necessary quality assurance. The PPP has been designed to try to address this, but it's early days yet to see

whether this formalised process will effectively address this issue. In the meantime, the project managers themselves seem very aware that 'the buck stops with them' while some of the others are not so sure that project managers are sufficiently skilled to know what is working effectively and what isn't. They are concerned that shoddy work may get through, only to be picked by the client when something doesn't work - and that will reflect badly on all their workmanship of which they are all, so rightly, proud.

Informality – people to resources rather than vice versa

Up until now the organisation has been not only very flat – but also organised in a very informal (even loose) way. People dress casually. Dogs have been allowed into the workplace. People can bring their babies if they need to. They largely come and go as they please. Others have arrangements to work from home at times. If and how such informality can continue while at the same time maintaining quality as the organisation grows and expands is a challenge they are now confronting. Already in the move to new premises other tenants complained about the presence of a dog - so the dog has gone. One question which people seem to be asking themselves is, what else is also going to have to go – why and how?

TURNING INDIVIDUAL LEARNING INTO ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

This is probably the biggest dilemma they do and have always faced. It is certainly one which Valerie is acutely aware of – and concerned about. Everyone at Pretzel Logic seems to be aware of their own learning, but there were perceptible differences between those who firmly believed that 'if the individual learns, so does the organisation' - and those who felt that a more cohesive effort would need to be made if all the learning done by individuals was to be turned into organisational learning. The T3 group, the PPP and the PVC are some of the structures that have now been put in place to address this.

Motivation for learning

From those we interviewed the strongest motivation people at Pretzel Logic had for learning was their own strong desire to grow and develop their knowledge, skills and understandings about their chosen areas of expertise - though often also about others as well. Additional motivation resulted from the need to keep abreast with the pace of change in the industry: if learning was not ongoing people in the industry quickly lost touch with new approaches to web development. They were a remarkably reflective group of people by any standards who could articulate very clearly how and why they learned. They were also very aware, however, of how the organisation supported them in that. The acquisition of support materials, the encouragement to question each other, the capacity to work in teams, the opportunity to work on new products, the support for them to share their knowledge and skills with others, all contributed to a sense of their own learning being valued and encouraged.

A drive to 'teach' other people to do your things

There was a noticeable feeling amongst several of the people we spoke to of a need to share what they learned with others. For some it was even a need to pass it on so they themselves could have room to learn and do new things. This creates an extraordinary dynamic in an organisation. Where it seems that retained knowledge in some organisations is power, at Pretzel Logic sharing knowledge is power. As Michael Pearson, a Project Manager, put it: 'Power at Pretzel lies in not retaining information but in passing it on to others so that you have the time to then learn more and to work in new fields'.

Recruitment and retention of people

Most companies recognise the costs of losing and replacing staff and Pretzel Logic is no different. And yet they also appreciate the nature of the people who they recruit. The staff at Pretzel Logic are young by any standards – on average about 23 or 24. They are individually and collectively ahead of most others in the field, especially in WA. Most of them want to further their experience elsewhere in Australia or overseas and most have never worked in another company. Thus, there is a tension between the understanding of the need for these people to grow (which is what brought them there and why they were recruited in the first place) and the desire to retain them and their skills – while at the same time knowing that their very strengths are what will take them away. There is little that Pretzel Logic can do about this beyond accepting that this a reality for their particular business.

Reflection and evaluation time

A refrain from many of the staff was how to build in reflection and evaluation time when new work is always there demanding to be done. There was also, however, some uncertainty as to whether there was enough similarity amongst projects for there to be very much carry over. Nevertheless, most sensed that the frantic pace at which they work doesn't allow them time at the end of a project, as a group, to think about what they had done, consider any mistakes that might have been made and decide if there were lessons which need to be remembered for the next time around or which should be shared with others. Thus, while some were aware of trying 'not to re-invent the wheel' or to 'learn from others mistakes' it seems that when this happens it is more by chance than by design.

A LEARNING CULTURE

Sharing of knowledge and skills

Many staff members told us about the way in which they share everything that everyone knows - with anyone else at all levels. There is no sense of protecting one's knowledge or skills from others. Sharing is also evident in the brainstorming, a regular means of addressing problems and issues. It is a strategy for drawing on everyone's knowledge and understandings.

Support for learning

- There is great support for the range of different ways and styles in which people learn:
 - informally from each other by asking and answering questions;
 - formally from each other by talks and meetings;
 - from books and journals;
 - from 'playing on the www';
 - through trial and error;
 - through 'jumping in' or 'being thrown in' at 'the deep end' i.e. being encouraged to take on something outside of one's comfort zone.

As Michael Pearson, one of the Project Managers explained:

Generally people don't go on courses here. You develop from your existing skill sets and attempt to learn from everything you do ... We are always looking for the easiest way to do things – it's efficient.

Students

Taking students on work experience has become a 'tradition' in the relatively short time in which they have operated. Not only does it provide students with an opportunity to work but it provides the company with an opportunity to see at close range the attitudes and approaches of a potential employee and assess whether or not they will fit into the Pretzel Logic culture. Pretzel Logic's sees young people as a resource ready to grow and develop with the company.

Risk taking

The climate is one of encouraging people to have a go, to take risks – without fear of retribution (though not without recognition of consequences, for themselves and the business). There is an overt sense of confidence and trust in the employees and in their competence and capacities.

Encouragement of self-learning

Encouragement of self-learning, by which they seem to mean taking responsibility for one's own learning, taking risks in learning, asking questions, seeking out new knowledge and skills and not expecting others to direct you, is something that many of the interviewees identified as being encouraged at Pretzel Logic. An expectation that people will learn – that because the industry itself is growing so fast, that you will seek out and find new ways in which to do things – and that there will not necessarily be someone else, internally or externally, who can teach you. Some expressed some wearying at this, but mostly people were excited and energised by this need. Virtually all recognised the necessity and commented on it.

Assessing learning

How, in fact, does one know if one's employees are learning? Valerie Pretzel has adopted a relatively simple and straightforward rule of thumb. She looks at the way in which people change from when they start to where they are now.

The people themselves were also very aware of how much they had learnt since coming to Pretzel Logic. Indeed, there was only one employee we spoke to who didn't say that most of what they knew they had learned since coming there. In part, this is to do with the nature of the industry. It is very new and so there are not people around with the knowledge and skills to formally pass on to others. Several employees pointed out that what they had learned in their first year or two at university or TAFE was out of date by the time they graduated. Some 20 years ago, computer programming generally was like this. Today there are a vast number of people able to teach others the basic skills of how to write programs. Now it's the more advanced and continuously growing new media skills that are in short supply.

But at Pretzel Logic, it is also partly to do with the company itself and its culture. People there know they are learning and they know that they are encouraged to learn – and all seemed well pleased by that. It is even one of those things that is looked for when employing people and the job section of their web-site is full of references to the opportunities there are for employees to learn and the expectation that they will. As the production controller, who participates in the selection of staff for her section, said:

Everyone is interviewed to see what sort of person they are, and their attitude to work and to the industry. We look for people who are keen to develop their skills, enjoy what they're doing and willing to help each other. Experience is a bonus.

In a formal sense, reviewing people's own plans and goals with them is a way of assessing the learning that is taking place. It seems that this was a more regular occurrence but that with recent rapid growth has become less common. The appointment of a specific Human Resources Manager may mean that this procedure will be resumed.

Pretzel Logic is a new, young company growing and expanding at a phenomenal rate. It seems to have already developed a unique and exciting learning culture. It will be fascinating to see the way in which grows and develops in the future.

ST JOHN OF GOD HOSPITAL

Subiaco, WA

St John of God Hospital has an enviable reputation amongst its patients and employees as a 'good' and caring place despite the fact that it faces the same horrendous financial and other pressures as every other Australian hospital. The way it develops and uses the skills of its workforce play a key role.

The St John of God Hospital (SJOGH) in Subiaco is one of eight private hospitals nationally within the St John of God Health Care Group. For more than a century the St John of God sisters have provided ministry to the sick and needy, in their hospitals and through community health and education projects. Although the sisters have recently handed over administrative responsibility to broadly constituted Boards and lay administrators, their heritage is directly reflected in the Mission statement and core values of the hospital - displayed and quoted everywhere - Hospitality, Compassion, Respect, Excellence and Justice.

What is there is to learn about training and learning culture in a modern hospital? Hospitals, of course, are not just staffed by doctors and nurses. Orderlies, nursing assistants, ward clerks, administrative staff, cleaners, technicians, gardeners, laundry and kitchen staff are integral to the effective functioning of the modern hospital. Their learning needs, long overlooked, are now an integral part of a hospital's total quality management.

St John of God Hospital Subiaco was also of interest to this project because it is intent on investing in its staff, and last year was recognised for its achievements in this area. We were therefore curious to examine what made this hospital stand out and to see how it functioned as an enterprise alongside other businesses developing their staff and training/learning culture.

We have chosen to illustrate the training/learning culture of this organisation through five vignettes. The vignettes were selected to illustrate how, in a busy organisation, one can achieve skills and organisational changes using both informal and formal programs, while also maintaining and strengthening the central values base.

MAKING THE MOST OF AVAILABLE MOMENTS

That should assure us of at least 45 minutes of undisturbed privacy. (Dorothy Parker - upon pressing her bedside nurse's bell)

Although we appreciate the humour of this quote, we also recognise that hospital wards are busy places. So cost conscious have hospitals had to become, that they now tailor their staffing according to the number of new admissions and bed load demands. When admissions are down and bed demand is lower, fewer staff will be needed and staff may either be sent home or fewer casual staff will be called in. So when ward staff are scheduled to attend a workshop, demonstration or training session, the load on other staff temporarily increases. Under these circumstances how do you ensure maximum advantage from the training being offered?

Teaching, of course, is one of the most effective ways of reinforcing learning. When teaching peers, especially through demonstration, we rehearse, supervise, give specific feedback and take responsibility for the quality of the outcome. When learning can be done in smaller, more frequent sessions - distributed learning - it is often more effective. So why not do it this way when you can?

Because the ward context is not uniformly busy through each shift, there appear 'windows of opportunity' when peer training can occur. Patient rest time or visiting hours came to mind. Keeping a skeleton staff to monitor and respond during these times while other staff give and receive short training sessions means that more staff get the benefit of the training that one person initially received. Staff commented:

Going to a session and knowing that you have responsibility for teaching it to your peers certainly makes you attend much more directly to what is being taught, to ask questions and to take good notes and diagrams so you can demonstrate skills with confidence. My learning is much more thorough this way.

MISSION MENTORING

You must constantly ask yourself these questions: Who am I around? What are they doing to me? What have they got me reading? What have they got me saying? Where do they have me going? What do they have me thinking? And most important, what do they have me becoming? Then ask yourself the big question: Is that okay? (E James Rohn The Treasury of Quotes)

At this time of transition from an 'Order-based' organisation to one of lay administration, there is active attention to transmitting and living the values that underlie the St John's Order. One means of attending to the process of continuity is through 'mission mentoring'. This is an active program within SJOG where selected individuals are identified to participate in a year-long program involving an aspect of pastoral care in the organisation. The participants must commit themselves over 12 months to five days of formal program and to undertake a project of benefit to the organisation as a whole. Since the program involves people across the organisation, it assists people to meet and work with different colleagues throughout the hospital.

In 1999 participants addressed the role of working with volunteers - a dedicated, important but often forgotten group within the hospital. The focus group discussions with volunteers during morning teas, resulted in many small but significant changes being made. Volunteers came to be recognised as employees - albeit unpaid ones - who deserved the same treatment and recognition as paid employees. As a result of this project volunteers' parking needs and parking payments were looked at; scissors and secateurs provided for them to do the flowers; and long-service awards introduced with an annual formal recognition ceremony.

For Chris Nicholls, Coordinator Admissions and Clerical Services, the opportunity to be part of the mission mentoring program provided opportunities to meet staff whom she would ordinarily never encounter. She also became more familiar with the meaning of 'living the values of the hospital'. While orientation gives staff the history of the order and its hospital work, mission mentoring made the values real.

Although you see people around the hospital and know their faces, this program gave me the chance to get to know the members of the group as friends and colleagues. I enjoyed this experience because I could see how important my part was in the whole process of someone coming to the hospital. It wasn't just admitting them. I set the

scene for what followed and my part was, in its own small way, as important as the treatment that followed.

Although in my ordinary day-to-day work I don't have much contact with volunteers, I came to appreciate the work they did. Now I greet them as I would any other worker in the hospital and respect their commitment to the hospital. While it wasn't easy to find a common project to work on that would make our hospital a better place for everyone, once we had decided on finding out what we could do for our volunteers, we became committed to one another and to them.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The information presented in the most striking circumstance is the information people remember longest. (Aristotle)

The appointment of Angela Williamson to the Education and Teaching unit was seen positively, especially by the non-clinical staff for whom there had been more limited learning opportunities. The non-clinical staff (such as orderlies, cleaners, laundry and kitchen workers and ward assistants) have a view that there is a hierarchical approach taken to training, that training is provided to clinical areas first and then if there is enough funding they may receive some. They were also well aware of the differential costs of clinical courses and sceptical that attention would be paid to non-clinical staff.

Williamson is determined to change that scepticism:

Our orientation program is one of the most important staff development activities in our organisation. Through it we aim to imbue staff with a shared sense of mission and purpose in St John of God Hospital and their role in maintaining the tradition.

It could be relatively easy to do repair work with the non-clinical staff who may behave in ways which are not congruent with the mission and values. What it requires is willingness on the part of departmental managers who may not always see the need, especially if the priority right now is to attend to something within their area. It is always easy to find an excuse not to do this part of the work. But it is fundamental to who and what we are.

One ward clerk commented on the real advantage for people in non-clinical positions to have training in medical terminology. Too often they were dealing with members of the public and clinical staff and didn't understand what was being said to them. With some basic foundation they are able to deliver better service because they 'understand the language'. They valued the introduction of these courses alongside the traditional occupational health and safety ones.

One non-clinical staff member noted:

Sometimes I feel like an airline hostess, presenting the public face of the organisation but not knowing enough to respond effectively. Understanding even a little bit of the language, you feel more a part of the place.

Many staff said that they learned mostly by observing, from their mistakes and from each other. Those who work in the wards also get feedback from patients and this helps build their self-esteem, especially when they are complemented for their attitude, care and skill.

BRING A CAKE!

The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice, there is little we can do to change; until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds. (Ronald Laing)

Nurse managers such as Heather Marin (who has worked at SJOG for 7 years managing 50 people including nurses, ward assistants, and Instep students) play a critical supporting learning role within SJOG. A major part of Heather's role is to 'develop these people'.

Heather describes herself as a 'St John person' – imbued with the values of the organisation. The values are fundamental to the way she encourages all the staff to approach patients and each other. She sees 'St John people' at all levels of the organisation playing a critical role in shaping change, attitudes and work. She feels that St John of God has helped her grow enormously. In developing leadership skills herself she has been supported by attendance at AIM management courses in the area of ethics based on scenario development and she has also learnt skills in teaching adults with particular emphasis on adult learning principles. She has also been given training as a facilitator of TQM implementation and these facilitation skills have been very beneficial in other aspects of her work.

Because of the breadth of nursing experience with people from many and varied backgrounds, there is a constant exchange of information which benefits the organisation. At ward meetings procedure and process issues are discussed and simple improvements are often made. One example was that of a sign that was created to stop people walking in on consultations.

This learning process is occasionally formalised and working groups are put together to develop a process or look at an issue. Heather worked with a group that developed the breast-feeding protocols. There was participation from ante- and post-natal personnel on this party.

When asked to describe SJOG in terms of a learning organisation she said:

It is a very generous organisation, where we listen to people and try to address their needs. It is an operational and strategic imperative that we do this. There is no option.

She did comment that, as the business became more competitive that there was a need to be more creative when approaching development issues. She had networked with other people in other organisations to get information on HIV and its management. She used company representatives to train people in the ward by asking them to spend time training and as a way to encourage people to participate she always asked the rep to 'bring a cake'. From all descriptions, the bribe worked!

'MISSION VS. MARGINS'

You can tell whether a man (sic) is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions. (Naguib Mahfouz, Nobel Prize Winner)

Senior staff members with budgetary responsibility, such as Peter Mott (Senior Administrator), see this dilemma as a key to encouraging reflection and constructive learning within the SJOG hospital. 'Everyone', he observed, 'struggles with the values words to ensure that they don't just become tokenistic. We want people's actions to be real and to reflect the values and that goes for me too.'

For Peter Mott, applying the values of the organisation means looking behind the incident in question to the principle involved. But when in doubt, mission has to override margin. He gave the following example.

Recently we had to face the prospect of replacing the dishwasher. This required a considerable outlay - around \$100 000. But when I looked at the history and the facts, it was evident that it was already costing us considerably more in workers' compensation, and that these costs were likely to rise as well to compound the problems of low morale and poor work satisfaction. Then it makes no sense not to replace the machine.

My task is to make money to spend wisely. We have to function as a modern corporation but we are also called to be good stewards of resources. This is New Testament based. I have also to apply compassion. We have, for example, a person who in another situation would be quickly made a redeployee. In my dealings with him, we have considered his future and I have told him to have 'a look around.' We will continue to keep him on until he makes a satisfactory transition. We won't act peremptorily. Meeting challenges this way will deliver a better outcome for him and for the workers around him. We will lessen the negative impact on staff and through the organisation.

Living out the values is also evident in the way we deal with the change process. I don't get to move around the organisation as much as I would like to. But communication trust, empowerment and support are needed in change and I don't want staff to hear things via memo. It works far better when you can explain why things have been done a certain way and why other options were dropped. So I make the time to speak to people directly whenever I can and to be available to hear their concerns and points of view.

My focus in management has been to assist staff to develop a sound business case to bring to others and me for consideration. This gives better performance management too. I have fortnightly meetings with my next level of staff. From these meetings they develop action items against which to report next time. I expect this pattern to flow down from them and into staff within their sections. I try to recognise the very different levels of skill among them and to use these skills appropriately for my tasks as well as for them to help each other.

SALTY SEAS

St Helens, Tas

Salty Seas is a new and exuberant company processing oysters on the east coast of Tasmania. That it developed from a training program for unemployed youth in the area is just one more ingredient in this quite wonderful story of an innovative community-building and profitable enterprise.

Salty Seas is a very new enterprise with an interesting history. It grew out of a formal training venture. The enormous success of the training venture is having an obvious impact on the local community and beyond. Salty Seas has a strong commitment to formal training and exudes an energetic and supportive learning environment.

This training/learning case study needs to be understood within a broader community context. St Helens is a major regional centre and picturesque fishing community on the east coast of Tasmania.

Oyster farming is an important element of the local fishing industry. Several years ago the local oyster farmers wanted to expand their farming into Georges Bay. The local community was concerned about the spread of wild oysters in the Bay (from the stray spat of farmed oysters) and the impact of this on beach activities. To address this problem the local farmers worked at securing markets for the large wild oysters. Additionally, like many smaller regional communities, St Helens has a significant problem with youth unemployment.

In 1998, a 12 month aqua-culture (Cert II) course was established in St Helens for 12 people. Out of that program 'Salty Seas', an oyster processing enterprise was born. Apart from its production agenda, Salty Seas has as one of its aims the training of staff in Seafood Handling. It is also working closely with the local NEET centre to create industry-based training for years 11 and 12 students.

THE PEOPLE

When talking about training/learning cultures, it is a mistake to put too much stress on the individuals. However, the people who make up the St Helens study need to be highlighted. Because Salty Seas is so new, it did not have a tradition or history of learning/training. Learning /training cultures do not just happen: In probing the Salty Seas story, names of key players kept being raised. And as indicated:

You need good support. A couple of enthusiastic participants make all the difference. You can deal with a company small, large or in-between, and if you've got one person that's sold on training, it's a breeze. If they're sceptical about it, it's a hard sell.

I think we've had some very unique individuals who have been involved in the project. Their main drive has been to see things go ahead and to see things move. There's nothing selfish involved in their motives whatsoever.

Two people (now co-managers) are key players in the Salty Seas story:

Lex Weekes

Lex was employed by the Beacon Foundation to establish the wild oyster business and to oversee the work of the trainees.

I've learned so much from him. He's a very disciplined, very organised, extremely approachable innovative guy, so I've been very privileged to be able to work along side of him and learn from him.

Anita Astley-Paulsen

Anita Astley-Paulsen was one of the trainees in the initial project. At the end of the course, Anita won a number of awards: the Tasmanian Fishing Industry Award, the special category award Aquaculture – Shellfish); the National Trainee of the Year award; and an Australia Day award from the local community and Council for personal achievement. For Anita, the course was the bringing together of a number of interests and previous work experiences. During the course, Anita was used as peer mentor to the other students. Since then, her career in the fishing industry (and in training itself) has flourished.

I had been in and out of the fishing industry. My partner is in the live fish so I'd spent some time around live fish (deck-handing) and I spent some time, a minimal amount of time, around the crayfish industry. But it's always fascinated me – I've always enjoyed it.

As important as key individuals have been, one of the most striking aspects of the Salty Seas story is the way the whole community at St Helens has been involved in the project. The oyster farmers, especially, worked very hard to try to generate employment (and training) to keep local youth in the area. From the very beginning, there has been a two-way link between the farmers and the Salty Seas program. The trainees were keen to tell the farmers about some of the latest research and developments they were hearing about. In turn, the 'old hands' shared their experience and wisdom with the trainees (and now, the company):

You'll find that the people, the farmers we've had around us and the mentors we've had have been very open with their suggestions and ideas, and we've been very lucky in that sense.

THE INITIAL TRAINING PROGRAM

As indicated previously, this story started with an initial formal traineeship program undertaken with a group of young people in St Helens. By all accounts, the planning was thorough. It involved the collaboration of a lot of people, and it was rigorous.

A customised course

The twelve-month course developed for the St Helens project was coordinated by the Tasmanian Fishing Industry Training Council. From the comments about the course, it was obviously carefully customised around the needs of the individuals and the local shellfish industry. As pointed out, this often requires a careful balance between the two, and between immediate and other needs. Apart from working at the wild oyster processing at the St Helens site, there was a deliberate attempt to get people off the job to mix with other organisation, to share experiences and to see farms with a range of equipment. By all accounts the experience was a very full one.

We went Launceston and Hobart mainly. We did a lot of courses here – what they could bring here they did – some of the courses we were required to travel for full facilities to do shipboard safety and that sort of thing.

The whole traineeship was a great combination of manual and theory courses or lectures if you like that applied directly to the industry. I use a lot of the things I learned every day.

Getting the ticket

Getting formal qualifications appears to have been an important outcome of the traineeship program. Though there appears to be some scepticism in the industry about formal training, and the view amongst some that all you need to know you can learn on the job, for those who have been directly involved in the program, the story is one of 'the ticket is important' and highly valued.

As indicated by a number of those interviewed, having a certificate allows young people to go elsewhere (which seems contrary to the theme of keeping them locally). With a certificate and some local experience, young people 'have got everything they need to work in aquaculture anywhere in Australia'. People were aware of the transportability of some of the tickets to other industries and other parts of Australia.

I couldn't believe it when I came to the end of my traineeship. My partner and I actually sat down and had a big celebration at the end of it. I just laid all these tickets and said 'look at them: chain saw, forklift to... - you know.' He is someone who is very versed in all different sectors, has many skills and manual skills and yet has never had the opportunity to put a ticket against it. And, therefore, can't offer those skills for labour.

It [the ticket] makes us more flexible in the workplace in the sense that we're now a valuable person. The workplace is a very competitive place now to try to actually get employment – it broadens your opportunities and your prospects.

Tasmania offers very limited work opportunities, so always in the back of their mind is: 'If the work's not here, I'm going to travel – whether that be to Hobart or whether it be to Sydney or Queensland'. It's quite often what happens in the area – that's why with the Beacon traineeships, one point I made at the time was, out of ten of us that were here, eight of them would have left in two years simply because of work opportunities.

A lot of the skills we learned probably didn't get utilised here as such. The fish knowledge definitely did and learning about what makes up a fish and how it grows. Things like occupational health and safety, documentation, all of that applied here. But some of the bigger tickets we got we don't actually utilise here. But in other areas of the industry they do, so the boys that have left from here and gone out to the farms are now utilising those other tickets they achieved.

Learning the VET system

While the traineeship provided participants with the competencies and knowledge required for the Certificate 2 (Shellfish) course in the aqua-culture stream, it also introduced participants to the VET system; a system not without its complexities. One of the valuable outcomes of the program was an understanding of the system and the development of useful networks through which the system could be more easily accessed.

I'm learning it [the system] now and after my Level 3 I will straight away be looking at my Level 4. I eventually want to work myself up to an Associate Diploma - if I can do that independently, like without having to do too many contact hours at college. I just can't afford the contact hours - I don't have hours any more.

In the last twelve months, I think the networking is probably the biggest thing that's come from the traineeship for me – apart from the knowledge and the skills and the course and licenses and everything I've achieved. The networking side of things has helped me immensely – you know, I ring people with an enquiry now in a certain department and someone will say, 'Oh, Anita, I'm sure ... will help you out there or will sort it out...' It opens a lot of doors before you actually come to them.

I'm still learning from the traineeship. I still have my handbooks and I'm still in contact with some of the tutors. I'm hoping to contact Dos O'Sullivan in the near future to talk about some other projects I'm involved with.

Knowledge about the VET system is also used for progression through the RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) process, to bring more training to the local area, to further the cause of training in the Fishing Industry, and to promote training in more general terms. A number of people expressed a particular interest in this aspect of the VET system:

There are a lot of people who've been in the industry for a lot of years and never had the opportunity to actually attach a ticket to their experience. A lot of them who are in the fishing industry can't book into a course during parts of the season, because they could be going to sea at any time. So what I'm going to try to do is tailor design it to each industry so that in the off-crays season there is a coxswain's course running. I'll be looking at my staff going through occupational health and safety, processing handling. A couple of them want to do their coxswains certificate as well.

I've been discussing with the fishing Industry Training Board I may be able to get my Shellfish Aquaculture Level 3 on RPL as well, so I'll sort of go up a level on both on RPL, so that's very exciting.

I've done my Level 3 Frontline Management. We all did that at the end of our traineeship. I've got a gentleman coming up next week hopefully to sign me off – I've gone from Level 3 to Level 5. I'm basically going through the RPL process. John Jessop recognised that I probably had more skills than were put into this portfolio and suggested maybe I look at Level 4. After looking through the book and having a look at the evidence, I said: "Wait a minute, I think maybe I could go for Level 5.

I've had discussions with him over the last few weeks because it's getting close to time for my assessment and he said: 'Now you're ready for level 5'. I've got all my evidence ready and he's coming up to just help me tie my evidence to my maps to make sure that we've covered all those and see if I'm ready for Level 5 – so that is very exciting.

Apart from what individuals learnt during their traineeship, for those who have stayed on at Salty Seas, this itself has been a great leap forward in terms of applying their learning and taking it further. For some this has meant working on the floor. Some stayed for a while but many have moved on, to be replaced by other (often unskilled) workers, who are 'trained up' ... and then often move into other parts of the industry. For Lex and Anita, the learning has been more intense. For Anita, it has signified a move from being a trainee to being a business partner. When this study was undertaken, Salty Seas was still in its infancy. Having the experience of working through 1999 when the venture was run as a local cooperative was a useful preparation ground.

LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE

Salty Seas: A learning environment

One does not have to be at Salty Seas for long to get a sense of an enterprise which is still in the throes of new and exciting things, and where everyone is keen to pitch in to solve problems, whether it be: working out how to set up live fish tanks; maintaining the right temperature in the packing room; or cleaning out the drains. Though some of this comes about because it is a new venture and everyone is pitching in to help, it is also because of a deeper understanding of work motivation.

The richness of Salty Seas as a learning environment can be seen to be directly linked to the good experience of the traineeship program, especially for Lex and Anita who are now managing the enterprise. Both are committed to making more formal training available to the unskilled employees coming through their organisation and are actively encouraging them to 'get their tickets'. And both are committed to 'training up' within their own organisation. It is interesting to note that, in a way, Salty Seas is being used as a training/testing ground for other employers in the area.

Unfortunately yes - well unfortunately in some ways. Already this year I think four have left the factory since we started, to go and work at farms. They use this as a bit of a testing ground and ... let Lex and I sort 'em out a bit.

'Training up' is a term that is frequently used across industries as a way of describing the process of succession planning or skilling of people from one position to another. As an on-the-job training strategy it should not be under-estimated. The learning of a new skill or job alongside an experienced person, for promotion or transfer to another job, can be quite a motivating learning situation. For a number of reasons, 'training up' was in evidence at Salty Seas. Interestingly, in one of the examples given, the 'training up' of people on the floor is tracked back to the initial training from the traineeship course.

I did get to a stage where after two years in the packing room, it was nearly enough. So that's why I have trained Michelle up now and fortunately she's taken very well to that – she's fantastic. Like now, she'll quite often come in and I'll just be able to tell her what the orders are for the day and she'll only come down if there's a problem.

We're pretty excited about diversifying into different areas and the staff all know that we will attempt to diversify and include them as much as we can so that their job doesn't become monotonous day to day – you know, going over the same jobs over and over again.

Michelle spends quite a lot of time at the same table and I would like to be in the situation where on a quiet day like today I could say, 'Oh, Michelle, do you want to come and bottle some water or would you like to come with me on a fish run' ... just to give her a bit of something different to do for the day.

An educated workplace

A strong message that comes through the Salty Seas study is that of the value of an educated workplace; one that values open enquiry, which expects personal commitment to learning and where knowledge is shared. Obviously, in a small enterprise, that is relatively easy to achieve. Nonetheless it can only flourish where in the first instance there is a commitment to valuing an educated workforce.

I believe that an educated workplace is a lot smarter, a lot safer, a lot more efficient. By educating the people in the field they do, whatever that field is, if they can become an expert, more attuned to what they do, then it benefits the whole community. If people can learn a bit about their waste products, or about – you know re-utilising things, or ... I think everyone's that bit better off.

Sharing knowledge

Understanding the positive learning culture at Salty Seas is more than knowing that people are encouraged to ask questions and to know 'why'. It is more than the formal training materials and CD ROMs which do help base-level entry people get involved in training in an exciting way. It is also necessary to appreciate the enthusiasm and love of their work that Lex and Anita share. Nothing enthralls like enthusiasm. It is probably one of those truisms we all know - but nonetheless worth highlighting when we come across it – that the best teachers are the ones who exude a love of what they're doing. In such situations knowledge and learning is shared, not withheld.

I'm quite happy for my staff to learn as much as they can, and you know, we've looked into a different species here which is a native species, and a couple of my staff members were actually quite familiar with the fish, so ...

I suppose it's just the general attitude. Like you're not nervous at all. Normally if I'd go for a job, it's: 'Have they inspected me and what happens if I muck this up and how much will I be getting into trouble?' But here it's a relaxed learning atmosphere. They're sort of very casual. As long as you get the job done you can go and have a coffee for fifteen minutes if you want. If you get cold or want to sit down for a while, you can do that.

It is important to note that at Salty Seas the sharing is very clearly two-way. Most employees bring immense local knowledge into the workplace; knowledge which is welcomed and valued.

We have great local knowledge – especially from the boys that we’ve got here. A couple of them were very familiar with that fish, so we actually asked them in for the day and they showed us how to process and how to handle them and different things about them and so we do leave that very open.

Part of what creates the learning environment at Salty Seas is the energy and enthusiasm which exudes from Lex and Anita. They are responsive to new opportunities and challenges and encourage their staff to join them resolve day-to-day problems.

Anyone here who has a suggestion of ways for improvement ... Yesterday was a prime example. Luke came to see me and he said, 'Danny's not wearing his ear muffs or the glasses – he's finding them uncomfortable. And I said: 'I know, if you bend over the glasses fall off', and he said 'Yes. he's trying to talk to some one and you've got dirty hands and you're pulling them down ...' And Luke said, 'Have you thought about a chain saw grommet?' As simple as that, and I hadn't thought about it ... and you can knock the visor up so you can talk to people and the ear muffs are attached. It was great. I went down the shop and bought it for him and he's now wearing his ear muffs and he's got a safety visor.

This openness and working alongside staff not only taps into a greater pool of resources, it inspires staff confidence and the feeling that they are trusted.

When I've started at other jobs they kind of stand over you, make sure you do the job, make sure they're getting their money's worth out of you type thing. But when I started here, Anita would be with me, usually when we worked. But now, basically I'm left up there to just do what we're splitting in the morning. I'm left to do it myself usually, and Anita will come up every now and then and stuff like that – they've got that bit of trust left there too.

SUMMING UP

At the end of the day, what are the messages that Salty Seas holds for training/learning culture?

- New enterprises can not rely on a history or tradition of training /learning. In terms of a 'culture', the traditions, shared values and behaviours are being established afresh. All individuals who form the enterprise Salty Seas, bring with them existing knowledge and attitudes and past experiences of work and of learning.
- The formal training program and the enterprise built around it (which eventually became Salty Seas) has left a lasting legacy of work competencies, and of understandings of, and attitudes towards, training.
- Salty Seas exemplifies a strong workplace learning culture and provides a rich data source for what actually constitutes such a workplace.

SIMPLOT Kelso, NSW

The Simplot factory in Kelso has been through some difficult times - what workers there call the 'dark ages' - but things have been turned around. Training has played a role, but not training by itself.

The Simplot factory in Kelso, NSW - whose brands include Birds Eye, I&J, Sealord, Edgell and Chiko - is the home of the Australian fish finger. It is here that the nation's fish fingers and Macdonald's Fillet-O-Fish are made along with 72 other formed and coated frozen foods. The unusually large number of different products is made possible by constantly reconfiguring the two production and two packaging lines. The workforce is not large: 170 permanent employees which is expanded during maximum production by up to 100 casuals from a local labour hire company.

Most of the workers who come to the plant have had little (or no) formal training. A great deal of the work is routine and can be carried out by following a set of rules without great depth of understanding. But a very large number of things can go wrong on the line: a slight variation in the size of the block of fish to be processed will jam the works; a slight variation in temperature will ruin the product; boxes roll over. One of the mornings we were there, two lots of batter had to be thrown away because the balance was out. So, if the lines are to operate well, a great deal of skill, experience and nous is required.

Training has, necessarily, been an element in the operation of the plant for 20 years – both for getting novices onto the lines and for developing production workers and trades people to make the line work efficiently. Traditionally, however, the training of permanent employees was hit and miss. Who got the training was often a matter of favouritism. And it was a very authoritarian culture. Workers were not supposed to question *anything*. Someone who wasn't working quickly enough would be openly belittled by a leading hand. As Kaye Smith described it:

Our voice on the floor was nothing. If you ran out of product, there was a button to press. But we weren't allowed to press it. So we'd end up standing there with nothing to do.

In the last few years, however, there has been a major change in the way training, learning and the whole operation of the plant has been conceptualised and managed. To understand the change, a little history is required.

The Kelso factory had been stable, relatively independent and profitable for its first ten years of operation. Then it was bought, first by Adelaide Steamship and two years later by Pacific Dunlop. In succession, these owners imposed drastic and, as it turned out, flawed changes. These included eight restructures in five years with constant alterations to managerial 'rules' – one phase which lasted a year had Kelso operating without a general manager or chief engineer on site. The packaging of Kelso products was redesigned and sales dropped 30 percent. *All* the leading hands were fired which meant, according to the original and now returned general manager, Bob Sugden, '80 percent of our expertise went out the door'. Further, during this period there was an intense battle between two unions for coverage of the site which led, naturally enough, to profound disharmony between the workers on opposite sides. It is no wonder they call it the 'dark ages'.

Then in 1995 another new owner: Simplot, a large American-based company, purchased the Kelso plant (it now owns eleven food processing plants in Australia) – although the Kelso site is a little independent of the large corporation in that it is actually a joint venture between Simplot and I&J South Africa. In 1996 Bob Sugden returned as general manager to revitalise this factory which was now losing money, without its expertise, and filled with tense, unhappy workers. His plan was simple:

I wanted to make the best use of as many people as possible. That means having each line be a strong, self-directed team.. But they could only be self-directed if they had all the correct skills, including (eventually) decision-making skills.

The key was to create new positions of responsibility on each team and to get serious about training.

NEW TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES

A coordinator for each team

A team coordinator is responsible for fostering the team's capacity without becoming 'a boss'. Kaye Smith applied and became coordinator of one of the packaging teams. Her history is not atypical for the plant. She left school early, worked in a factory for 7 years and then left the workforce to have children. As coordinator she is responsible for:

- the labour on her line: depending on the products being made that day, she may need only 5 people on the morning shift and 4 in the afternoon. The day we spoke to her, she had 26 people working;
- the line running properly: 'I wear any problem';
- people getting the training they require;
- harmony on the team.

She didn't receive any special training when she became a coordinator, rather:

We were thrown in at the deep end, but in the beginning we were not responsible for so many things. We keep being given more responsibility but that's fine because you begin to know what you're doing.

One of the things that did trouble her at the start was in handling people because there was a bit of resentment on the team with some of her co-workers saying 'you're getting paid extra, you do it'. Support was available: the supervisor called a meeting and explained the team had to cooperate. The team agreed and the problem went away.

Kaye has been enrolled by Simplot in a Certificate 3 Level course at the local TAFE, Central West Community College. The self-paced modules have been designed by the College specifically for Simplot Kelso and focus on the way the plant operates. Kaye and the others enrolled are finding the final third of the 900 point course hard going and most have chosen now to learn together. Ben Bardon from the College made an interesting observation: he believes that self-paced materials at Levels 1 through 3 work well 'when people already know 80% of the stuff. They don't work as well when the material is largely unfamiliar.' Kaye's story supports this observation.

A trainer for each team

Elaine Wilkin is the trainer not on Kaye's line but on the other packaging team. She has worked at Simplot Kelso for 16 years. For her official role as team trainer, she completed a train-the-trainer course which reaffirmed for her the importance of recognising that everyone learns in a different way and that the most important skill a trainer needs to

exercise is patience. She has also discovered the value in teaching people at the point of need, so, for example, the time to train a person on how to fix one machine is not ahead of time but when the band comes loose.

Her goal, she says, 'is to train everyone up so they've achieved something.' Often her co-workers begin by believing they are not capable of learning to run and fix a machine by themselves. 'I'm dumb,' they will say. Elaine's response: 'Hmm, how dumb exactly are you?' 'High level dumb,' comes the answer. 'Well then, can I prove to you that you have abilities you don't know you have?' And she does. And takes immense pride in the achievement.

Having teams and creating leadership positions for line workers has already made an immense cultural change, according to Ray Chesher who is the production manager of the plant. But he sees the potential for the plant to perform even better 'once the coordinators are *really* leading their teams.' And how will that come about? 'By us – production managers, shift managers – spending a lot of time with them: walking and talking and giving them support when they've made a mistake.' What Ray likes to emphasise is that in the past there was little appreciation of the people on the floor:

People in manufacturing, in general, have been under-valued. Everyone seems to believe that factories are for dummies and that it is an unskilled environment. It is not. And if you treat people with the respect they deserve, they respond.

A maintenance technician for each team

Maintenance had been the role of specialist technicians in the central workshop. Assigning them to be on a line and a full member of that line's team was to ask for an immense cultural shift. Before the change, when the trade-qualified technicians were all based in the maintenance workshop, they would go out on the floor to set up the machinery and depart. When a problem arose, the person on the line simply called up maintenance and someone was sent to fix it ... grudgingly.

The technicians had a pretty low opinion of the line operators and when a call came through, the technicians' immediate reaction was that the operators were hopeless – they didn't know how to run the machinery, they were ruining the machinery, etc. Their encounters with the line workers were fairly tense. It was also the case, according to electrician Craig Lamberton:

We were out there every five or ten minutes fixing mundane problems. We couldn't get on with preventative maintenance work, there wasn't any time left. And we were losing two or three hours a day of production because of breakdowns.

Giving each line team its own maintenance technician was, in the words of Ray Chesher, Kelso's production manager, 'a bit sticky for about six months'. Elaine Wilkin from one of the packaging lines put it more bluntly:

We didn't like them. We didn't want them – we thought our team was fine as it was. We had bad memories, too, of the days when there were leading hands on the floor, and they were leading hands from hell, I can tell you. They treated us like two-year-olds if you stepped one inch out of line.

For their part, the maintenance technicians were being asked to share their knowledge – their power base, their security – and become a team player helping people (whom they did not exactly hold in the highest regard) learn how to keep the machinery working.

But slowly, once the line operators showed the maintenance people that they could learn and could fix things, it began to work. The technicians became more willing to pass on their knowledge. Change has become less of an issue on the line, according to Craig:

We've had a lot of new technology and people aren't scared of it. Before if there was a change, a technician would have to operate the machine for 2 or 3 days, now they'll pick it up.

And people like Elaine discovered that if the coordinators were like leading hands, they were not 'from hell. They turned out okay: and they treat us like adults, we're free to speak out, even to suggest they might be wrong about something.'

The results are interesting. Instead of the two or three hours a day lost to breakdowns, the figure has fallen to half-an-hour. Why? Because the people who have stayed in the central workshop can now spend their time on pro-active maintenance; they've installed a system so they can track breakdowns and investigate why they've occurred. On the line, the maintenance people are at hand to keep things running and anticipate troubles with the machinery, and the operators themselves now know how to fix some of those mundane problems.

There is a significant amount of learning in all this. Some of it is the 'traditional' transfer of skills and knowledge from someone who has it to someone who doesn't. But there is a more subtle element of learning at work here, too – *new* knowledge about how to work, and work together, which has been slowly generated by the team members themselves.

A NEW APPROACH TO TRAINING

The formal design of training at Simplot Kelso has undergone some major, and instructive, changes in direction over the last four years. It started from a base where training had been largely neglected: employees were not treated as an asset – indeed, they were not considered to *be* an asset. They were trained to use this machine or that, full stop.

Training began with the whole site studying the core modules for Certificate I through the local TAFE, Central West Community College. In many ways the exercise was successful. Almost everyone (95%) completed at least some of modules. It introduced core concepts like hazards, occupational health and safety, sanitation and hygiene, and gave everyone on site a shared (and correct) terminology for the technical tasks and machines on the floor. It was non-threatening: the assessments were done on the line and positively focused: 'show me how ...' 'tell me what ...' The workers were basically keen.

But, there were problems with the scheme, too. The production manager saw great waves of people coming and going off the floor and didn't see any productivity gains. Nothing was different on the lines: the quantity of fish fingers hadn't gone up; the machines were not being used any better. It seemed too academic: people used to say 'do you have school today?' Furthermore, it cost, in the words of Barbara Brackenreg, Human Resources Manager, 'an arm and a leg'.

It was the Simplot corporation, however, who actually called a moratorium on the training plan. It was a decision that caused a distinct backlash. Morale, and indeed, production on the Kelso lines dropped noticeably. The workers on the site Training Committee were furious at having been promised something and then having the company renege on it. There were some tense and unpleasant meetings. Ben Bardon from the Community College could have been furious too: the College had a contract to deliver the Certificate I modules and they were only 2/3rds of the way through it.

Cool heads prevailed. Kelso and the College made it an opportunity for a thorough rethink of training. The first thing they decided was to stop thinking in terms of certificates and start

thinking in terms of what the staff actually need to be trained to do. It seemed obvious, then, that what was needed would be to identify each of the tasks done on the lines and write detailed work instructions for them. A team of people from the College then worked for a year with workers on the floor to identify these tasks (there turned out to be some 270) and to document all the steps involved in starting, operating, adjusting and stopping the machinery, the hazards associated with each task and other relevant information. Currently the work instructions are being linked to the Food Processing Training Package.

One issue which needed to be clarified and negotiated with the workers was the knotty one of whether, once people have received training, increased their skill base and worked at a range of tasks on different lines, they should receive a commensurate increase in pay. Workers felt that one of the reasons Simplot backed off taking everyone to Certificate 3 and doing a skills audit on the trades people was because the company would end up with a blown-out wages bill. By designing the work instructions and bunching the associated competencies into designated Certificate levels in the training Package, the company has made it clearer that as long as a worker stays at the same certificate level (even though they may be applying their competencies more broadly across more tasks), they will not get a pay rise. This framework has met with general support across the plant.

Simplot Kelso has also used committees to good effect. The Training Committee includes the General Manager, Bob Sugden and the Manager of Human Resources, Barbara Brackenreg but the remaining 80% of its members come from the plant floor. As Craig Lamberton, an electrician at the plant said:

The fact that these people became such 'champions' of training has helped to ensure widespread support from the other workers. The various training initiatives are seen as 'coming from us' rather than being a top-down decree from management.

As more than one person said to us, 'the days of waving a big stick are over.' In practical terms, too, having the training experts' be one's co-workers means that people throughout the plant can be kept informally up to date about what is going on and what is planned, and, even more importantly, have access to colleagues who can answer any questions and convey any concerns.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The picture of Simplot Kelso should not be imagined as too rosy, nor in any sense complete. There are still workers who are not interested in this 'learning' attitude to work and the workplace. Bob Sugden, the General Manager, believes that much more work needs to be done on the teams' decision-making skills which, he also believes, will be a challenge:

It is a question of getting people to not turn a blind eye to problems which might be affecting the profitability of the plant, in a cultural environment which feels that raising issues may involve dobbing in your mates. We have a lot of thinking to do about that.

Nonetheless, the achievements have been impressive and, significantly, impress the employees themselves. What stands out is the way cultural change has been brought about without changing the people involved. It was the Production Manager, Ray Chesher, who pointed out:

That is the only way to get a lasting and stable change in a workplace culture. The idea that you fire everyone or bring in smart new bosses from the outside is an almost childish - certainly short-term - view of cultural change.

The company has become one of Simplot's strongest profit centres and its output is increasing. Its efficiency has improved. Three years ago they were loosing \$600,000 in direct labour (that is, wages paid out but because of inefficiencies, break-downs and mistakes no product was produced during those paid hours); now it is \$120,000. Some lines are meeting their target output at 101% - that is, neither under-producing each day nor over-producing - whereas it has varied between 80% and 127% in the past (over-producing causes as many problems as under-producing because of storage pressures). There is less absenteeism; workers on the line have become more supportive of one another; they *are* working as teams and everyone seems to sense a new spirit of cooperation.

Training has played a significant role in all this, but it is not the only driver of learning and cultural change. There has been a co-evolution of organisational change and strategic learning. Indeed, Barbara Brackenreg, manager of Human Resources, is the first to admit that it is not easy to know what part the training dollars have played in fostering the changes:

I would never try to claim that the observed improvements are due simply to skill training. It is much more complex than that.

SOUTH SYDNEY CITY COUNCIL

Sydney, NSW

When South Sydney City Council was established ten years ago, the doom-sayers were sure it would go broke. It hasn't. But neither has it developed the kind of culture it wants. Improving training and learning in such a diverse organisation to accomplish that is far from easy.

As you can imagine the South Sydney City Council (SSCC) with 1,000 employees is a large organisation, both in width and in depth. Its responsibilities are vast and cover the maintenance of urban and parkland areas such as the *Domain* and *Centennial Park*, through to shire management at the most senior of levels. With such a gamut of responsibilities you may suspect that the Council has little advice to offer smaller businesses. You may be surprised!

Most people in business are aware of how difficult it can sometimes be to develop a change in the culture of the workplace. Peter Chaffe, the Organisational Development Officer, for SSCC, is the first to admit that local government is an extremely good example of a 'hard culture to change'.

Traditionally local government acts in an authoritarian manner because of the statutory obligations which must be fulfilled. The Directors of key departments must report regularly to the Council. Senior officers act under delegated authority. Council staff balance carrying out a range of community services with maintaining a service orientation to the local community of ratepayers. In keeping with other areas of government, ratepayers expect to be informed, consulted and involved to varying extents in a range of projects that affect the quality of their lives and their communities.

Given these features of the organisation, knowing where to begin to effect change was difficult. However, as is so often the case, where there is a will there is a way and it was this determination that in 1996 gave rise to a review of Council which, not surprisingly, suggested that it needed to attend to both its internal and external culture. The report identified problems including a lack of trust, poor communication and 'a silo-like structure' that separated departments' and units' activities from one another. Improving the internal culture was made a matter of priority - a decision that received enthusiastic support from staff.

To address some of the management problems Council formed a learning partnership with the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) through the South Sydney Region of Councils. UTS agreed to develop and deliver courses to key middle managers to be geared specifically to the needs of the staff in various sections of SSCC. The courses were delivered on-site at times that suited employees. Successfully completed units could be credited to the university's graduate management qualifications.

It was through this partnership with UTS that Alan Wren (Manager of Human Resources) completed a project to develop a Performance Management System. Alan's project arose from reflecting on what might be undertaken that would add value to SSCC as an

organisation and to him as a manager. He elected to invest his time in developing and implementing a Performance Management System for his unit.

Several years after completing this unit Alan is still enthused by what he managed to achieve:

I have developed a System that fits this organisation. It is more of a 180-degree system than a 360 degree one. In other words, we have focussed more on gaining feedback from staff reporting up than reporting down. The System is very comprehensive. The consultation processes through the project resulted in people involved coming away with a different perspective - including the General Manager.

The UTS courses and the project processes broke down some important barriers within SSCC and the silo mentality we had in our sections. For example, town planners and engineers now know and exchange ideas with one another. Previously they would have had little chance to interact.

Alan believes that the new flexible approaches in training go a long way toward making learning partnerships really worthwhile for businesses today.

The System took time to develop - nearly 18 months in all. I was in charge of the progress and completion and I had the opportunity to do the work that was needed to arrive at something to suit this organisation. There was negotiation with the UTS supervisor and my colleagues at SSCC regarding what the project would encompass. I had to meet criteria acceptable to UTS - such as the scope of the research review and the methodology - as well as aspects that met the needs of SSCC strategic initiatives.

Currently, within SSCC two key individuals are responsible for learning/training. Both believe that having a training culture means moving the training more to on-the-job skills where what is learnt can be directly applied. Peter Chaffe's role is that of Organisational Development Officer, with particular line responsibility for the executive functions of the organisation. Don Mould, Director of Training, on the other hand, has specific charge for the majority of workers. These include the counter staff, clerical staff, civil construction workers, gardeners, etc and their supervisors.

Their two approaches to learning and training reflected quite distinct approaches for employees at the managerial level and the 'workers', with no crossover between them. The differing needs and ways of dealing with staff development in the two groups provide varied examples of how organisations might go about undertaking training. However, it should be noted that major and distinct variations in opportunities available to staff at different levels can run the risk of adversely affecting a training and learning culture.

When considering the executives' professional development, Peter Chaffe realised that staff valued and benefited from meeting colleagues in different sections of the organisation and began to consider how opportunities could be furthered beyond the more limited ones afforded to those enrolled in the UTS course. It was through this thought process that monthly Breakfast Club meetings were instigated. The meetings are open to all staff of Grade 13 and above. Each month about 60 staff gather over breakfast in the conference /Board room to hear from an invited speaker. The program includes both external and internal speakers and the topics are of general interest - for example, the next guest speaker will be an Aboriginal person talking about reconciliation.

The initiatives for senior managers differ to the approaches required in accommodating the training and learning needs of the majority of Council workers. Don Mould believes there are some important fundamental attitudes which have to filter from the top if you are to succeed in bringing about a change to a training and learning culture.

Firstly your own attitude has to be transparent and open. You have to believe that there is value in distributing knowledge and power, and also that the processes of training have real benefits for

organisations. Unfortunately in this job you encounter continuing resistance from people who believe exactly the opposite, who behave as if control and retention of knowledge is the best way to wield power. But your task is still to effect change under these circumstances.

In saying this, Don is identifying the fact that within SSCC there are some people who have risen to various levels of responsibility without qualifications and that, sometimes, people who have been promoted in this way find it difficult to encourage younger workers to complete TAFE qualifications. It is for this reason that some of the gardeners opposed outright the move to give labourers opportunities to do Certificate 2 and Certificate 3 courses in horticulture.

The challenge facing the SSCC with regard to the supervisors was often referred to. Whilst there was an initial tongue in cheek comment that in Councils the three R's don't change much - *Roads, Rates, Rubbish* - there are signs that things are changing at SSCC:

Training has changed, roles have changed. The Council is more human resource orientated now. I did not have a computer when I started and now there is one on every desk. There is a new payroll system, competencies, remodelling and updating going on all the time. Through all this it is the top levels and the supervisors that remain the most challenging to deal with in terms of personal learning.

SSCC applies a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) framework to take workers up to Certificate 3 level in clerical and civil construction areas. RPL can be used to take workers up to 60% of the qualification, but in the case of SSCC Don observes that 'RPL is not well integrated and finds the TAFE approach to be a more reliable index of competence.'

At SSCC there are many initiatives in place, many barriers still to overcome and many challenges ahead. Don Mould is a firm believer in training needs analysis. He describes his role as 'juggling fire fighting with long term planning' and discussed some of the challenges still to come:

Training isn't just doing the task—it's also thinking about the task and wanting to do the task. Missing at many levels of the organisation are mentors, continuity and generalisation. These are the harder features to put in place to make the training really work. It isn't enough to train workers, you need to change motivation and reflection about what they're doing and why. It's best when you have confidence that workers in the section or team have these attributes.

From Don's point of view four areas have to be in balance and integrated to make training/learning effective. He diagrammed them as follows:

Structured Process	Training Process
Employee Request	Management Request

When these are out of balance it is really difficult to make your training program work effectively.

Some of the strongest evidence of the personal value of formal, competency-based training comes from staff employed in the Depots in the maintenance sections of SSCC. Mick Huskell, who has been involved with the SSCC as a civil construction worker for many years has been really enthusiastic about the changes he has noticed as a result of training initiatives.

When competencies were first proposed as a way of workers achieving higher skill levels, Mick, like other workers, was a bit sceptical. Once he became aware of the potential impact that competencies offered, including national recognition and portability across jobs and industry, he looked harder at the scheme.

Before we had skill recognition, the truck drivers were the only ones thought to have skills and they were the ones who progressed, so they ran all the jobs. Now we can all run jobs if we get our skills recognised.

As Mick and others began to record and develop their skills and competencies they gained opportunities within Council to progress. Mick has become heavily involved in training and has been to Adelaide to benefit from train-the-trainer work in a Registered Training Organisation. His experiences in working along side a registered trainer and seeing how a well equipped training centre (industry funded) operated opened his mind to the complexities and skills involved both in training and accrediting training. With the trainer as his mentor, Mick came to appreciate the range of skills and steps involved in the processes of work planning.

At the start no one exactly are you? 'ities you d There was no reward for skilling staff. Some blokes dropped out of training because they were promised promotion. But this wasn't going to be guaranteed. Now we have 80%-90% involvement in training on the job. And the workers know what they have to do to get a pay rise. We developed the log books and gave them ways to gather their own evidence. Once they did that bit they soon got rewards!

Mick believes that the trick to helping people who are uncomfortable about taking up training is to not give them too much (i.e. learning material or thick log books) at the start or they won't do it. The instructions must be written in plain English and relate to work practice, and the material is self-paced without needing a great pile of books. Then, he says, put together the work place assessors and get them accredited. Mick has also observed that this process has stopped the supervisors 'picking heads' and given the construction workers a better opportunity to learn.

The training program for members of staff at the depot rests upon individuals identifying what they need and then notifying the Staff Training Unit of their request and seconding other colleagues into enrolling for the course they want offered. Once a critical minimum enrolment number is reached and enough people add their names to the list, the course runs.

Anyone can get what they want if they can say: the boss wants it, I want it, and other blokes want it. Naturally the Council also benefits.

The practicalities of the training initiative meant that some people were transferred so that those training were in the one depot. The rostered days had to be changed over the nine months of the training course and all the pays were submitted on the one sheet.

No one relies on the training to keep the job but they can see how the learning of levelling and maths works on the job and individuals doing these sessions are gaining self confidence in working things out for themselves. It has gone from a mentality where the supervisor is always on your back to one where people take a responsibility for tasks themselves.

The Depot workers have responded positively to the whole range of changes:

When I do on-the-job training I enjoy working with the team. We often have to work things out together and we learn about one another as well as the skills. Getting the Certificate Level 3 means I can go anywhere but I like the opportunity to train on the job here.

Mick judges the effectiveness of a course by the retention of the participants in it. He notes the difference between trying to run things in a classroom and running things on the job.

Thirty minutes in a classroom and you've lost them. We put them out on the job with a task and make them plan what their going to do. We get them to write a specific plan for me or someone else to

carry out. They have to watch us do what they wrote. And then you get them. They soon know where they went wrong and we can help them fix it. They know what they've got to do and nobody saidn'I told you'.

Doretta, one of Don Mould's associates in the training unit, reflected on how the unit used to aim to target people into the right courses at the right time. She considers that not only was this impossible, but it didn't bring together learners at different levels so that they could share their experiences with one another and assist informal learning within the organisation.

Of course, learning and communications are not just limited to the staff. As a large Shire Council the SSCC has many clients and stakeholders and many residents are migrants with limited knowledge of the English language.

A few years ago, the SSCC multicultural officer decided, that in order to help residents learn about the SSCC, meetings should be held with various ethnic groups and advertised through the appropriate local ethnic community newspapers. This initiative had an immediate impact. For example, in Redfern the Russian community had borrowed many Russian language books from the Library and not returned them. Through the meeting it became clear that the community had not understood the library process and the library was astonished at the rate of return and adherence to borrowing rules following this meeting.

When Members of the Chinese community were taken on a guided tour of South Sydney to help them learn about the Council and the community, some residents began to wonder if some of the small plots of unused land they saw could be used to plant vegetables. Council obliged and these small oases have now become a focus of outdoor activity and exchanges.

South Sydney Shire Council is the first to admit that it has some real challenges still to face when examining its learning culture. Its recent experience of having managers work the one stop shop and finding they did not know the answers to many of the intricate questions posed by stakeholders, shows that divisions and communication problems are still present. The reluctance of supervisors to embrace formal training initiatives is very much embedded still and there is a visible difference between the treatment of workers at higher managerial levels and those at the coalface. Despite these challenges the Shire has made some significant breakthroughs.

It has convinced about 80% of a workforce who were previously uninterested to take control of their learning and to pursue training and learning opportunities. There have been networks established between workers, departments, other Councils, the community and between training providers and the SSCC, which have led to demonstrated efficiencies and understandings. The organisation has signed up to be a St James Ethics Centre Corporate Member because 'as a major big business we have to think ethically about our business dealings, values, awareness and training of staff'. This raises the point that sometimes simply thinking about improvements and searching for frameworks and guidance can be a really important step.

STELFORM ENGINEERING

Bennetts Green, NSW

The Managing Director of this pressure vessel design and fabrication plant decided he would introduce 'soft skills' into a 'hard' technical and business environment. It was a highly contentious program, to say the least.

Stelform Engineering designs, manufactures and erects a wide range of high quality pressure vessels used in industry for heat exchangers, boilers, ducting. It currently has three workshops, all in the Newcastle NSW area. The company was set up ten years ago when Tubemakers, the large metal fabrication firm, decided to close down its Newcastle pressure vessel plant. Eight of the men involved in the Tubemakers' operation (three managers, five tradesmen) decided to buy the business and restart it as Stelform. They remain the company's eight shareholders.

Setting up the business was considered, by their colleagues at Tubemakers who did not 'buy in', as a risky, perhaps foolhardy, venture. In fact, it has proved very successful. The company trades on its reputation for high skill/high quality work and has grown from its original 25 permanent employees to today's 100 - the majority of whom eventually came from Tubemakers. Over the last six months, having won a succession of fabrication tenders, the pace of work has been particularly demanding and, stretching them further, they have a team working on site on a major project in Queensland and they are setting up a branch in Western Australia.

Past success is no guarantee of future success, however, in these times of a globalising economy. The local television news on the first evening of our visit displayed the problem in graphic detail. It showed footage of a ship entering Newcastle Harbour earlier in the day. It was laden with steel pipe fabricated in the Philippines for the Hunter Valley's new \$300million Redbank power station. In the 'old days' (of a few years ago!) pipe for that project would have been made in Australia, most likely by Stelform.

The company has come to believe it will find it increasingly difficult to compete with the big international producers of pressure vessels, even on quality. They are rethinking their business strategy, increasingly looking at on-site installation of other people's equipment, solving plant operational problems, designing and perhaps implementing major plant shut-downs. To make this shift, John McColl, Stelform's Managing Director came to the view:

to fully develop the potential of the organisation, there has to be open communication up, down and across the organisation on all issues – that is the only way we are going to get anywhere. We have to be able to look inside ourselves honestly and understand what is going on.

McColl recognised that if he was serious about open and honest communication, then the people in the plant – himself included – would need new skills. At HunterNet, a cooperative of specialised engineering firms in the Hunter Valley, he had attended a seminar presented by Jennifer Elliott who owns a small training company, Soft Skills Australia. McColl contacted Elliott and they negotiated a contract whereby she would work with Stelform employees for a few days every month for two years. This was a major commitment both in time and in

money – as McColl puts it, 'It was painfully expensive, we had to take big swallows,' but he was determined to re-visit (and change)'the way we behave and conduct ourselves'.

The term 'soft skills' is often used in a loose sort of way to mean listening and being nice to people. To Elliott soft skills are quite specific. They are the interpersonal skills needed by people who work together to enable them to speak frankly, but constructively, with one another. It is her view that most people in a work environment 'collude' in that they evade difficult issues by unspoken but mutual consent. But then, because in the end the problem needs to be resolved, they 'fight dirty' (usually without even recognising that is what they are doing).

Now this is an odd claim to apply to Stelform because as a technology based company whose market edge is to solve complex problems to meet each client's specific requirements, its engineers and production workers *necessarily* debate daily at length, in detail and with complete frankness the 'ins and outs' of a vast array of technical issues. But McColl recognised that outspokenness about technical matters does not mean people are equally comfortable confronting one another over procedural and personnel decisions. In fact, on those matters the traditional hierarchical style of management prevailed.

The senior management group did recognise that when they discussed procedural matters which were important but not urgent and there was a difference of opinion in the group, they tended to let the matter ride. As Robert Gibson, the Financial Controller, said,

We knew there ought to be a better way but we thought it was mostly a question of not making enough time available to sort through the issue. We also assumed that this was a common problem for businesses and that we were not in any way unusual.

Thus, staff were not opposed to tackling the Soft Skills program, but without McColl's insistence, they would not have thought their problem was significant enough to warrant major intervention.

THE SOFT SKILLS PROGRAM

Major intervention is almost too mild a term for the approach Elliott used. Confrontation might be closer to the mark. She herself describes what she does as 'hammering them...holding them up against their problems...forcing them to see.' She began the process with the six members of the senior management group, which is known at Stelform as 'the first tier' and later started working with the second tier managers. These two groups got the 'full treatment' of training which involved a day, and sometimes more than one day, a month with Elliott. Towards the end of the program another 15 or so people at the top end of the company were given a two day 'overview' session.

Elliott's soft skills program works on two fronts: one is with the individual managers; the other with the management group as a unit. With the individuals, the process begins with a questionnaire which is then computer analysed and a score (between 0 and 100) generated on 11 'executive aptitudes':

personal honesty	organisation	appreciation
self-esteem	ability to talk	reliable
happiness	ability to listen	confront people
confront paperwork	warm and sociable	

The individuals who thought their analysis was 'spot on' were impressed – even if they scored poorly on some attributes – and their confidence in the program was secured. But

others thought their assessment was hopelessly wide of the mark. One person, for example, who had thought his self-esteem was just fine received the remarkably low score of 20 and was very angry. There was also the situation that people who rated low on a particular attribute - 'confronting people' was a common one - liked that aspect of their personality and had no desire to change or to be changed. Several were annoyed enough to try to get out of the program. The requests were refused.

There were a number of individuals in the first and second tiers, however, who said they were open from the start to personal change - for various reasons - and responded positively. One wanted to ensure he was minimising his stress levels as a close friend had died recently from cancer and he believed stress had been a major factor. Another recognised that 'what I hate most in others is probably what I hate most in myself' and he was determined he would learn to be less arrogant. A few were simply more tolerant of the 'shock tactics' and willing to see that there was room for them to change 'if that's how it developed.'

It was also interesting that different people responded to different aspects of the program. Some liked it in the beginning, but then felt they stopped getting much out of the one-on-one sessions. Others got more used to these sessions as time went on and got more out of them. Similarly with the group activities which sometimes involved 'games'. Some people thought this an unmitigated waste of time, others increasingly came to appreciate them.

OUTCOMES

What developed for the first tier managers is that they did begin to work much better as a team. Elliott, for all the insults she handed out, also taught them some real skills in interpersonal relations and she acted as a coach so people would check with her 'did I handle that right?'. In fact, even now a year after she finished with the company, people will still sometimes say in a meeting: 'now, what would Jennifer say?' She also had them deal with some of the issues they had been letting slip. At one meeting, the combined group of first and second tier managers compiled a list of seventeen tasks which, if they were tackled, should save the company \$1 million per year. These included standard terms of offer for different client groups, effective information transfer to shops, commitment to safety, accountability of project engineers.

One of the most successful of the tasks that was attacked was establishing a continuous improvement process in pipe spooling whereby tradesmen would check their own work. This was to eliminate the need for supervisors or quality controllers to do full job inspections every time because that was both expensive and did not eliminate the source of the problem. One must be clear about this, problems were always corrected, but preventative action so the problem did not recur was often let slip. Through a series of meetings, ways of recording and quantifying results were discussed. As Gibson reported, 'I made a number of draft recording sheets and presented them to a meeting; this was about as close as they came to sneering *but I was not discouraged*. I asked how they could be refined...' This perseverance in the face of protest about something that was not of immediate and critical impact was new to Stelform, and has paid off.

Another shift attributable to the soft skill training was overcoming senior managers' reluctance to deal with an issue for which they did not have line responsibility. For example, Bob Masterson, Project Coordinator, felt 'stuck' if he wanted something from someone who didn't report to him, what right did he have to insist? The team's soft skills work made it clear that anything which affected Stelform *is* the business of each member of the first tier.

Now I see myself as a people manager rather than a 'nuts and bolts' manager. I don't enjoy conflict – no one likes to be in a dispute situation - but I know now how to focus on the problem not the person, and I tackle what has to be done. Problems avoided do not go away.

We heard a range of 'testimonials' about positive improvement in first tier management group from their soft skills training – from people outside and inside the first tier (including from the first tier manager who had been so offended initially by his self-esteem rating):

You can speak your mind without offending people and that is a big change. Everyone speaks in senior management meetings.. We sometimes relapse but it has oiled the team and, all in all, it was a good program.

It has enabled us to express our emotions a bit more. We've learned to say things like 'this is how I feel about'... rather than either withholding comments or abusing the other person. We're personally closer now.

The whole place is less autocratic now. You could definitely talk better to management when the course was on. The company runs better now.

The outcomes of the soft skills training program for the second tier managers and supervisors were a little more muted and mixed. Well, in the beginning their reaction was not muted at all: they wanted to pull the plug, full stop. McColl listened to their complaints and did see that some adjustments were made so that it focused more on company issues. But, basically, the insurrection was put down because McColl was determined to see the program through.

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of the program at the second tier was not as strong as in the first tier. This was partly because the second tier received less training; partly because they work in various parts of the company and do not function (and are not intended to function) as a single team. This second tier also became responsible for the spread of soft skills to the people on the shop floor – a task which they did not, by and large, feel capable of handling. Fifteen other people at Stelform received a two-day 'overview' of soft skills but that was never going to change their capacity to interrelate more effectively if significant change (learning) was required.

There was a fairly consistent message from the second tier and 'overview' participants that for sustained and deep cultural change at Stelform, soft skills training needed to reach everyone. As one supervisor said, 'it's all right me learning to communicate assertively but fairly with the floor, but the blokes on the floor need to communicate with me in the same way.' There was almost a sense of disappointment that it had stayed a program for the top of the company because there had been, it was reported to us, genuine enthusiasm on the floor about everyone learning to communicate better.

OTHER TRAINING AT STELFORM

We set out specifically to look at the soft skills training at Stelform but inevitably as we interviewed people the whole range of their learning, especially technical learning which is so critical to Stelform's success, was raised and discussed.

The fact that Stelform grew out of Tubemakers has had a big influence. Tubemakers (with BHP) had placed a strong emphasis on highly structured apprenticeships and formal training programs which provided the skill base for many smaller employers in the Hunter region as well as for themselves. Training and its benefits were still valued in the new company but the

training was predominantly based on each individual's own interests rather than on highly structured formal programs.

That was a logical tack for the much smaller company. Currently, however, because the company is getting larger, because it needs new skills, because of the near collapse in good apprenticeship training and the aging of its own workforce, there are signs that a shift is occurring. This might see Stelform moving back into the more formalised training agenda of its historical roots and, in particular, it has embarked on an ambitious apprenticeship program where the company has taken on ten apprentices, amounting to almost 10 percent of its workforce.

Nonetheless, training undertaken at Stelform is still best described as being responsive to individual needs. Individuals interviewed were able to describe a range of training/learning in which they have been involved. All of them reported learning and developing at work; none gave the impression that they felt they were stagnating – in fact, quite the reverse. The topics they choose to learn about is wide – ranging through new codes, new software programs, occupational health and safety, research seminars on new materials and some personal choices like parenting skills and karate. As one person said, 'if you offered to guys on the floor to do what they wanted, they would choose as varied a range as the people themselves'.

Not only is the choice of topics broad, the way people's learning took place showed even more variation. These included:

- Learning from each other
Talking to others and tapping into their knowledge appears to be something that most people found relatively easy to do. People said things like: 'You have to do the job, so you have to ask'; 'Out there on the floor people talk to each other a lot.'
- Learning by doing (and, sometimes making mistakes)
People often mentioned learning on the job and having to solve problems; as suggested by one person, he had to solve his 'own problems', his 'own dramas'. 'Growing with the new technology' and learning on the shop floor was recognised as an important part of learning on the job.
- Interactive computer based courses
This suited one person, but he was careful to point out that this style doesn't suit everyone. He told the story of computer training that was offered on CD ROM. This involved self-directed modules which were ticked off when completed. Only three attempted the course, and only one completed. As he said: 'Some people prefer more directed, lecture type learning situations.'
- Reading
Reading was often mentioned by people. Apart from reading about technical aspects of the job and new technologies, people read (and listened to tapes) about things like conflict resolution, team building, organisational behaviour. 'If I see something new, I read about it and then follow up.'
- Acting up
In-house training for people to 'act up' in senior positions (for example from Leading Hand to Supervisor positions) was another training/learning strategy. This was necessary to fill positions when people were on leave, but was also a mode of succession planning. This form of learning is especially useful when people are on leave for a relatively long period because it gives the person being trained a longer trial and was better for 'getting your teeth into it'.

- Attending formal off-site training courses and conferences
On the first day of our visit, the company's Managing Director was himself away the first day of our visit at a computer course. Thick books of conference proceedings on material fabrication could be seen on office desks.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

Technical knowledge at Stelform is at a premium and the way the company deals with this kind of training and learning is interesting but not innovative. Where Stelform departs from the norm was the introduction of soft skills training into this world of big machines, heavy steel pipe and welding torches. The soft skills program that Stelform undertook over two years was difficult. It caused mistrust amongst some of the people who didn't receive training or received it only late in the day. It caused huge discomfort, even pain, for some people who were fully involved in it.

The *personal* changes and insights into individual's own ways of thinking and acting which Elliott's 'treatment' delivered have survived well. Many individuals reported a sense of personal change. One person indicated: 'I've changed and seen an improvement overall in the company.' However, when asked if he had seen a change in other individuals, he was not sure: 'It may be they weren't as bad as I thought and that if I see a change in others, maybe that's because I approach them differently'. A soft skills program can hardly ask to be more effective than that. Its one flaw is that it was confined to management.

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG LIBRARY

Wollongong, NSW

The library of any university employs a diverse staff – from the people who stack shelves to senior managers. This library has managed to forge a cohesive and impressive whole out of its separate elements – winning *business* awards - by taking 'investing in people' seriously.

The University of Wollongong is a regional university south of Sydney in the Illawarra region of New South Wales. It became autonomous in 1975, having previously been part of the University of New South Wales. It was recognised in the 1999 University of the Year awards for its work with overseas students.

This case study focuses on one section of this diverse institution - the University of Wollongong Library - a 1998 finalist in the Australian Quality Awards for Business Excellence. It outlines how the University of Wollongong Library achieved recognition for business excellence - and its process of striving yet higher.

The library, which employs 64 permanent staff and up to 20 casuals, is the first one in Australia to be awarded the Investors in People (IiP) standard - an internationally recognised standard concerned with achieving best practice in the management and development of people to achieve organisational goals together with a framework for ongoing evaluation and improvement.

All libraries - especially university libraries - are confronting major change. More books are being published on increasingly specialised topics. Journal offerings continue to widen while current and past journal volumes are also becoming available electronically. Published scholarly books and journals (whatever their format) are increasingly expensive to acquire. The available purchasing budget is shrinking (along with the buying power of the Australian dollar in overseas transactions). Student and staff demands for specialised material are increasing; and there is an ongoing need for everyone in universities to update skills in information literacy and knowledge management.

Like other universities, the University of Wollongong Library has undergone budget cuts, staff redundancies, increases in the proportion of casual staff hired, technological transformations, and a growing demand for higher quality services. However, in this process it has invested in its staff and business such that in 1998 it was a finalist in the Australian Quality Awards for Business Excellence. How has it achieved business excellence and an IiP standards award in this climate?

KEY TURNING POINTS

People had attention paid to them.

The Business Excellence Award and Investor in People recognition is the outcome of a more than ten-year process of staff development and strategically well-managed change. University

Librarian, Felicity McGregor (effectively the CEO), who has worked in the University library for 25 years, describes her early years in the setting as 'dreadful'. When she was appointed Deputy and later Chief Librarian, she already had a strong commitment to staff development as a path to organisational transformation and change. It was time to live out her convictions.

When we started with staff training more than a decade ago, it was not within a conceptual framework. We started with a plan and with a focus to put that plan in place. There wasn't much good material around and we just used what we could get our hands on. Looking back on those days now I see that probably what mattered more than anything was that people had attention paid to them.

Performance was linked to staff development.

Beyond that early plan, a second key turning point came when we started evaluating people's performance—performance appraisal we called it then. We had to link performance somehow with staff development. In the 1980s we had a hard job doing this. Now it seems so obvious to link and target professional development with performance management. But back then it wasn't so clear. We were the first Australian library to implement performance management.

Now training needs are linked specifically to staff learning plans, the review process and developmental evaluations. Staff have the opportunity to identify what they need for their stage of development to link this with returns to their current or anticipated work settings and the library as a whole. Performance management meant we had an obligation to all staff - supervisors and workers.

We focused on 'growing our own' capacity.

We 'discovered' the importance of having an effective recruitment process to gain and develop staff with attitudes and work approaches congruent with our Library aims. We revised our staff selection processes and ways of collecting information from referees. We appointed people who welcomed change and were not afraid to experiment.

From that base, we focus as much as we can on 'growing our own' capacity. Getting Level 7s and 8s - that is, highly qualified and skilled library staff - is nearly impossible. Hiring Level 2 workers where little or no formal qualification is much easier. By offering a range of programs to staff, together with opportunities for them to act in different and more senior positions which they may then apply for, we see how staff perform in the work place and offer them opportunities for growth. We've called this 'job enrichment'.

We offer a range of professional development programs in-house.. In planning we keep focusing on our strategic initiatives or sooner or later we will fall off the pace. You cannot afford to be complacent or you start going backwards. I see the investment in PD as real value for money. Even though the budget is small, we have made it work effectively for the whole library.

Now we have a critical mass of employees—much of this capacity developed through our team training programs—that embrace change and we've been able to develop further from there. Initially, of course, there were many people who opposed the processes involved in being placed within work teams. But we also recognised that it was important to allow staff time to work through the issues that were important to them. We learned we had to set aside time to deal with individual issues and allow workers time to be heard.

Rodney Horan described his experience of working, and learning, at the Library this way:

We all have team-building training. Other members of the team know it is their job to help you adjust and manage in new settings. Along with that there are systems in place to support a new team member. We all realise what it's like for them so we help them learn what they have to do. Teams

have checklists to work from, without them we would assume a lot of knowledge. It's the same with everything. You get so used to doing a job you quickly forget what it is like for someone coming in new.

Everyone has responsibility for being a conduit for communication.

As Felicity McGregor explains:

I see my role as the Chief Librarian as one where I have to communicate value to my team. I do this through email, identifying reports that I find and posting them on our Intranet, or circulating other reports for comment and discussion. The communication effort is a huge one. We are fortunate in library and information areas to have very good professional bodies and I use these sources to keep up to date myself on the key issues in our field. But I also rely on my senior managers to assist me within their areas of expertise.

I spend time sifting out information that comes from CAUL (professional body for university librarians) and ask myself: Who would benefit from having this information? Then I pass it on. I'm a conduit, but then I expect the staff to do the same thing.

INDICATORS OF ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING WITHIN THE LIBRARY

Learning opportunities exist for staff at every level of the organisation.

Ten to fifteen years ago staff saw little need for training and development. Four years ago, the Library (as part of its quality processes) identified the training and courses they needed for quality management and improvement. From this exercise came core training modules on team building, quality awareness and customer service, together with new modules on information literacy and IT 'up-skilling' to manage new demands such as data base management and on line searching.

Lorraine Denny's (Staff Development Officer) recent personal staff development has focussed on creative training techniques and training-to-train through activities that extend her skill base. The 'Training to Train' program has involved participants committing to something that paralleled an aspect of training that they wished to develop. They might therefore undertake Tae Kwon Do in order to mirror in their work environment a particular aspect such as flexibility or alertness to the unexpected. Other participants in this course undertook theatre sports and acting to learn to improvise and develop better verbal fluency. Lorraine observes that:

Training is an expectation of all staff, although we do not make it compulsory. Library management provides strong support for all training. We encourage staff to attend and emphasise the link between training and the achieving Library goals and expectations. This may include personal emails to staff who would benefit from the training or who have identified the need for the training in their learning plans.

Much of the learning has to be on the job especially in lending services and this is where the value of strong and effective teams can be seen. Although we are investigating developing some courses online through the Internet, many staff want training to be face-to-face and to have contact with other staff. They learn so much from one another.

Experimentation, risk taking and learning from performance are encouraged.

Sectional teams each have action plans. The team action plan identifies specific actions (including training needs) linked to the Library's goals and objectives. Recently, one sectional team could not secure a team leader. So a team member suggested that they trial operating as a self-managing team. While the team was successful in meeting team goals and targets, a number of issues arose. For example, it was difficult to identify which team member other teams should approach. Now the Library is about to formally appoint a team leader. However, staff are not daunted by the fact that this experiment has not been continued.

Nor do they see it as impossible to develop a self-managing team. They have seen the process as a challenge, and not a defeat.

The Staff Training and Development Committee, and Lorraine Denny in particular, are currently focussing on courses in creativity. Why? Because they believe that their staff are inherently creative, but may have lost touch with some of that capacity. They want to see if they can enhance creativity for the organisation to produce transformational changes rather than just incremental ones. They believe that this may be possible by mobilising different thinking styles using a 'think-outside-the-square-you're-in' approach. Such initiatives are designed to provide further links between training and quality improvement.

Senior staff use their networks to identify a wide range of learning opportunities.

Since moving into the role of University Librarian Felicity McGregor has had 'a lot of catching up to do especially in the changing area of publishing online and sustainability'. She uses both her professional networks and professional mentors to assist in this task.

Other senior staff also use professional networks to identify the very best providers and opportunities here and overseas.

There is a firm staff development budget and careful thought is given to its allocation.

We work from a small budget of around \$40 000 each year for all needs including attendance at overseas and national conferences. So we have to be very careful about how and where we spend this money. We also receive about \$2 000-3 000 for staff development from the Career Development Unit. This allocated budget has to cover fees for outside consultants, external training, resources and incidental costs. So we have to review the return on conference and training attendance to see what value individuals and the library will get for this large expenditure. While the budget is not increasing, it is dedicated to this purpose. (Lorraine Denny)

Staff are encouraged to create their own opportunities but these are then supported financially and through some time release. Throughout the interviews, came the stories of staff who joined the library with no experience in the library sector who have created their own career tracks and opportunities with the assistance of the library's staff development opportunities and job enrichment/staffing policies.

Traci Webb, now the manager of Resource Services, is in her eighth year with the Library. Early on in her employment she saw possibilities in IT. She was up front with management about the staff IT skills she thought the Library would need and how she could develop her own skills and experience to assist the Library to meet these new demands. A Systems Support Officer development opportunity was realised which later was reclassified as a permanent position. In addition to this role, Traci supported herself through TAFE and continues university study outside of work hours. Having completed her Associate Diploma in Library Practice, she is now undertaking an undergraduate degree (via distance education) in Library and Information Science with a Commerce major.

What were the driving forces for her undertaking training and professional development? In 1992 Traci describes herself as

... daunted by IT and I had to tackle this attitude. When I got involved through training in the technology I found it wasn't as bad as I had feared. Then in 1993 I attended a course in Career Planning and I could see some scope for my career. I didn't have high expectations of the Library in terms on long-term job satisfaction when I first commenced employment. I thought I'd get bored. Thankfully there are interesting and changing roles and responsibilities for staff who want to rise to a challenge and get involved.

Opportunities to learn from team project management.

Traci's career thinking was also shaped early on when she had an opportunity to lead a project team.

I've learned that projects are a huge developmental opportunity. They take you in all sorts of unforeseen directions as well as consolidating and developing existing skills and experience.

One of the biggest changes for me came when I was a general library assistant and volunteered to lead a project team (which included senior management) on TQM. From being a twelve month project team it became a standing committee. No one said 'you can't do this you're only a Level 2'. They gave me the encouragement to try and take some risks. I also gained support from team members' experience to see it through. It was very demanding for me. I had to prepare for and run meetings, as well as learn about TQM because I was no expert. I learned to implement facilitation and project management processes and to prepare documentation. I got lots of ideas from members of the team whom I also bounced ideas off. The team gave me constructive feedback. I know it was a major learning opportunity. They were very forgiving and the experience resulted in my improved self-confidence.

Opportunities for job enrichment

The job enrichment program offers staff opportunities to apply to work elsewhere in the Library in temporary vacancies and vacated positions. Maternity leave has provided many opportunities for staff to 'act-up.' During this time they have a chance to develop new skills, see what a different area of work entails and to apply for that job, should it become permanently available. But it is also made clear that there are no guarantees. If the original employee returns to the post, the secondee returns to their substantive post. Following a resignation, each post is formally advertised and with open competition for the post.

Staff identified the learning value of job enrichment as follows:

- it's a chance to test out employees in a range of new posts without much risk;
- employees gain new experience, variety, skills and knowledge of work mates throughout the library;
- it is a way to test the effectiveness of many work-based practices and philosophies. If they don't work, then there is a way to fix them;
- there are flexible work teams who have an opportunity to try out what they have learned;
- the Library develops a highly multiskilled work force of people who truly understand the others sections of the library.

Opportunities to develop creative ideas

A current focus within the Library is to encourage staff to solve problems creatively. Staff are offered incentives both to devise solutions and to identify ways in which these solutions might be applied elsewhere in the Library and University.

The Library wished to encourage community membership, for example. Wollongong residents clearly appreciated this opportunity and turned up to enrol after work only to find that the University cashier's office closed earlier in the day. One Library staff member thought of Australia Post. Why not ask them to act as a payment point? This would extend both the hours and locations that community members could use to pay the joining fee.

When the ideas was circulated more widely through the Library, someone suggested that the same system could be used for students to pay outstanding fines for overdue books. Since students are unable to access their end of semester results if they have debts outstanding, they could clear these debts regardless of where they might be working or on vacation. The idea was quickly picked up and applied in other areas of the University.