

Learning Locally

Better understanding the complexity and costs of service delivery in rural locations.

Literature Review

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INTRODUCTION

Learn Local Organisations (LLOs) located in rural and regional communities provide a vital service in supporting the most vulnerable learners in their communities, yet many of these organisations are becoming economically unviable. There is a tension between having an organisation that is totally commercially orientated and one that sees its role as part of a wider community engagement model. First, this review backgrounds the wider benefits of learning and the current policy arena. Second, it investigates the tensions LLO face and how they currently impact on regional and rural LLOs. Third, alternative models of good practice from national and international examples are canvassed. Finally, a proposition is made that LLOs should be viewed within the context of a broader network of learning organisations, working in a range of partnership models, within a geographic location. Such a learning community approach takes into account a LLO role as a partner in a place-based strategy that contributes to improving social and economic outcomes, builds community and strengthens community governance (Bristol-Myers Squibb n.d., Cheesman 2013, International Water Management Institute n.d.).

WIDER BENEFITS OF LEARNING

Adult education plays an important role in contributing to the well-being of society. There is a wealth of international research on the wider benefits of learning. Schuller and Watson (2009) make explicit that education in all its forms helps people to understand, adapt to and shape change. In addition, a study on the impact of adult learning undertaken in the United Kingdom, found that adult learning, in the form of participating in part-time courses, had a positive effect in the four areas of life, that is, health, employment, social relationships and volunteering (Fujiwara and Cambell 2011). Further, an EU-funded study entitled *The Benefits of Lifelong Learning* (The BELL project) finds that a liberal adult education not only benefits the individual, but also the wider social context (Thöne-Geyer 2014).

Adult education and workplace learning are also inextricably linked (Wang and Allen 2013). There are many challenges in preparing adult learners, especially older workers and people from socially and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, for the modern workplace. In particular, the workforce is aging while at the same time, international competition and new technologies are changing the face of Australian Industry (Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education 2008). This means that in this 21st century information society the adult learner must grow and learn at a more rapid pace than at any time in history (Wang and Allen 2013: 10). Further, Schmidtke (2013: 461) argues that the current technology explosion has made the adult education providers' task 'impossibly complex'. This is because they have an ever expanding clientele and a workplace that requires ever more advanced skills. This is at a time when a 2007 international adult literacy survey found 48.7 per cent of working age Australian adults had literacy and numeracy levels too low to cope with the everyday demands of life and work in a complex and technologically advanced society (Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education 2008).

The most recent international research, based on literacy and numeracy surveys, demonstrate that for individuals, low levels of literacy and numeracy skills have a negative impact on both their social and economic future (OECD 2013; Hagston and Tout 2014). LLOs in Victoria, and other Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers across Australia, play a vital role in widening participation and providing fundamental workplace skills for adult learners, especially those from 'non-traditional' backgrounds.

POLICY BACKGROUND

Wilson (2014) notes that the responsibility for lifelong learning is shared across all three levels of government. The national vocational education and training (VET) system is a major provider of skills training linked to economic development needs. The Australian Government delivers its lifelong learning agenda through the national qualifications framework. This system influences 'the volume, distribution and quality of accredited lifelong learning' (Wilson 2014). The VET system can include schools, Higher Education, ACE, TAFE institutions and private providers.

The Federal Government recognises the issues with the levels of functional literacy and numeracy among Australians of working age and is working to address this through a 10 year strategy – The National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults (SCOTESE 2012).

The 2008 Ministerial Declarations on ACE, the only national framework that specifically links to ACE, highlights the sector's importance as a pathway for 'second chance' learners (Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education 2008). In addition, the Victorian Tertiary Education Plan also emphasizes the importance of community education as providing a pathway to tertiary education. 'The Adult and Community Education (ACE) organisations are part of the VET sector and they provide diploma and advanced diplomas' (Dow et al. 2009: 106).

However, Golding argues that the VET policy structure does not account for the wider benefits of learning, that is, life wide that is a cornerstone of ALA policy. The current system is narrowly focused on employment outcomes. He asserts that lifelong learning is not specifically addressed in Government policy and a critical and comprehensive study of learning by adults in Australia is well overdue. The last national review of lifelong learning and adult and community education was *Beyond Cinderella: Towards a Learning Society* published in 1997 which is now 'hopelessly outdated' (Golding 2014). It seems nothing much has changed since Rubenson and Beddie reported in 2004 that adult and community education 'remains the Cinderella of education policy, unsupported in a systematic way at a national level, with funds coming almost exclusively from the states, whose definitions of adult education vary considerably and whose main priority remains schools' (Rubenson and Beddie 2004: 161). In fact, recent research commissioned by Adult Learning Australia suggest the situation is much worse, especially in rural and regional locations (Thompson 2013; Victorian ACE Peaks 2014).

Internationally, interest in lifelong learning is gaining traction, especially through the re-emergence of the learning city concept.

The recent rise in learning cities has really been driven by East Asia, in particular Korea, China, Japan and Taiwan (Chang et al. 2013; Dayong 2013; Han and Makino 2013). At the *Cities Learning Together* conference in Hong Kong in November 2013, Korea was identified as the lighthouse of the learning city developments internationally.

Prior to that conference the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning's (UIL) International Platform of Learning Cities (IPLC) was launched in Beijing in October 2013 (UNESCO 2014). An outcome was a Declaration on Building Learning Cities in which among other things, 'learning communities', 'learning cities' and 'learning regions' were recognised as pillars of sustainable economic development. The Framework of Key Features of Learning Cities includes the following building blocks of learning that can be applied to any learning region, whether it is city based or not:

- Inclusive learning in the education system
- Re-vitalised learning in families and communities
- Effective learning for and in the workplace
- Extended use of modern learning technologies
- Enhanced quality and excellence in learning
- A vibrant culture of learning throughout life.

Adult education should be linked to any formal policy because it contributes to the building blocks of learning in any place-based initiative. For example, Europe does formally include adult education in its education and training strategies, attaching 5% of a very large budget (14.7 billion Euros) to adult education (European Commission 2014). As part of the Strategic Framework Education and Training 2020, European countries have four common objectives to meet future challenges:

- Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- Promoting equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship
- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

The European Commission has set common benchmarks including school retention rates, university participation, and most importantly for adult education, a target that at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning. The Commission works with 32 countries across Europe to promote the European Agenda for Adult Learning. They recognize the need to increase the participation of adult learning in all kinds (formal, non-formal, informal) learning for a range of reasons including acquiring new work skills, active citizenship, personal development and fulfillment. As part of the funding there are opportunities for staff working in adult education institutions to study and work abroad. This might provide opportunities for Australian adult education personnel to link and learn from European counterparts.

Right at this point in time, advancing the right to quality education for all is one of the goals in the new United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) being proposed. The Asia-South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) in Australia is facilitating discussions on the post-2015 education goal that was agreed on during the Global Education Meeting held in Muscat, Oman in May 2014:

'Ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030'
(Sultanate of Oman, Ministry of Education, 2011)

The conversations with representatives of the key education advocacy organisations in Australia are identifying the key policy platforms to engage with in Australia and what Australia can contribute to regional and global policy advocacy (Australian Council for Adult Literacy 2014).

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In many countries around the world, the role of regions is becoming more important and increased consideration is being given to regions and the contributions that they can make.

'In the immediate post-World War II decades almost all of the major capitalist countries were marked by strong central governments and relatively tightly bordered national economies. ... Today, after much economic restructuring and technological change, significant transformations of this older order of things have occurred virtually across the world, bringing in their train the outlines of a new social grammar of space, or a new world system One of the outstanding features of this emerging condition is the apparent though still quite inchoate formation of a multilevel hierarchy of economic and political relationships ranging from the global to the local. ... Accordingly, ... there has of late been a resurgence of region-based forms of economic and political organization' (Scott 2001: 813-817).

According to a review undertaken by the Australian Government into one of its immigration programs:

[t]he term 'region' was an elastic one, being widely understood but seldom defined. It incorporated a myriad of meanings in the Australian context, and encompassed everything from geographical areas located in rural and remote Australia, through all non-metropolitan areas of Australia, to provincial and industrial cities. There was ... no clear definition of what constituted a region or regional Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 2001: 10)

This view is also reflected by the Australian Government's Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (2008: 2) (BITRE) that reflected that:

Regions do not always have commonly accepted boundaries. Regions can be defined by formal boundaries (as in the case of state or local governments), by a sense of economic and social interdependence, by natural environments and landscapes, or by other connections that distinguish them from neighbouring areas. ... the main spatial concept used to summarise information about Australia's regions is the ABS Remoteness Structure. This classification groups Census Collection Districts into five broad classes of remoteness, which share common characteristics in terms of physical distance from services and opportunities for social interaction. These classes are: Major Cities of Australia; Inner Regional Australia; Outer Regional Australia; Remote Australia; and Very Remote Australia.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001: 9) (ABS) identifies the 'specific definition of remoteness based upon the distance people must travel along a road network to get to Service Centres (areas where they can access goods, services and opportunities for social interaction). It is a geographical concept and does not attempt to define the broader concept of accessibility which is influenced by many factors such as the socioeconomic status or mobility of a population'.

According to the Regional Institute of Australia:

'Throughout regional Australia, local communities are seeking an opportunity to take the reins and lead their own development. There is a growing awareness that the future will be very different from the past and that this requires new perspectives and approaches from regional leaders. This also means that there is no 'one-size fits all approach' to regional policy. But while every community is unique, its position in the economy is mainly driven by a combination of industry, proximity to larger cities and local population size. We are in an environment where the big economic changes in a community will be driven by international economic conditions as well as long-term demographic and social trends. This means that regional communities will need to consider their future closely and use their resources wisely. For regions to have the chance to prosper in the future, they need to identify what matters the most for them and act on these issues. It goes without saying that there is a great diversity in the regional communities of Australia – reflecting unique geography, resources and history.

Regions also need policy and public debate that better understands and responds to varying needs and situations. This has been lacking in the public conversation about the future of regions' (Regional Australia Institute 2014: 2).

They identify four types of regions, including:

- *Regional Cities*, which have populations of over 50,000 persons. They have diverse economies and the chance to use their size and diversity to shape their own future.
- *Connected Lifestyle Regions* do not have city population size, but are close to our major metropolitan regions. They will be influenced by their connection with these cities.
- *Industry and Service Hubs* are regional centres with between 15,000 – 50,000 residents, located further from major metropolitan areas. Their performance is linked to industry outcomes, but their population size means they could be resilient to change (for example Horsham and Warrnambool).
- *Heartland Regions* are smaller regional areas that are not close to other major metropolitan or *Regional Cities*. Industry trends and local ingenuity will shape their future' (for example Ararat) (Regional Australia Institute 2014: 3).

Regional leaders need to understand which of these descriptors fits their region and to develop strategies that are appropriate for that type of region.

As well as examining regions based on a geographic basis, governments and industry also identify regional characteristics that relate to economic factors. Local Government Areas within which this research has been set include Economic Development Units that consider a range of economic factors, such as industry mix, natural resources and infrastructure, in determining the regional context. As discussed by Maude (2004: 7):

Much of the theoretical and policy related discussion of regional growth in Europe emphasizes the role of knowledge, and the ways in which it is generated and applied, as the major factor in regional economic growth. In Australia, however, the only significant contribution to regional growth theory has been to emphasize the role of natural resources, and to explain the development path of a resource dependent region.

Research has also been undertaken to examine regions from both an economic and cultural perspective. In conjunction with universities in Britain and Japan, Finnish researchers Sotarauta and Viljamaa (2002) have undertaken a research project that examines regional innovation environments (RIE) in order to 'better understand the role of management and leadership in the development of RIEs of the Information Age' (2002: 1). As part of this project, they undertook an extensive examination of the literature available with regard to regional development and then used this information to draw out the learning from a number of Nordic case studies undertaken by other researchers. They discuss the growing importance of regions since the 1980s and 1990s and reflect on the rhetoric and practices that resulted in the 'Europe of Regions' approach to policy development.

They do not define a region by its physical borders but rather by the interaction and operation of regional networks (2002: 3). This accords with the view of Allen et al. (1998: 5) that regions are 'a series of open, discontinuous spaces constituted by the social relationships which stretch across them in a variety of ways'.

Florida (1995: 528) also examines the role of regions in the knowledge era and states that 'there is likely to be a shift from strategies and policies which emphasize national competitiveness to ones which revolve around the concept of *sustainable advantage* at the regional as well as national scale' (1995: 535).

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION

Factors in the rise in prominence of regions and sub-regions include their contribution to global competition (Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen 2007: 81) and the way in which those who live in regions cooperate to achieve a competitive advantage (Lorentzen 2008: 539). Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007: 80) discuss how, in the industrial era, '[t]he nation-led approach supported hierarchical and harmonizing regional policies, but these do not seem to function in the information era' as the availability of timely and focused information allows local 'actors' (2007: 81) to become involved in policy and decision making.

Danish researcher Lorentzen (2008: 538) state that 'ideas of regional embeddedness ... face the problem that theoretically there is no definition of what a region is and, empirically, the territories researched are quite different in size and status – from states, provinces, countries, city regions or groups of villages', but, despite this view, still asserts that competitive advantage will be driven from the local level as 'the source of growth and competitiveness is to be found in the local environment' (2008: 533). This view was supported by Moulaert and Sekia (2003) who discuss the interplay between regional 'growth and development factors such as human capital, local business culture and schooling systems, infrastructure, quality of production factors and systems, and learning from the regional experience for renewed regional development' (2003: 290) in contributing towards regional innovation in the UK. They define economic growth, in which 'inputs that are at least partly available or generated locally'; socio-cultural factors such as 'cultural needs and community identity'; and the political dimension, 'relative to political decision making and involvement of regional groups and individuals in the policy process' as factors in regional endogenous development theory (2003: 296).

In developing successfully, regions need to build capabilities in the areas of learning, networking, leadership, innovation and being visionary (Haarmaakorpi 2006: 1087) and successful regions have been defined as being characterised by four factors: 'a plethora of civic associations, a high level of interaction between social groups, coalitions which crossed individual interests, and a strong sense of common purpose' (Healey et al. 1999: 119).

LEARNING REGIONS

The concept of the 'learning organisation' was developed by Garratt (1987) and Senge (1990). In a theoretical article, US researcher Florida (1995) discusses the rise of knowledge based capitalism in most parts of the world and believes that the role of regions in this process is poorly understood. He examines the importance of knowledge and learning in the 'new' capitalism and used the literature to examine the development of theories and practices with regard to the learning region.

According to Florida (1995: 528) 'learning regions, as their name implies, function as collectors and repositories of knowledge and ideas, and provide an underlying environment or infrastructure which facilitates the flow of knowledge, ideas and learning'. He believes that regions are similar to a knowledge based business, needing to build capabilities in 'continuous improvement, new ideas, knowledge creation and continuous learning' (1995: 532).

US researchers Christopherson and Clark (2010) examine the literature with regard to the ways in which European and American universities work with regional governments, other parts of the education sector, business and the community to build competitive economic advantage. According to the authors, '[t]he learning region is about practice as well as ideas' (2010: 121). Knowledge and learning in the modern economy are vitally important factors and learning is a collective process that is dynamic and synergistic (Haarmaakorpi and Melkas 2005: 642), whilst knowledge has been recognised as a valuable resource in its own right by economists (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998: 245).

As well as learning from their successes, groups need to also learn from their failures in order to do things better in the future (Sotarauta and Viljamaa 2002: 13).

COMMUNITY RESPONSIVENESS AND MOBILISATION

In building an understanding of how regions operate, it is useful to view the region in terms of the communities that live and function within its boundaries. Research has been undertaken into the capacity of a community to mobilise in response to natural disasters (Dunbar 2007), health issues (Lindsey et al. 1999; Lindsey et al. 2001), local planning and development (Amdam 2000) and disability rights (Rummery 2004).

Another lens through which communities can be viewed involves analysing the ways in which local labour markets operate. In her examination of welfare versus 'workfare' labour markets, German researcher Dingeldey (2007) compares theoretical constructs against empirical case studies of labour market policies in Denmark, the UK and Germany. Her analysis include comparisons of spending as a percentage of GDP and participant inflow to the national labour market; as well as numbers of participants in work placements, training and counselling programs.

'Activating labour market policy ... is supposed to play a central role within the paradigm shift of welfare state policies. It is understood to involve a mix of the enforcement of labour market participation, the conditioning of rights and growing obligations of the individual at one side, and an increase of services in order to promote employability and restore social equity at the other' (Dingeldey 2007: 823).

Dingeldey discusses the 'notions of the 'enabling' and the 'activating' state ... that highlight changes in the governance of the public-private mix' and finds that, whilst the evidence points to some similarity in approach, '[d]ifferent welfare state types keep on producing different mixes of workfare and enabling policies' (2007: 823). Whilst most labour market policy is likely to be developed at a national or state level, these different mixes are likely to be enacted within local communities.

Amdam (2003) analyses the policy change taken by the Norwegian Government to increase the role of the County Communes in Norway in the regional planning process. This was done to move 'from vertical government to horizontal government' (2003: 440). In analysing the importance of communities in undertaking regional planning, Amdam discusses the importance of trust and cooperation between public and private organisations, as well as with the community if that community is to be mobilised effectively to meet regional challenges. Amdam believes that, whilst external stakeholders can stimulate this process, only the community and its members can effect proactive change. In his examination of these issues, Amdam discusses the challenges to regional planning, the importance of regional industry and research universities to innovation and concluded that the community itself plays a very important role in regional development through entrepreneurs and networks.

Clunies-Ross (2005) undertook an examination of the existing national funding structures in which have been used to assist poorer countries and posited that wealth can be created within communities which have been empowered to address their own local issues. She states that '[c]ommunity mobilization, appropriately structured, can greatly enhance the amenities and earning power of poor rural and urban people, while also potentially promoting social harmony' (2005: 331). According to Clunies-Ross, allocation of resources for community mobilisation may be made available 'if an initial vision and trust can be created and structures set up which ensure that contributions are not wasted, that all participants are likely to benefit, and that there is universal participation by contributor-beneficiaries' (2005: 334).

SOCIAL CAPITAL

In working to develop a powerful and effective region and to initiate community mobilisation and engagement, it is important to build cohesion and a sense of shared identity within the community. This requires the development of extensive, strong relationships, and this will require the presence of both social and human capital. Social capital involves the process of building trust and mutually beneficial relationships between individuals and groups.

Finnish researchers, Tura and Haarmaakorpi (2005) examine social capital in terms of its relationship to regional innovation, which they argue is a social process. The paper 'introduces a conception of social capital defining it functionally as a field-specific social resource of an actor. This conception is applied to analyse social capital as a central element in enhancing regional innovative capability' (2005: 1111). Tura and Haarmaakorpi discuss the issue of varying, and sometimes contradictory, understandings of social capital due to the different theoretical schools of thought (2005: 1114).

In developing social capital and building a unified approach to regional development, it is important to articulate the values and skills necessary within the group. Wilson (1997) states:

‘Whether the focus is community economic development, community social development or strengthening local democracy, productive social capital rests on the values of trust and openness. The role of the professional as technical expert, master planner or manager will be embedded in the larger role as catalyst, facilitator, communicator, team player’ (1997: 746).

According to Woolcock and Narayan’s (2000: 226) examination of the literature, those communities endowed with a diverse stock of social networks and civic associations are in a stronger position to confront poverty and vulnerability’. However, they also warn that some social capital theorists assume that ‘communities are homogenous entities that automatically include and benefit all members’ (2000: 230). In analysing the relationships within communities which have experienced extreme poverty, civil war or endemic crime, they were concerned that ‘the social ties individuals have can be both a blessing and a blight’ where those ties relate to misuse of power relationships and do not enable the community to build strong ties outside the community in order to access resources.

LABOUR MARKET POLICY

Labour market policy forms a component of public policy that Curtin (2000: 33) examined in the Australian context. He states that ‘analysis indicates that there are clear signs that public policy making in Australia, compared with [the UK, Canada and New Zealand] is still deficient in a number of respects’. In drawing this conclusion, Curtin examines official documents with regard to policy development and policy reviews and appraisals conducted by governments in these three countries, and uses the results to identify the key elements that he believes comprise good public policy. These include the need for policy to be framed in the long term, rather than in the shorter electoral cycles. It should also be developed in such a way as to enable the recipients of the policy to be involved. He states that ‘[g]ood policy also needs to be outcome-focused by identifying carefully how the policy will deliver desired changes in the real world’ (2000: 36). Finally, Curtin (2000: 36) asserts that ‘[p]olicy making needs to be a continuous, learning process, not as a series of one-off isolated initiatives’. These three elements are particularly important where labour market policy is being enacted at the regional level.

Having identified these elements, Curtin uses them as the vehicle to critically examine the development of three specific national policies. He concludes that the Australian government did not specifically detail what it believed was good policy, and states that ‘[t]he capacity to reflect critically on the shortcomings of existing policy processes and to draw lessons on how to improve them *in toto* does not appear to be a feature of the operating environment of Australian Governments or the Australian Public Service’ (Curtin 2000: 42). He believes that this could be improved by consulting more extensively with the public and by seeking alternative sources of advice when developing policy (2000: 43). Curtin’s article is based on a review of the literature as well as his own practice as a public policy consultant; and draws on his involvement in the development of the policies discussed in the article.

The development of labour market policy needs to consider both the potential economic outcomes of the policy as well as the likely impact of that policy on the people concerned. Qureshi (2009: 93-94) believes that 'human development (HD) and economic growth (EG) are interdependent and intertwined in feedback processes which suggest that both are mutually reinforcing, either leading to an upward spiral of development or a poverty trap. Qureshi's modeling indicates that, for sustainable 'real' growth, fiscal policy should be refocused on human development that he believes will, in turn, lead to sustainable growth. This article indicates that non-western countries are also struggling with the tension between economic rationalism and labour market policy development.

In the regional setting, the focus of government has often been on the economic issues and relevant infrastructure, with very little focus on the 'human' aspects of the labour market.

The importance of this factor is examined by Scott et al. (2009) in their review of how Europe's rural society and economies are changing. They consider the role of people in the development and implementation of policy and discussed the importance of what they called active citizenship. This paper uses two case studies of rural communities near Dublin in the Republic of Ireland to examine how local communities have responded to spatial changes resulting from rapid population growth and changing social structures. They state that '[i]n Irish society, as elsewhere, there is a growing interest in public participation in governance processes and in the role of civil society to create deeper and a more embedded democratic culture and citizenship' (2009: 251). In doing this, Scott et al. (2009) examine the literature to identify how '[p]ublic policy in all spheres is moving towards a greater degree of engagement with public participation for the development and implementation of government objectives' (2009: 252).

Labour market policy is also examined by Miles and Tully (2007), who believe that '[e]conomic exclusion and 'worklessness' is high on the current political agenda. ... During the past decade a myriad of national and locally based policies, programmes and projects have been devised in order to address the issues of economic exclusion and worklessness' (2007: 856). They use case studies of five community development projects in North East England and state that the Regional Development Agency 'has experimented with a more 'holistic' approach to regional economic development. This approach involved combining and integrating actions addressing housing, health, education and cultural issues, with more traditional area-based regeneration interventions such as physical infrastructure interventions or support for intermediate labour markets and small businesses' (2007: 856-857).

In considering labour market policy in the education and training context, Gemici and Curtis (2012) examine the Australian workplace learning program and conclude that '[t]he COAG [Council of Australian Governments] policy of increasing Year 12 completion is based on macroeconomic policy analysis that projects increased labour force participation and enhanced productivity arising from the skills bonus of higher educational attainment' (2012: 42).

One of the problems encountered by community agencies such as LLOs in trying to integrate employment issues with other social policy areas such as education, health and wellbeing, is the complexity brought to the work by having to deal with multiple levels of governments. As described by Bessant et al., 2006: 203-4:

Policy-making can be complex because of the numerous layers of government that Australians have developed. With three 'levels' of local, state and federal government, there is plenty of scope for complications and problems about who does what or who gets the money to pay for various policies or programs.

Bessant et al. (2006) examine social policy as it is developed and implemented in an Australian context. They talk about the messy nature of social policy as it deals with the human situation, and state that '[t]he first thing we need to acknowledge is the complexity of the organisational frameworks within which modern policy-making gets done. So ... we show why accounts of social policy-making are more convincing if they recognise that policy-making processes are going on simultaneously in many different organisations, both within state agencies and in the broader society' (2006: 204). Bessant et al. illustrate their arguments with a number of case studies showing how social policy is enacted in a range of situations.

One area in which both Federal and State Governments have enacted changing labour market policy is in the education and training sector, particularly in vocational education and training (VET). This has been done partly in response to the issue of skill shortages and the resulting need for changes to the VET system, and partly as a way to include disadvantaged groups such as those with disabilities, the long term unemployed and Aboriginal people in the labour market (Kell 2010: 98).

Over time, problems have been encountered in the enactment of social policy in this area. The 1970s saw a focus by Governments on addressing inequalities and promoting social justice, but in the 1980s this was superseded by a:

'more punitive and oppressive approach where any commitments to equity and social justice were subordinated to the broader needs of the economy ... which overwhelmed any sense of choice about what people, and more particularly young people, might want in their lives' (2010: 99).

In the 1990s, a continuing emphasis on economic rationalism saw reduced assistance to disadvantaged groups (2010: 100) and a growing emphasis on competition amongst VET providers in which:

'profound conflicts [are] emerging from the shifts in VET policy where altruism and traditional notions of vocations are challenged by the values of the market competition and flexibility and these suggest some important tensions around the values and norms associated with work and learning' (Kell: 2012).

Competition amongst VET providers has continued to grow in the 2000s, whilst the focus of VET policy over the past decade has been on more strongly connecting the VET sector with industry.

This is occurring in an environment where VET providers have been identified as not meeting the needs of industry (Kell 2011: 181) and in which the VET system 'has not benefited from the ambivalence of Australian industry to training and a reluctance of all stakeholders to fund a world class VET system' (Kell 2012: 75). It reflects the tension between 'top down' social policy as it is enacted by Governments and community activism for changes in social policy at a local level, set in the context of complex regional social structures.

ADULT COMMUNITY EDUCATION (ACE) PROVIDERS

There are 330 Learn Local Organisations (LLOs) registered with the Adult Community and Further Education Board (ACFE) in Victoria. These organisations offer local access to training opportunities that might not otherwise be available. They are diverse and include neighbourhood houses, community learning centres, ACE centres and community colleges. They offer an 'informal, welcoming, adult-focused approach to learning' (ACFE 2013: 13). While the majority offer pre-accredited training, approximately 100 also provide VET programs (Victorian ACE Peaks 2014).

It has been recognized that the ACE sector in Victoria has developed specific expertise in working with people from educationally and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. They also provide a critical point of re-engagement for many people who are disconnected from education and lack the confidence or opportunity to re-connect through other providers (Dow et al. 2009: 106, Davies et al. 2011: 16). The pre-accredited courses offered through ACE providers provide a pathway to reverse the disadvantages of limited education and precariousness in the labour market. Many of the men and women who enrol in pre-accredited courses are economically vulnerable, often in relatively insecure situations within the labour market, they commonly have low levels of qualifications (or none) and incomplete schooling.

There is a strong rural bias in participation. While rural and regional Victoria contains 27% of the adult population, as many as 42% of all learners in pre-accredited courses are from country Victoria. Because of the social make-up of the rural population, this accentuates the low SES character of the learner population in pre-accredited courses. Adults with incomplete schooling and lack of qualifications, Indigenous Australians, unemployed workers, and people with disabilities enrol to different degrees in pre-accredited courses. But with respect to all these groups, there is clear evidence of *rural disadvantage*. There are a greater proportion of adults who did not complete school in rural and regional Victoria than in Melbourne, but they are less well-represented in pre-accredited courses than in the capital city. There are a greater proportion of unemployed workers in country Victoria, but compared to Melbourne they are also less well-represented in pre-accredited courses. There are proportionally more disabled people outside of Melbourne, but fewer in pre-accredited courses. Indigenous Australians are thinly represented (Teese et al. 2013: 132).

In an Australian wide study Clemans et al. (2003: 27) found ACE to be flexible and adaptive providing courses that range from basic literacy and foundation education through to post degree professional development. This includes accredited and non-accredited courses, in a range of modes, including tutor-led, self-run groups, class-based, work-based and distance education.

In another study Bowman (2006: 2) identified that collectively ACE providers' play at least six key roles:

1. Platform builders - re-engaging adults with basic education and support services
2. Bridge builders - providing pathways into formal tertiary education and paid work
3. Work-skills developers - offering accredited vocational training in their own right
4. Facilitators of adult health - improving mental, physical and emotional well-being
5. Promoters of citizenship.- achieving adults active in community activities, and
6. Community capacity builders - facilitating local networks and community-led development at various levels, of suburb, neighbourhood, small town and district.

Thompson (2013) in specifically focusing on providers located in rural and remote areas, found that they provided a broad range of services, some as a stand-alone service and others in partnership with others.

'As well as post-compulsory and lifelong learning opportunities, they offer a range of other services which can include job services, childcare, community interest groups. In addition, an increasing number are running social enterprises, for example, recycling services, coffee shops and second-hand clothing stores' (Thompson 2013: 3).

In addition, Bowman found providers located in rural and remote areas offer a higher proportion of Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs than their city counterparts (Bowman 2006: 9). While a survey of organisations involved in social enterprise in Tasmania, found that of the 111 organisations who responded to the survey, 56 per cent were from the adult and community education area (Eversole and Eastley 2011). ACE providers are vitally important in regional and rural locations and very often are the only 'on the ground' providers of post-compulsory education (Thompson 2013).

'Not-for-profit ACE organisations are significant contributors to the economies of regional and rural communities (2013: 3).'

Yet despite this good work, ACE providers in Victoria are finding it increasingly difficult to remain viable. In a submission to the Minister for Higher Education and Skills, three PEAK Bodies representing the ACE sector argue that the introduction of demand-driven individual choice in VET has had a devastating impact on ACE in Victoria and 'the long term survival of the sector is not assured' (Victorian ACE Peaks 2014). They highlight that since 2008, there has been a 27% drop in ACE providers delivering government funded training across the state (about 90 providers).

Although the Student Contact Hours (SCH) have been allocated elsewhere, this may not be to locally based organisations that can effectively penetrate thin markets.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Financial sustainability can be defined as the long-term ability of a stand-alone ACE Centre to maintain or improve its capacity to deliver services (Wheeler 2004, ACFE 2006). It goes beyond immediate self-sufficiency. It is about the capacity of the organisation 'to serve its community, and to contribute to community development and growth, well into the future' (ACFE 2006: 3). The diversity of roles and services that ACE providers undertake can be seen as a weakness that hinders financial sustainability. Harris and Simons (2007) argue that in a climate of reduced public funding to the sector, where ACE providers must work within market models of service provision, previous notions of 'doing good' in the community sector no longer provide sound rationale for funding being made available. There are a number of areas of concerns that hinder long-term financial stability.

Firstly, the range of services provided to learners. Harris et al. (2006: 10) found that compared to private providers, ACE providers made available a 'significantly higher proportion of a range of services to their students.' This included computing facilities, academic counselling, study spaces, library facilities and fee assistance. Increasingly, it also includes health and welfare support including mental health, drug and alcohol counselling. However, this is no surprise given that the market is 'second-chance' learners and particularly disadvantaged groups.

Secondly, there is a tension in trying to balance the costs of compliance associated with VET provision while at the same time trying to maintain a commitment to access and equity and the provision of services that make ACE providers an attractive alternative to other educational services (Harris et al. 2006).

Thirdly, the cost of maintaining infrastructure, which includes keeping up-to-date with technology. Increasingly students and the workforce include those defined as the millennial generation, that is, those born between 1979 and 1994. They represent the first generation to always have access to a computer and employ emerging computer technologies like smart phones, instant messaging, internet publishing and social networking to communicate and learn in their daily lives (Reio and Hill-Grey 2013). The challenge is the requirement to use the latest technology often exceeds providers' budgets and instructors' technical and pedagogical knowledge (Schmidtke 2013: 462).

Fourthly, it is particularly difficult for regional and rural locations (ACFE 2006: 7). In particular, the demographics of the students and the thin market structures mean that 'there is effectively no market which would support current funding arrangements' (Victorian ACE Peaks 2014: 2).

Finally, there is the matter of staffing. In order to resource programmes on reduced public income staff in ACE organisations are generally employed on a casual or part-time basis (Harris et al. 2006: 11). There is also a significant use of volunteers.

As well, the heavy burden of compliance means that ACE providers are now employing, pro rata, more administration staff than teachers (Victorian ACE Peaks 2014: 2).

These issues highlight a number of challenges but the reality is, according to Harris and Simons (2007), that if the ACE sector is in receipt of scarce public funds or to accept investment from the private sector, it needs to be prepared to produce measurable outcomes to embrace considerable cultural change if it is to enter into genuine inter-sectoral partnerships to help solve complex social and economic problems. While Chalker-Scott and Tinnemore (2009) say that community education providers need to pay attention to the sustainability trio, that is, superior educational quality, clear organizational structure and continued financial stability (Chalker-Scott and Tinnemore 2009), this is no easy task and it seems even with sound sustainability practices some LLOs in Victoria have not been able to continue. However, because of the vital contribution that the ACE sector makes to the wider benefits of learning, LLOs must come to grips with operating as community businesses, accountable at a number of levels – to communities, to sources of funds - both public and private, and to their learners (ACFE 2006: 4, Australian Strategic Services 2012). The challenge of balancing the running of a viable business with the social outcomes is difficult but critical and to this end, it is time to revisit a partnership approach.

PARTNERSHIP MODELS

The ACE sector in Victoria is no stranger to learning partnerships. The Victorian Learning Towns programs and the Victorian Flexible Learning Networks were two such programs where ACE played a leading role (Hughes et al. 2003; Galbally and Wong 2008). Wheeler (2004) ran one of the Victorian Flexible Learning Networks – RMIT LearnLinks for 10 years. This was a partnership between six ACE providers based in Northern Metropolitan Melbourne and RMIT University. It involved the professional development of ACE teachers in online learning and the outsourcing of RMIT accredited online training in information technology and language and literacy to ACE Centres. LearnLinks was strategically aligned to RMIT University's access and equity policy at that time. An evaluation of the 10 Flexible Learning Networks across Victoria found that those that were more commercially orientated were more sustainable than those that were focused on community engagement (Hughes et al. 2003). However, all required some form of base Government funding in order to keep going. This appeared to also be the case with the Victorian Learning Towns and once the funding was withdrawn funded towns cease to promote themselves as learning communities (Saleeba 2013).

One exception is the City of Melton, an early adopter of the learning community strategy along with the 10 Victorian Learning Towns. Melton was not funded, and along with Hume City, joined the project because they recognized the value in taking a whole of life coordinated approach to learning and education for all residents from preschool through to older residents. Having commenced this approach in 1998, Melton is now in its sixth iteration of a community learning plan. Melton was recently chosen by UNESCO to be the Australian case study in a forthcoming publication highlighting Learning Cities across the world.

Of particular interest to UNESCO was the strong stress on the evaluation of learning community activities and among other things its strength in establish a strong partnership for building learning cities. LLOs are represented on the Melton Community Learning Board. The Lifelong Learning Coordinator of Council works with LLO and other providers to collect data on adult enrolments, course and program areas. This is used to publish a learning directory of approximately 400 different learning opportunities (formal and non-formal) available for residents in the City of Melton. The Council and LLO are also working together to track pathways of learners into further education or employment. As part of the Melton Community Learning Board, LLOs are also in a strong position to collaborate on funding opportunities. Many councils recognized the importance of LLOs, especially in regards to aligning with a community strengthening agenda. For example, some LLO enjoy subsidized rent especially if they occupy learning centre buildings owned by a Council.

There is no doubt that policy makers support a partnership approach to sustainability. Dow et al. (2009: 106) note that a number of ACE providers have formed partnerships with higher education institutions and that these arrangements could provide a useful model for further engagement between the sectors. While the Ministerial Declaration on ACE supports a collaborative approach 'particularly in relation to its role in the provision of vocationally focused education and training and fostering the development of skills required for individuals to participate fully in their communities and the economy' (Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education 2008).

One such current partnership with higher education is occurring in Hamilton, Southern Grampians Shire, South West Victoria. The RMIT Hamilton Learning Centre, established in 1999, was an early adopter of a learning community approach aided through participation in the National Learning Communities Project in 2001. The Shire of Southern Grampians was one of 10 communities around Australia chosen to take part. The audit of the project identified opportunities to extend adult learning provision in the region as well as recommending a focus on developing local leadership and improving technology infrastructure (Sholfield and Smale 2002, Kearns 2011). The long-term benefit from this project has been the skills in partnership development, maintenance and negotiation now displayed so effectively by the LLO, Southern Grampians Adult Education, and the RMIT Campus. The SGAE is one of the most robust regional LLOs in Barwon South West with a focussed commitment to best-practice engagement strategies for vulnerable learners that include pathways from pre-accredited programs to employment through strategic partnerships with local government, business and community agencies, blended learning programs, skilled and flexible training staff and a large bank of employers adept in mentoring and developing people who have re-entered education and training after periods of disengagement and who may face multiple barriers to employment. (Interviews with Julie Neeson and Dr Kaye Scholfield, BSW ACFE Project, October 2014).

Likewise, RMIT continues to develop strategic partnerships, most recently for a new Education Cluster which aims to 'strengthen the region's competitive advantage in education'.

The learning community approach is articulated in the core value of the strategy for the proposed Education Cluster to 'enable learning opportunities which match the aspirations of the Hamilton community from early childhood to retirees, as well as local enterprises and agencies' (RMIT Hamilton Education Cluster Working Group Vision and Objectives 2014).

In an attempt to address the costs of service delivery and infrastructure costs, five LLOs in Melbourne's inner West and North have formed The Inc Group. Developed initially through an ACFE CAIF grant in 2009, The Inc Group explored the concept of Shared Services, a business model by which organisations achieve economies of scale by jointly managing and/or delivering services. The concept of Shared Services first emerged in the private sector in the 1980s and has been used in the Australian government sector since the 1990s (Tangient LCC 2014). It has also existed informally in the not-for-profit sector for decades, often taking the form of collaborative partnerships, informal sharing of teaching and administration staff and a limited form of outsourcing to fill skills gaps. By adapting the existing business models of these shared service arrangements to suit the uneven environment that LLOs operate in, regarding funding and organisational capacity, The Inc Group was established a cooperative in 2011. Shared services actually delivered are currently limited, but the cooperative has now employed a General Manager with a further CAIF grant, tasked with establishing its business footing. The five LLOs have strong support from the City of Melbourne in the development of the cooperative, receiving several funding grants to assist in whatever way the partnership deemed relevant. The Inc Group is optimistic about being able to move into independent premises recently refurbished by the City of Melbourne.

Another interesting collaboration is between five LLOs in the City of Knox. Engaged in a formal partnership comprising large and small organisations, the LLO Managers meet monthly to plan their program to ensure reach and avoid duplication. They have pioneered a program of taster courses in community locations as 'pop-up' courses, bringing learning to the learner. Locations include shopping centres and libraries but also include one-off introductory programs in workplaces. The partnership also engages in annual strategic planning and reports regularly to their respective Boards to ensure the communication channels remain open (Learn Local 2014). The partnership also has strong engagement with Local Government, with regular meeting with the Economic Development Unit to discuss community programs, training needs and funding opportunities.

In the USA partnerships between adult education providers such as community colleges and business are often heralded as an appropriate and effective response to the effects of globalization (Schmidtke 2013). The requirement of meeting the learning needs of an ever diverse cohort of students; the cost of ensuring the latest technology needs to undertake the training, and the additional services such as career counselling, transport and so forth is a challenge for many adult education providers (Schmidtke 2013). One way to leverage and pool resources more efficiently is through partnerships, in particular, partnerships with business and industry.

They cite a useful definition for partnerships:

'A Community College and Industry Partnership is a collaboration between a community college and an individual business, group of firms, chamber of commerce, industry association, or sector partnership with the purpose of using the combined resources to create alternative college education programs that are tightly linked to regional economic development and labor force needs for non-traditional students—both younger workforce entrants and older ones in need of skills and education upgrades' (Soars 2010: 4 as cited in Schmidtke 2013: 462).

This definition could be easily adapted for LLO located in rural and regional areas, especially those ones which Thompson identified work with no or limited presence of a TAFE provider. In reality, for Australian conditions it would be useful to have a TAFE provider and University in the partnership mix.

Schmidtke identifies several reasons for such partnerships between adult education providers and industry:

- To fill the gaps left by cuts in government budgets
- The problems around economic development and education tend to be complex and through partnerships you can draw on a range of experience and expertise
- Partnerships build bridges to other sectors, i.e., local government, social service agencies, and then they can also work on solutions
- It enables the sharing of resources, such as training rooms and administration, thus potentially reducing costs.

These are some of the many studies documenting the benefits of working in partnership with other organisations and they are well summarised by these findings from VCOSS:

- partnerships can allow for diverse thinking and values leading to better outcomes
- partnerships provide opportunity to share workload and resources
- partnerships build capacity of their members
- partnerships can create the environment for taking risks in developing new service models
- partnerships create the motivation for people to pull together, which in turn drives and sustains the partnership (VCOSS Guide 1 (2012): 3).

One of the drivers for partnerships between government, business and community has been their capacity to overcome the barriers presented by traditional economic and political structures which perpetuate a competitive environment, and can deny access by small players to the channels of power and influence, identified as a social exclusion mechanism by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1979). Bringing stakeholders together increases the pool of resources in terms of funding, knowledge and experience, and creates the conditions to provide a coordinated and comprehensive response.

Partnerships are not always the answer to long term sustainability. Seddon et al. (2005: 30) advise of the importance of taking a critical perspective on social partnerships, especially those that focus on a social good, such as, for example, improving youth disadvantage. The focus should be on how these types of partnerships will lead to better outcomes, especially when 'education is seen more dispassionately as a product under neo liberal governance.' In a climate of reduced public spending there is growing awareness of the need to understand the impacts of such partnerships and the contribution each partner brings. This is where a place-based approach, a growing awareness of collective impact, and the role that an ACE organization plays in working towards collaborative social and economic outcomes comes into focus.

GOVERNANCE

If LLOs are to find the 'right' structure and partnership model for their own particular circumstances, then they will also need to establish appropriate governance processes for that structure.

Potential structures are shown in the table below. The first is the informal, or loosely coupled, alliance in which organisations identify mutual benefit in working together. This might include co-location in delivery hubs or sharing of some back of house functions. This structure may be useful for small LLOs which could save on rental or administration costs by forming an alliance with like-minded organisations, such as other LLOs or RTOs where the

LLO does not deliver accredited training. The original structure established by the Inc Group in Melbourne's west was an example of an alliance where members have agreed to share some back of house functions with the intent of co-locating those functions.

The second type of structure is one in which there is agreement to deliver joint programs. This is occurring in the Knox Group in Melbourne. The Executive Officers of this group meet monthly to identify opportunities for joint delivery. This reduces competition and builds trust, which can then lead to further partnering arrangements. This structure may be useful for LLOs in very thin markets with competing providers.

The third form of collaboration involves more closely connected structures in which an organisation provides fee for service management and administrative functions for others, or in which those organisations group together to form a new management entity. This is the structure to which the Inc. Group is currently working, with the intent of creating a new joint CEO position under which the various agreed back of house functions will sit and which will provide fee for service functions for organisations outside the original group.

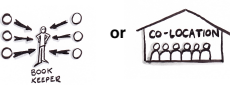




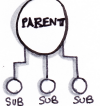

The next two, more tightly coupled structures involve organisations entering into formalised joint venture arrangements or in which one organisation becomes the 'parent' body overseeing the work of others. Few, if any, LLOs appear to have taken up these options, moving instead directly to the final structure in which organisations legally merge.

As can be seen, each of the above structures is more closely connected, or tightly coupled, than the previous one, and this means that the governance processes will need to address the needs of the chosen structure. There has been a significant amount of research into governance structures in both private and public sectors, for large or small organisations, and in profit or not-for-profits (Lockhart 2010: 227).

Some of the governance issues which need to be addressed by LLO Boards include the importance of diversity, particularly in times of turbulent change (Van der Walt et al. 2006: 132), the need for that diversity to include diversity of thought as ‘diverse boards ought to be able to generate and explore a wider range of options’ (Lockhart 2010: 231), and the need to address problems such as poor information flow, lack of trust between the EO and the Board, and the lack of understanding by some Board members of the sector within which the LLO operates.

‘If good governance is to be achieved, when governance is defined as effective decision-making that results in good performance, directors must be selected on the basis of their contextual knowledge and skills; how their competencies and behavioural characteristics complement each other; and, how they enhance the strategies an organisation selects through which to achieve its goals’ (Lockhart 2010: 231).

TYPES OF COLLABORATION

Type of collaboration	Looks like	Benefits	Risks	Governance / Legal	Timeframe	Broad Steps
Alliance - Can be impact and/or administration focus - Shared admin - Co-location		- Efficiency - Reduced Admin overlaps and costs - Multiplier effects of sharing space	- Shared space can cause / exacerbate tensions (culture clash) - Unfair allocation of tasks/resources	Admin - policy / protocol Co-location - policy / protocol - agreement (legal) - contract for expenses and infrastructure costs	Admin - short timeframe Co-location - short to medium timeframe	- Decision to co-locate - Audit of needs - Initial agreement - Space search - Formal Agreement - Contract - Move - Policies / Protocols
Joint Programs		- Increased impact through shared skills - Organisation adding their strengths	- Differing ideas of outcome or process	- MOU - Shared service agreement (who manages funds and how)	Context dependent and depends on lengths of program Need lead-up time (planning)	- Catalyst - Agreement - Planning - Funding Application - Service Agreement - Delivery and management
Service Integration / Management Service Organisation (MSO)	Model 1: For  Larger organisation establishes a service business - offers a fee for service to other orgs Model 2: With  Organisations establish a jointly owned and managed MSO	- Efficiency - Allows orgs to focus on their core business - Can act as a contract manager and fund raiser / contract sourcer	Model 1: - Increased cost risk Model 2: - Tax status of MSO (eg. for purposes of salary sacrifice) - Governance burden	Model 1: - Service agreement Model 2: - MSO as a new legal entity with board consisting of representatives from 'owner' organisations (eg. cooperative)	Model 1: Short timeframe (except for establishment) Model 2: Medium timeframe	- Organisation decides to set up - Planning - Start up business - Decision - Business model and feasibility - Legal Advice - Start Up - Agreements, policy and protocols
Joint Venture / Consortium	 Backbone can be an existing organisation. Backbone takes the role of 'gluing' together the parties	- Draw on each party's strengths - Can increase efficiency in the longer term - Increased impact potential - Shared work and measurement frameworks	- Needs excellent ground work - Potential value / culture tension - Needs very clear purpose and if it is focussed on efficiency it needs a sustainable business model	- MOU - Formal Agreement - Service Agreement - Not usually a new legal entity, but sometimes it may necessitate a new structure	Medium timeframe - plus an agreed time for the joint venture to run.	- Come together around a shared issue / objective - Form partnership - Explore options for focus of joint venture - Establish formal joint venture agreement - Agree measurement framework - Implement and review
Parent - Subsidiary Structure (wholly / partly owned subsidiary)		- Increased efficiency - Enables keeping of identity to a certain extent - Increased organisational and political strength	- Identity and autonomy dependent on leadership in parent organisation - Loss of autonomy and identity over time	- Can take a few forms - parent takes over subsidiary and becomes the legal 'owner' and governor - MOU to keep the identity of subsidiaries	Medium timeframe	- Identification of potential parent - Negotiation of terms and conditions - Agreement - Formal transfer of legal ownership - Decision of governance of subsidiaries - Ongoing MOU and governance structure -
Merger		- Increased efficiency - Decreased duplication - Potential for greater impact at scale - Increased political strength	- Loss of identity and potentially value framework - Bigger is not necessarily better in terms of impact	- Wind up of old organisations - transfer of assets to the new organisation (or owning organisation)	Medium timeframe	- Identification of organisations - Identity of new organisation (or agreement on the lead org) - Wind up of old orgs and transfer of assets - Establishment of new identity

The information contained in this table does not constitute legal or financial advice and should not be construed as such. Legal and financial advice should be sought by anyone intending to use any information contained in this table.

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LEARNING COMMUNITY FRAMEWORK

Based on an extensive review of the literature, years of practical experience and an examination of learning community case studies in Hume City and Gwydir Learning Region, Wheeler and Wong (2013) have developed a Learning Community Framework. This can be used as a planning document by organisations and individuals contemplating the formation of a learning partnership. It considers the following factors as important elements of a learning partnership, which also align with the UNESCO Key Features of a Learning City, but are designed at the community level:

- Goals and vision
- Leadership for change
- Strategic partnerships
- Learning and innovation (lifelong learning linked to the UNESCO building blocks of learning)
- Building community capacity
- Connecting community and social infrastructure
- Integrated , Structure, including evaluation.

The Framework uses reflective questions to assist the planning phase of working in partnerships. It is also important to measure the outcomes of partnership work along the way. The Centre for Social Impact and Social Leadership Australia are currently promoting a collective impact approach to Corporates and the Not for Profit sector as a 'way to help communities across Australia transform the way they approach society's biggest challenges' (Centre for Social Impact 2014).

This approach comes from the USA where it has been used in educational programs. For example, in Cincinnati community leaders decided to 'abandon their individual agenda in favour of a collective approach towards improving student achievement.'

Community leaders 'realized that fixing one point of the educational continuum – such as better after-school programs – wouldn't make much difference unless all parts of the continuum improved at the same time' (Kania and Kramer 2011: 36). An Australian example is the Woodside Development Fund, established in February 2014, focused on supporting initiatives in early childhood development in Australia and overseas with \$20 million to disperse over 10 years. They intend to use a Collective Impact model to bring together government, Not for Profits, foundations, corporations and communities that operate in the early childhood development space (Morgan 2014). Such an approach might also be appropriate for achieving outcomes in adult education.

One of the pressing issues is how does an LLO view sustainability in the long term as part of such collaborations. Wheeler (2004) in researching a University/ACE partnership discussed sustainability on two levels. In the first place, at a program, or organizational level, the focus was on the long-term ability of a particular program and/or business organisation to maintain or improve its capacity to deliver services. When an ACE provider is financially sustainability then it is in a position to make a contribution to a place-based

learning partnership aligning with a view of sustainability at a macro level. That is, partners could come together to ask the question – how does this partnership project contribute to the creation of a sustainable learning community in a particular geographic region, as described by Wheeler and Wong (2013) or community strengthening/ecological system as described by Ife (2002) and Kenyon (n.d.). The challenges of maintaining organisational viability have been recognized for many years, yet the many attempts to re-dress them have not been successful in warding off closures of large and small LLOs throughout Victoria. This even includes some LLOs that were cited as exemplars in restructuring to meet these challenges in previous reports (e.g. ACFE 2006). This would indicate that LLOs might now benefit from developing a more structured basis for the operation of the LLO using resources such as the Learning Community Framework, the Collective Impact Framework or the Community Business BizPlan (Australian Strategic Services 2012), or engaging professional assistance, to ensure accountability, clarity of purpose and clarity of roles. Governance and process needs to engage key stakeholders to agree on strategies and solutions that will make a positive difference to the community.

It is responsible for ensuring that:

- the complex issues that are articulated though enhanced community participation and consultation are identified
- integrated planning to address the issues is actualised from the partnerships that result from the activation of the project
- a way forward is established that monitors progress systematically (Wheeler and Wong 2013:15).

Importantly, Wheeler (2004) also identified that place-based learning partnerships that focused on education and training of the most socially isolated and disadvantaged groups, are not likely to be sustainable in the long term without guaranteed base funding be that public, corporate or philanthropic. In light of recent reduction in public funding, the ACE Peak Bodies are recommending such a ‘community social / service obligation’ fund for those ACE providers who work with students who require substantial additional educational time (Victorian ACE Peaks 2014). This appears to be the best way of ensuring long term sustainability.

PARTNERSHIP/NETWORK LEADERSHIP

If LLOs are to survive and thrive into the future, then they will need to build strong partnerships and networks with other stakeholders to form a ‘critical mass’ of community education related activities and this will require strong leadership capabilities within the LLO. In trying to develop capabilities in building networks and partnerships, LLO leaders will need to become effective in ‘partnering’. This section of the Literature Review examines the components of ‘partnering’ which will be required of LLO leaders.

Much of the research with regard to partnerships and networks relates to structure, purpose and learning, rather than considering the role of leadership specifically in voluntary partnerships or networks (Sotarauta 2005: 54) such as those that are relevant to LLOs. Sotarauta (2005: 55) notes that:

‘The nastiest question usually is not *what* should be done but *how* to do it; for example, how a fragmented bunch of actors, resources, competencies, ideas and visions can be pulled together, how people can be mobilized, how a new perception about the region and its futures can be created’.

The role of leadership is vital in achieving these aims, but the issue is whether leadership in voluntary partnerships and networks, particularly in organisations such as an LLO, is the same or different as that which has been extensively researched in business organisations. It appears that a combination of authority and enthusiasm is necessary in these groups (Sotarauta 2005: 56-57).

According to Baker and Kan (2011: 855) ‘recent theoretical writing on leadership in networks tends to assume that network leadership needs to be different, but with little empirical evidence to support this’.

The advent of the networked society has had an impact on power and influence and how leadership is used (Sotarauta and Viljamaa 2002: 2), and in which ‘no single organization is capable of such effective development work alone as that which can be achieved in cooperation with other development organizations’ (2002: 2). This is particularly true of rural or regionally based organisations which are small and which have minimal funding to achieve their aims. For these organisations, success is more likely to occur through the development of strong partnerships and networks. Sotarauta and Viljamaa (2002: 14) stated that ‘in networks shared power and leadership should be accepted – no single development organization could easily take precedence over others in issues of regional development’.

Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007: 84) use a case study methodology to examine leadership in the context of regional development networks and pose the questions ‘what is network leadership in today’s regional development environment, and how does leadership differ in different regional networks?’ (2007: 81). Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen use the Lahti Region in Finland to gather empirical evidence, supported by their examination of the literature, to form the basis of their framework of three network types. Their framework presents a robust argument for the different types of leadership that they identify as ‘an action, which directs all the operations and resources of the network to the desired direction’. The volunteer nature of many regional development networks or partnerships, and the lack of a formal hierarchical authority mean that, ‘in the case of regional development, the role of leadership in a network-based operating environment is particularly essential’ (2007: 84).

Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007) developed a framework of three different archetypes of regional development networks and then used a panel of three experienced network leaders to identify a range of different leadership characteristics which are required and identify capabilities such as ‘negotiation, communication, persuasion, trade and visionary skills, ... organizing complex projects, managing conflicts and anomalies, as well as processing and disseminating information’ (Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen 2007: 83), and identify as important the ability to:

- involve people and empower them to act as a network
- make people work to reach joint separate goals and renew the goals in an ongoing process
- promote interaction serving as an intermediary in interaction between actors, as well as steering activities towards seeking goals and enabling cooperation
- connect various actors to the cluster from their own starting points
- create and utilize creative tension in development and create a sense of drama. This means presenting issues so that people become enthusiastic and excited
- get short-term success so as to sustain motivation
- form partnerships competently and to efficiently utilize informal relations (Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen 2007: 83).

The capabilities identified by Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007) deal with the interpersonal skills needed by leaders of organisations such as LLOs that need to work within regional development networks, rather than those leaders being able to rely on the authority of their formal leadership positions.

Sotarauta (2005: 62) also identifies a number of important regional leadership capabilities as shown in the diagram below:

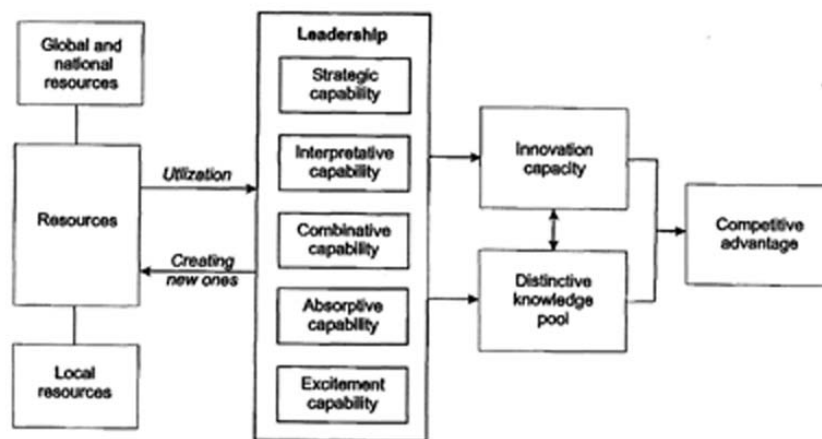


FIGURE 1 - CAPABILITY MODEL FOR REGIONS (SOTARAUTA 2005: 62)

According to Sotarauta (2005: 67), *strategic capability* refers to ‘the ability to make decisions about what to focus on in regional development in the long run, and thus to set the strategic direction for many development efforts’. *Interpretive capabilities* involve the ability to understand various mental models and concepts (2005: 66), whilst *combinative or networking capabilities* include the ability to build trust and facilitate joint work (2005: 65). *Absorptive capability* relates to the ability to adapt readily to the changing environment (2005: 66) and *excitement capability* refers to ‘the ability to create and utilize creative tension in development work’ (2005: 68). An understanding of these capabilities is very useful for those examining leadership in regional development. Considering the gaps in the capabilities described here will assist regional development networks to seek members who are able to bring such needed capabilities to the group. LLO leaders who do not already have these ‘partnering’ capabilities will need to undertake professional development if they are to successfully lead their organisations into the future.

One of the key requirements of leadership in a regional development partnership or network is to gain cooperation from members and to find the common ground that will enable those members to work towards a common purpose. To do this, an understanding of Personal Construct Theory (Kelly 1991) is useful. This theory includes four elements, the first of which is *individuality*, or a realisation that people are different and understanding these differences will facilitate negotiation. The second component, *experience*, indicates that people make sense of the world based on their own personal histories and their decisions will be made in that context.

The third element, *sociality*, involves exposing members to the views of others so that different perspectives can be appreciated; and the final component of Personal Construct Theory is *commonality*, or finding the common experiences which provide a starting point for communication and negotiation (Ackermann and Eden 2011: 296).

The Sotarauta (2005: 67) model and the Personal Construct Theory (Kelly 1991) are very useful for LLO leadership to examine in order to identify the types of people who are likely to contribute the necessary capabilities and insights that are needed in any type of regional development partnership or network and in engaging with those stakeholders. The two constructs provide an indication of the ‘partnering’ skills and capabilities necessary to both develop and implement sound structures and strategies to the work of the network, as well as in understanding the ‘human’ side of network or partnering operations. Those partnerships networks which focus on structural capabilities and ignore the human elements run the risk of alienating members and stakeholders; whilst those which spend all of their time in trying to make people feel valued and trusted at the expense of developing robust strategies and relevant structures can find themselves unable to achieve the group’s objectives. LLO leaders will need to manage the tension that can arise between these two functions.

These various capabilities need to work in harmony in order for leadership to be effectively enacted in a regional development partnership or network. As stated by Claxton et al. (2010: 27) when discussing the importance of general leadership characteristics:

‘it is important to remember that, in action, they do not function alone or in a neat sequence, but weave together in intricate and ever-changing ways. If we look at each [capability] as an instrument, we should think of them as instruments in a jazz ensemble, not playing in isolation, but interacting and responding to each other, and to the shifting energies and responses in the audience’.

SHARED OR DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

In the new environment of partnerships or networks with which the LLO will need to engage, there will be a requirement for the leadership function to be shared amongst the group where appropriate. A number of researchers examine the concept of shared or distributed leadership (Amdam 2004; Harris 2008; Cope et al. 2011; Edwards 2011; Ocker et al. 2011; Berber and Rofcanin 2012)

‘While the terms used to describe these leadership models include dispersed, devolved, democratic, distributive, collaborative, collective, co-operative, concurrent, co-ordinated, relational and co-leadership, the terms shared and distributed leadership are by far the most common’ (Fitzsimons, et al. 2011: 313).

Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007) view partnership or network leadership frequently as an indirect process in which members are influenced to become champions of the network within their own organisations.

They believe that leadership needs to occur at the strategic and operational levels of the partnership or network, but that the depth of emphasis on each of these components will vary depending on the type of partnership or network (2007: 89). This is particularly important for LLOs which need to work at the strategic and operational levels to achieve their aims, but where these approaches are divided between the Committee of Management/Board and the LLO Executive Officer/Manager.

The expert panel used by Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen identified a number of personal network leadership characteristics such as:

‘logical thinking, perseverance, visionary thinking, creativity, all-round education, consistency and charisma. Rather than the traditional command and control type of leadership that is often seen in organisations, the importance of communications and networking skills in regional development networks were highly emphasised. In particular, negotiation skills and ability to listen to others were seen to be crucial’ (2007: 92).

More research is needed in order to fully understand how leadership is enacted in a voluntary regional partnership or network and a new, more indirect form of facilitative leadership is required in a regional network than in the corporate environment, relying more on social skills and the ability of the leader to interact effectively with partners and network members (Sotarauta and Viljamaa 2002: 4). Sotarauta and Viljamaa (2002: 17) state that 'despite differences in power and resources, the main empowerment in network management is based on information rather than authority'. These 'partnering' capabilities will be essential for LLO leaders in an increasingly complex environment.

US based researcher Miller (2008) uses a qualitative methodology to examine boundary-spanning leadership, leadership that crosses organisational boundaries. From this research, Miller compiled a number of characteristics of boundary-spanning leaders. These include the observation that effective network leaders have extensive contacts that they can use to further the work of the group.

According to Miller's Taskforce members, they are also 'effective collectors and disseminators of information (2008: 357), have the trust of stakeholders, understand the complexities involved in networks with a range of constituents, have excellent interpersonal skills, are able to bring diverse partners to the table, can unite 'disparate groups around a common cause' (2008: 357) and are able to 'move freely and flexibly within and between organisations and communities' (2008: 358) to engage with a wide range of stakeholders.

Leaders need to be aware of the values and attitudes within both the group and the community (Sotarauta and Viljamaa 2002: 7) and recognise that, in a voluntary partnership or network, leadership and followership may be interchangeable depending on the issue or project at hand, resulting in a more collaborative form of leadership (2002: 2). This will be important for LLO leaders to ensure effective engagement with partners and other stakeholders.

Other researchers also examine the components of successful regional network leadership. Healey et al. (1999: 131) describe the leader as a change agent, whilst Haarmaakorpi, (2006: 1088) states that 'leadership capability in a networked regional development environment can be defined as a regional innovation system's ability to effect actions steering the processes and resources of the system in the desired direction'.

Thorpe et al. (2011: 244-247) provide a framework in which distributed leadership is plotted along two axes, the first being whether the activities of the group are planned or emergent, and the second of which is whether that activity is aligned or misaligned, 'where people may be unaware of or unintentionally ignore the activities of others and the potential benefits of sharing aims and interests' (2011: 245).

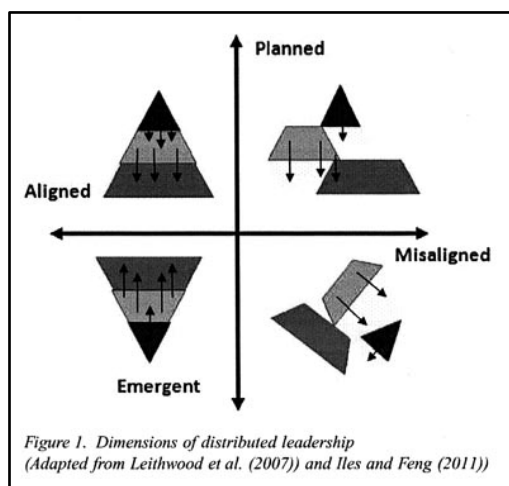


FIGURE 2 – DIMENSIONS OF DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP (THORPE ET AL. 2011: 244)

According to their model (2011: 244), the upper left quadrant, or Classical Distributed Leadership (DL), relates to circumstances where ‘the manager/leader has a clear focus, powerful control and existing structural arrangements through which to operate’ (2011: 245). The upper right quadrant, or Mis-planned DL, represents organisations which would like to use distributed leadership but whose structures are not appropriate or whose members are not receptive. The lower left quadrant, Emergent DL, ‘recognises the realities of day-to-day organizational life where the everyday cannot be designed with certainty, and where contradictions and disturbances to work occur’ (2011: 246), whilst the lower right quadrant, which they define as Chaotic DL, ‘illustrates a situation where elements of DL may develop locally but in relatively haphazard ways, with a focus on local contexts and goals and without sufficient attention to operations in other parts of the organization’ (2011: 246). Whereas other theories of leadership described in this section relate to leadership as it applies to human interactions, Thorpe et al.’s (2011) model relates more to leadership as it applies to structure and operational management.

If vulnerable learners are to be assisted to find relevant pathways into meaningful employment, then LLOs will need to become more adaptive at working with other stakeholders through partnerships or networked arrangements, and LLO leaders will need to understand the environment within which they operate so that they can implement the most appropriate leadership activities. This will require LLO leaders to undertake professional development in order to build their ‘partnering’ skills.

NEEDS-BASED FUNDING

In a climate of reduced public spending there is growing awareness of the need to understand the impacts of social partnerships and the contribution each partner brings. This is where a place-based approach, a growing awareness of collective impact, and the role that an LLO plays in working towards collaborative social and economic outcomes comes into focus.

Effective strategies to engage vulnerable people in vocational training and employment requires system-wide, stable finance models that are integrated with agreed educational values and policy, grounded in available research, and accessible to all stakeholders. Advantages to these models of funding include transparency about procedures and entitlements for all providers in a system and allocation of resources in a systematic way that empowers providers to implement programs relevant to the groups of learners that the provider deals with, rather than ad hoc resources linked to particular programs. It will also satisfy agreed educational needs in a fair and reasonable way by reflecting differences in costs associated with differences in the characteristics of learners and programs. Low-skill, disengaged learners require a range of intensive supports for effective engagement in education and training programs. The add-ins regarded as most important for this group includes consistent learner advice, guidance and support, the provision of supportive and locally accessible learning settings, access to small group learning and individual learning, and the provision of managed pathway support. These more intensive supports require additional funding for education and training providers in order for them to implement and maintain effective programs and improve outcomes. But the additional funding needs to be targeted appropriately so that it reaches providers who deal with larger numbers of disengaged adult learners. Needs-based formula funding would represent a break from the more piecemeal pattern of resource allocation in education that has traditionally operated for disengaged adult learners, with limited long-term success. It is required to support education and training providers delivering services to high-need learners, particularly disengaged adult learners, and particularly those in rural communities (Davies et al, 2011).

Examples of such formulae can be found in the 16-to 18-year-old and adult learner funding model developed in the UK where providers gain additional funds are provided using an index weighted by the English and Maths skills of learners. Needs-based funding is employed in a range of sectors in Australia including Aged Care and Health. The index used by Job Services Australia to assess work-readiness of jobseekers—JSCI and JCA—may be useful in the case of disengaged adult learners (Davies et al, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research into the wider benefits of learning in areas such as health, employment, social relationships and volunteering and the realization that it will take a collective approach to solve some of the social and economic issues, there is no doubt that the network of LLOs across Victoria have a vital role to play. LLOs do face significant challenges including, reduced public funding; balancing the need to provide quality services to learners, while at the same time meeting the costs of compliance; keeping up-to-date with technology changes and ensuring the teaching staff have sound pedagogical knowledge. LLO understand the need to ensure financial sustainability of their own organisations and are well used to leveraging resources using a partnership approach that is in line with international research. However, it appears that some base line funding to subsidize services, especially for those providers dealing with the most hard to reach learners, and those located in rural and regional areas may be necessary. This is in line with taking a broader view of lifelong and lifewide learning.

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