

# ***Decent training for decent work***

**Strengthening Employment Outcomes**

**(Strategies to improve connections between Learn Local offerings and employment outcomes for learners)**

## **Literature Review**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

LLOs located in rural and regional communities provide a vital service in supporting the most vulnerable learners in their communities, yet the outcomes from strategies to assist disadvantaged learners into vocational education and training (VET) and employment are not improving. This is despite the best efforts of LLOs and their partners, and the focus placed on achieving such outcomes. First, this review provides an overview of regional and rural LLOs and investigates current pathway and employment issues. Second, alternative models of good practice from national and international examples are canvassed. Finally, a proposition is made that LLOs should be supported in building best practice strategies for delivering employment outcomes 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 and building community capacity.

## 2. OVERVIEW OF ISSUES

### 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.

## **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 recognised 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).

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 some 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 have been allocated elsewhere, they may not have gone to locally based organisations that can effectively penetrate thin markets.

## **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 emphasises 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, lifewide, which is a cornerstone of Adult Learning Australia (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 suggests 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 reemergence 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 UNESCO 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 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 Union 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 recognise 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 proposed goals in the new United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 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 during the Global Education Meeting (GEM) 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).

## VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT POLICY DIRECTIONS

Community building initiatives found a particularly fertile environment in Victoria due to the strong Victorian local government and community sector legacy of support for and involvement in social policy and community services activities (Wiseman et al. 2006:3; Government of Victoria 2005). Victoria's whole of government approach, instigated from 2000 onwards, is an example of a concerted effort to address disadvantage through place based strategies, such as the Community Building Initiative and Neighbourhood Renewal, underpinned by principles that ensured that they aimed to:

- Change the social, economic and environmental circumstances of communities
- Develop active partnerships with stakeholders
- Strengthen the capacity and cohesiveness of the community
- Use bottom-up and joined-up approaches (Oleson et al. 2012; Wiseman et al. 2006; Government of Victoria 2005).



In 2005, the Victorian Government released a policy statement which ‘sets out actions the Government will take to improve access to vital services, reduce barriers to opportunity, strengthen assistance for disadvantaged groups and places and ensure that people get the help they need at critical times in their lives’ (Government of Victoria 2005). One of the 14 strategies detailed in *A Fairer Victoria* was Building Stronger Communities, and included a number of place-based programs in Victoria, including Community Renewal, Neighbourhood Renewal and Community Building initiatives.

As a result of participation in these initiatives, many organisations undertook to re-orient the way they deliver services to these communities. Much of the work that has occurred is consistent with the priorities and strategies designed to tackle disadvantage and inequality laid out in *A Fairer Victoria* as it takes into account the requirement to:

- be responsive to the needs and priorities of local communities through place-based approaches
- directly tackle the causes of disadvantage through improved targeting of services and redistribution of resources to areas of high need
- support preventative and early intervention strategies
- strengthen the capacity of communities to manage and sustain themselves (Government of Victoria 2005).

The delivery of pre-accredited courses through LLOs plays an important role in contributing to Victoria meeting its COAG targets and contributing to economic growth and reducing pressure on services delivered by the Victorian government (and thus costs) (Teese et al. 2013: 15). Teese et al. go on to argue that, if pre-accredited courses are to perform their social role well, they should enrol high proportions of adults who are economically vulnerable. Vulnerability arises from limited schooling, low qualifications, employment in low-skill, poorly paid jobs, unemployment and disadvantages of a social or personal nature (including stages in the life course). The policy aim of pre-accredited courses is to reduce this vulnerability by equipping adults with skills and creating pathways to training and employment, where appropriate (Teese et al. 2013: 10)

The *Corio Norlane Neighbourhood Urban Renewal Project*, for example, carried forward the objectives identified as foci for local activity in the 2002 launch of the initiative, through the development of locally responsive action plans that included:

- Increasing people’s civic pride and participation in the community
- Promoting health and wellbeing
- Enhancing housing and the physical environment
- Lifting employment, training and education opportunities and expanding local economic activities (Henry et al. 2009: 80).

The commitment by the newly elected Labor Government in Victoria to sustainable funding to enable ACE providers to meet local learning needs, including the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners is welcome. Whether it will address the inequities experienced by the LLOs since the introduction of the competitive training environment by Skills Victoria is unknown at this time (Victorian Labor Platform 2014:34).

This commitment is reflected in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development: Strategic Plan (DEECD 2013: 17). This Strategic Plan articulates its role as helping people to gain the skills and knowledge they need to thrive and participate in a complex and challenging economy and society with one of its four-year priorities to give Victorians relevant skills by raising the quality and economic value of vocational and higher education (DEECD 2013: 13).

## LABOUR MARKET POLICY

Labour market policy forms a component of public policy that Curtain (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, Curtain 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, Curtain (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, Curtain 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' (Curtain 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). Curtain'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. 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.

## 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).

LLO Boards and other 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 includes 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.

## INCREASING PARTICIPATION - THE SOCIAL INCLUSION AGENDA

In Australia, the interest in social exclusion and inclusion has been more recent than in Europe but studies here also show that social disadvantage is linked to lower levels of social trust and higher levels of crime (Cameron, 2006; Vinson 2007; Government of South Australia 2008: 1).

It should be noted that while the concepts of social exclusion (more widely used in the initial stages of policy development in the UK and Europe) and social inclusion are highly variable, it is useful to regard minimising social exclusion as a policy objective achieved by implementing a social inclusion agenda (Government of South Australia 2008: 2).

A significant development was the creation in 2002 of the Social Inclusion Initiative by the then Premier of South Australia, Mike Rann, who was also the South Australian Minister for Social Inclusion. The initiative emphasised the provision of opportunities for social and economic participation, especially by the most disadvantaged citizens of the state, and has been at the vanguard of Australian social inclusion policy and practice. (Government of South Australia 2008: 2).

Under this approach, to be socially included requires opportunities for:

- securing a job
- accessing services
- collective efficacy (connecting with others in life through family, friends, work, personal interests and local community)
- dealing with personal crises, such as ill health, bereavement or the loss of a job
- a voice in community planning (Gillard, 2008; Pope 2011: 18).

Social inclusion policies are based on a number of important principles: building on individual and community strengths; building partnerships with stakeholders; developing services tailored to the needs of communities; early intervention and prevention; joined-up government services; the greater use of evidence to inform innovative policy making; using a locational approach to tackle entrenched poverty; and planning to build future resilience in disadvantaged families and communities (Commonwealth of Australia 2009: 3).

### **What is the difference between social capital and social inclusion/exclusion?**

The key difference between social capital and social inclusion/exclusion approaches is that social capital focuses largely on everyday social interactions between people, the resources these interactions provide to the individual and the impacts these interactions, or lack of, have on broader society. Social inclusion/exclusion by contrast focuses on the multitude of processes that cause exclusion from mainstream society and the interactions between them. In public policy, both social capital and social exclusion terminology is used. The terms are relevant to each other (Pomagalska et al. 2009: 112). For instance, a lack of social capital can be a factor in social exclusion. Increasing an individual's social capital may lead to greater levels of social inclusion (Narayan 1999). It might be helpful to see social capital as the means to an end, rather than an intrinsic objective - 'the glue holding society together' as described by the World Bank (United Nations 2010: 5).

### **3. ASSISTING DISENGAGED LEARNERS IN RURAL LOCATIONS TO PATHWAY INTO FURTHER EDUCATION OR EMPLOYMENT**

In Victoria's regional communities, barriers to access include wide dispersion of the population, distance to travel, lack of specialised transport or facilities, higher costs of provision or access. But there are perhaps other barriers that are more cultural than economic, and more subtle. Is a course relevant or will it make a difference to employment prospects, given the regional labour market? Will participants enjoy the stimulus of learning with others? Are participants confident that they can learn? It is as important to know the story of those who do not cross the threshold to study as those who do and understanding the motives, perceptions and outcomes of the many people who do take pre-accredited courses can help the community sector reach those who do not (Teese et al. 2013: 132).

Pre-accredited courses offer 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. They are often in relatively insecure situations within the labour market and they commonly have low levels of qualifications (or none) and incomplete schooling (Teese et al. 2013: 3; Davies et al. 2011: 16).

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 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).

Grampians has the highest proportion of learners with incomplete schooling coming from Lower (48%) and Lowest (42%) SES quartiles in Victoria. 9% are in the Higher SES quartile and there are no learners from the Highest quartile. It also has the highest percentage of adults with incomplete schooling (44%) (Teese et al. 2013: 28).

Every third completer of a pre-accredited course goes on to further study, but workforce-vulnerable learners are much more likely to do so (40-47%). This finding is important because it shows that high-need groups build on their pre-accredited course participation and that a pathway is being used to improve location in the workforce (Teese et al. 2013: 12).

## **ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF GOOD PRACTICE PROGRAM DELIVERY.**

### **SERVICE MODELS**

The ACE sector has been funded by the Victorian Government to offer semi-formal entry level training with vocational intent through pre-accredited training that has been delivered across Victoria for over 30 years. This provides an important stepping stone for people who have little or no recent experience of education and, for reasons associated with different kinds of disadvantage, find it difficult to commence formal training as a first step. Pre-accredited delivery has a sound pedagogical base through the design and development of a quality framework – the A-Frame – through which teachers and learners interact to contextualise and develop a learning plan that engages the learner in designing their learning pathway and which acknowledges different teaching and learning structures (Davies et al. 2011: 30).

Flexible learning options include part-time or distance learning. Certain organisations may be able to provide the flexibility in curriculum better than others. NSW TAFE Outreach has educational practices that are based on negotiation and are project based, providing purposeful education with VET accreditation when required (Davies et al. 2011: 31). Ireland's Back to Education offers part-time training and education that leads to certification through the National Framework of Qualifications. Participants take qualifications in components, in a modular fashion, that builds up into a whole award over time. The part-time provision is designed to be flexible to ensure that the learner can 'reconcile participation in education with family and/or employment responsibilities' (European Commission, 2007 in Davies et al. 2011: 31).

Applied or hands-on learning may appeal to disengaged learners, especially people who may have been excluded from the academic focus of traditional education programs. The practical application of skills is extremely important for hard-to-reach learners, as a more traditional abstracted instruction will only lead to further disconnection and affirm their distrust of educational settings (Davies et al. 2011: 32).

Applied learning was at the core of Lead Local, a program aimed at developing participants' confidence, skills and knowledge to support their communities, promote education and training opportunities in their communities and encouraging participants to enrol in training and education opportunities themselves. The mix of workshops and field trips proved successful in engaging the 11 learners in education and training. Using an applied learning approach and providing support for the participants' welfare and social needs were effective strategies to ensure positive outcomes for learners and their full participation. Session leaders were sourced through Conservation Volunteers and Community Leadership Loddon Mallee Inc. Field trips via a community bus visited nearby community groups and organisations including education institutions, the media, local and state government representatives, not-for-profit organisations and community groups. The program had a significant impact on each of the participants. There were increases ranging from 33% to 57% on all of the competencies surveyed (Loddon Murray Inc. n.d.)

### **BLENDED OR INTEGRATED APPROACHES**

Programs that successfully integrate technologies into their training model can be appealing to many disengaged young people across the world. Examples from Ireland (Bytes) and Scotland (Core Connex) as well as local initiatives (Jesuit Community College, Collingwood and NMIT) show that working towards a qualification using technology to build a portfolio is appealing to young learners, and teaches web skills, behavioural skills and general confidence in dealing with the wider community. Most importantly, the online forum creates a space for young people to find out further information concerning education and training (Davies et al. 2011: 34). Embedding pathways, mentoring, work placement, transition and post-program support into programs creates valuable connections between the program and the wider community.

### **PARTNERSHIP MODELS**

There is no doubt that policy makers support a partnership approach to sustainability. 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).

Schmidtke (2013) identifies several reasons for 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.

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). Many good practice programs are partnership focused and policy and funding frameworks today encourage strong connections between community and non-government organisations and training providers in the shared planning and delivery of interventions aimed at building participation of the disengaged in training and employment or community pathways. There are good reasons for this focus: bringing together providers of social, housing, employment and other services assists in developing a 'full service' approach to the individual, positioning the learner at the centre of the process and building responses around individual needs. For the individual this means less fragmentation in engagement with systems, less repetition of experiences and a more holistic approach to needs. The partnerships can also inform program delivery and content especially in connecting learners to workplaces.

In Rosemount Lifelong Learning Centre, Glasgow, tuition and childcare is provided free through partnerships. It draws on a range of organisations to provide the supports young mothers need to participate in training (Davies et al. 2011: 26). Strong partnerships also characterise the successful programs delivered by the Sandybeach Centre and the Pavilion school, both in Melbourne, which can be adapted to other settings. (Davies et al. 2011: 26). Features include the use of accredited or pre-accredited training modules, individual support, personalised learning, mentoring and the specialist support provided by agencies (such as addressing homelessness, substance abuse, mental illness).

Hubbing, such as the approach used by the Old Courthouse Community Centre in Casterton, Victoria, lends itself to rural areas where distance imposes significant costs in time and resources for learners, providing accessible one-stop-shop delivery of programs and a broad range of supports. The place-based nature of the operation facilitates local partnerships. The breadth of the hub activity reduces any sense of stigma associated with accessing specific support, training or other services and builds educational activity into a more holistic and social framework of community participation. A hub-based provision allows providers to transfer learners between programs or to suspend participation while learners are dealing with health, family or other personal issues, without losing the learner from training (Davies et al. 2011: 28).

Ballarat Neighbourhood House's Next Steps Work and Learning Centre is a volunteer organisation that assists people who are having difficulty securing employment find a career path, whether it be through education or employment (Work and Learning Centres 2014).

It is evident however that 'partnership working is not without problems and one important reason is the scale and frequency of change in the attitudes and institutional structure of agencies.' Partnership building and maintenance is time and resource intensive, and this needs to be taken into account in program funding and in the understanding of costs.

It is not necessarily a 'cheap' option or an opportunity for cost shifting – partnership benefits may lie more in the networks of associations available to more effectively support learners over an extended training journey than in economies achieved through accessing in kind and other contributions of local partners (NDCNE, 2009 in Davies et al. 2011: 47).

#### **INTENSIVE SUPPORT NEEDED FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE LEARNERS**

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 include 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 (Davies et al. 2011: 56).

#### **OUTREACH**

By bringing learning to the learner, outreach services are a means of overcoming the social distance between disengaged learners and education and training (Davies et al. 2011: 22). They can provide accessible information and individual counseling, not necessarily about courses.

The NSW TAFE Outreach consortium provides services in community learning spaces embedded in a host community organisation. It also has a consistent budget (Davies et al. 2011: 23). In Tasmania, the Tasmanian Adult Literacy Action Plan supports volunteers to deliver individual assistance in libraries and other municipal sites (Davies et al. 2011: 24). In the UK, Scotland's 'Big Plus' (Skills Development Scotland 2011) and the Norwich Learning Shop (n.d.) have had success over a long period of time with a similar approach.

#### **BUDDIES AND MENTORS**

Engagement on a personal level can develop into a pathway for further opportunities. Community initiatives such as community gardens and kitchens provide easier access to social opportunities for marginalised people (Davies et al. 2011: 24). They may also be the catalyst for social enterprises that 'hooks the learning into employment straight away' (Davies et al. 2011: 36).

#### **SERVICE COORDINATION AND INTENSIVE SUPPORT**

Intensive support succeeds in the Gateway Program (Jesuit Social services) for a socially excluded and highly isolated group. Its best practice service model includes service coordination to address the learning, social, health, welfare and economic needs of at risk people (Davies et al. 2011: 25). In this program, a support team is critical for direct contact at entry, through any crisis and exit (Davies et al. 2011: 26).



## GATHERING THE NECESSARY RESOURCES THROUGH NETWORKED APPROACHES

Finnish researchers Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007: 81) believe that 'regions must build their prosperity in a new, network-based environment' and discuss the various types of networks that occur in regional settings (2007: 85). They define three archetypes of networks. These include what they describe as the 'large and loose' network in which some members may have different values and may not know each other, and in which members may form cliques or coalitions with different ideas about how to progress the work of the group (2007: 86). The second network archetype is the 'small, homogenous, public sector network' in which members know each other well, have similar values and have a clear task and shared vision (2007: 87). The final archetype of network described by Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen (2007: 86) is the 'heterogeneous, multi-actor, innovation network', the characteristics of which are:

- 'the members come from different sectors of society
- the network has a commonly accepted goal
- interactive learning is emphasized in getting results
- it produces several sub-network
- the commonly accepted coordinator steers the activities' (2007: 86).

Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen discuss these different types of networks in terms of both the literature for a theoretical examination, and from a case study of networks in the Lahti Region of Finland.

They find that these networks are not only important from an economic point of view but also from a sociological point of view, as networks have become 'one of the basic forms of social organisation' (2007: 82).

By understanding the different network characteristics, it is then possible to consider the types of interventions that may be useful to assist those networks to achieve their objectives. For example, a 'small homogenous, public sector network (Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen 2007: 86) may need to consider the need to ensure that external points of view and alternative ways of working are considered lest they become too insular and resistant to change. On the other hand, a 'heterogeneous, multi-actor, innovation network (Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen 2007: 87) may choose to work on identifying the areas of mutual gain and common interest, and initiating robust communication processes to ensure that the engagement of members and stakeholders is maintained.

In Australia, as elsewhere, the often seemingly divergent strategic goals of businesses and the community/education sector has meant that it has been notoriously difficult to successfully establish forums in which these sectors interact effectively over long periods of time. In 2002, the Victorian Government established the Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) to broker these relationships to improve the educational outcomes and post-school pathways for secondary school students. The DEECD (2007) report, *Local Learning and Employment Networks Engaging with Industry*, noted that, 'A number of factors deter industries from becoming involved, or cause them to withdraw their support for programs or initiatives.' (DEECD 2007: 5).

These factors may include a focus on the day-to-day and shortage of time, previous negative experiences with young people, competing involvement with other community activities and competing requests for participation. The report recommends direct and ongoing dialogue with industry and ensuring that the strategic approach of the community project is aligned with the goals of industry partners.

Infrastructure plans, such the *Social Interagency Infrastructure Delivery Plan* for the planned new development of Armstrong Creek, south of Geelong, are a way of engaging business and industry in community development. Driving the vision for Armstrong Creek is a belief that stand-alone services and facilities are not sustainable and that collaborative and integrated service provision meets the needs of the community in a 'seamless and responsive service system' (City of Greater Geelong 2009: 18).

#### **THE EXPANSIVE LEARNING NETWORK (ELN)**

The Expansive Learning Network (ELN) (Expansive Learning Network 2014) was created in April 2012 through a partnership between the Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network (GRLEN), the Victorian Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Deakin University and the University of Winchester, UK. Based on an initiative developed by the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester, the ELN is a forum 'where principals and aspiring school leaders, other educators, community, government and industry partners who care about learning for the real world can work together to make the changes needed to prepare our young people for their future' (See ELN case study Messer et al. 2013). It is an example of Haarmaakorpi and Niukkanen's 'heterogeneous, multi-actor, innovation network'.

The Geelong region contains a volatile labour market which is in transition from traditional industries such as manufacturing and agriculture to a more diverse mix of industries such as advanced manufacturing, entrepreneurial small business and a growing education and research sector. However, in the light of recent massive redundancies through the closure of several major employers, the region faces difficulty in moving towards a more creative and entrepreneurial approach to change, with some opportunities for cross-sector engagement being unsuccessful.

The ELN conducts several major Events each year in which members are exposed to highly credentialed 'thought leaders' who present provocative propositions relating to key issues facing the region. Events have included taking a 'futures' perspective about how the region might evolve, which one member described as 'making us more open-minded about possible futures and actively working to realise a preferred future'; the changing nature of work; and learning for the 'real world'. Members then work together to explore ways in which the desired futures might be turned into a practical reality.

Designed to be driven by the members, one outcome has been the creation of professional learning communities that investigate particular issues in depth, such as innovative learning approaches designed to better prepare young people for the future.

Members are also becoming more sophisticated with regard to the practice of evidence-based research, action learning and practitioner focused skill development and actively contribute to shaping the Events program.

The ELN is a low-cost, organic model for community-led, cross-sectoral problem solving that is futures-focussed and able to be highly responsive to changes in the external environment.

See Expansive Learning Network (2014) for more information

## **BUILDING AND MAINTAINING BEST PRACTICE THROUGH SUSTAINABLE CAPACITY-BUILDING PARTNERSHIP NETWORKS**

Something has to change. Despite the best efforts of organisations such as LLOs, the outcomes for the most vulnerable in Victoria's regions are not improving. Faris (2002) says it is important to recognise a 'sense of history and a sense of place' in working with whole communities in an organic way, not in isolated segments. The multi-disciplinary capacity-building partnership and networks model is a significant modern approach that builds on the achievements of the past to ensure sustainable solutions to problems that have taken many years to develop. Faris says the 'short termism' approach of many government policies creates quick fixes but is ineffective in creating genuine social change. Short-term solutions do not address big social problems and all they do is teach people how to tackle little problems.

Joined up solutions are needed for joined up problems and valuable leadership is developed as people learn that they can deal with the big issues (Horton 1990: 3).

Modern place-based community building initiatives are a valuable means of reaching people who are not well linked to existing social systems (Kretzmann 1993; Pearson 2002). The asset based approach to community building focuses on the positive aspects in communities as a more profoundly effective starting point for developing the skills of the people in disadvantaged communities than the traditional 'dead end' of needs driven approaches to community development (Pearson 2002).

The practice of defining need has a disempowering effect. The expertise in defining needs that is vested in professionals rather than the people 'supposedly experiencing them' prevents empowerment (Ife 2002: 57). Where multiple groups of people in power define the needs of local communities, there is less likelihood of those needs being met.

Redressing the balance requires knowledge and access to education and information so that people are given the power to define their own needs. 'Significant community development takes place only when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort' (Kretzmann 1993: 5).

### **WHY TAKE A PLACE-BASED APPROACH?**

The asset-based, place-based approach confirms the value of local knowledge in effective community development. By assessing the availability of local expertise, community development initiatives become and remain relevant in specific community contexts. By persuading local people that they may have the necessary skills and knowledge to address their particular issues, the first steps in acting for change can be taken (Foucault in Ife 2002: 211).

The literature shows that the effects of neighbourhood disadvantage on the wellbeing of residents can be significant and while it may not be the only major factor, addressing it can have a ripple effect that creates improvements for residents. On the other hand, 'policy designed in isolation from delivery can lead to ineffective outcomes' (Barca 2009).

Living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, compared to living in a less disadvantaged neighbourhood, has been found to be associated with:

- poorer outcomes for children, including learning and behavioural outcomes, and physical health (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000)
- poorer health in adults, as indicated by rates of infectious diseases, asthma, smoking, depression, poor diet and poor self-rated health
- reduced job and educational prospects (Government of South Australia 2008).

An important and influential recent study documenting the extent of locational disadvantage and the extent to which different dimensions of exclusion are correlated within areas was conducted by Professor Tony Vinson in 2007. Vinson found that 3% of Australia's localities account for a disproportionate amount of disadvantage. For example, compared to the other localities, the 3% most disadvantaged had at least twice the rate of unemployment, long-term unemployment, disability support recipients and psychiatric admissions, criminal convictions, imprisonment and child maltreatment. Vinson's study also indicated that disadvantage was entrenched in these areas and durable over time (Vinson 2007; Government of South Australia 2008: 10).

As demonstrated in the UK and Canadian approaches to social inclusion projects, one of the advantages in taking the place-based approach is that it draws in Local Government, an influential and well resourced partner with a vested interest in effective planning and the provision of social and economic benefits to its community – and this becomes an important strategy for addressing the risks posed by short term funding (Breen 2011: 15). Consequently, the place based approach has become well-established in Victorian community building and community strengthening initiatives over the past decade.

Collective impact is another approach which is currently being recommended by the Centre for Social Impact and Social Leadership Australia as 'a new initiative to help communities across Australia transform the way they approach society's biggest challenges' (Centre for Social Impact, 2014). The Collective Impact Framework describes three pre-conditions, and five conditions of Collective Impact (Hanleybrown et al. 2012; Kania and Kramer 2011). Some communities will find themselves well past the pre-conditions, that is, creating a sense of urgency; engaging influential champions and gathering necessary financial and other resources. As a learning community becomes established, they should review how it is progressing against the following five conditions of collective impact:

- Common Agenda
- Shared Measurement
- Mutually Reinforcing Activities
- Continuous Communication
- Backbone Support.

The Centre for Social Impact (2014) identifies the work of the backbone support as:

- 1) guiding visions and strategy
- 2) supporting aligned activities
- 3) establishing shared measurement practices
- 4) building public will
- 5) advancing policy
- 6) mobilising funding.

Further, the backbone support could be one organization or be a distributed system where organisations and staff are aligned across the six functions.

Key functions that must be funded are firstly, a leader for the program; secondly, short term research projects when needed and at other times community engagement projects, and finally an administrator to keep systems and processes in order.

The City of Melton Community Learning Board is a well-established learning community that is embedding sustainability by using the Australian Learning Community Framework and Collective Impact to align its future plans with the UNESCO Key Features of Learning Cities. It has evolved an evaluation framework based on mixed methods and an action research approach, using tools such as the VicHealth Partnerships Analysis Tool and ACFE's Measuring Impact. It has taken these experiences a step further and developed the City of Melton Measuring Collective Impact Tool (Blunden et al. 2014) to more accurately assess impact by improving comparison of data over time (Wheeler et al. 2014).

#### **GWYDIR LEARNING REGION – A RELEVANT EXAMPLE FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES**

The Gwydir Learning Region (GLR) is a strategic partnership consisting of the various local educational providers and the Gwydir Shire Council (Wheeler and Wong 2013).

Gwydir Shire, in north-west NSW, is sparsely populated and covers an area of 9,000 square kilometres. It consists of a number of small towns and villages.

In the 2011 Census, there were 4,965 people in Gwydir (A) (Local Government Areas); of these 50.6% were male and 49.4% were female. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people made up 3.8% of the population. The vast majority of people were born in Australia (92.8%) with an aging population (30.5 % of people 60 or over, compared with 20.5% for New South Wales).

The key challenges were low levels of household income and very low educational attainment. In 2003, the newly formed Gwydir Shire Council established the Gwydir Learning Region (GLR) as a partnership framework involving key stakeholders from across sectors. Its mission was 'to do what is necessary to ensure high quality education and training is available, accessible, affordable, adaptable and acceptable for people of all ages and stages of life who live in or are associated with the Gwydir Shire (Wheeler and Wong 2013)'

The achievements of the GLR in lifting educational participation and attainment has been internationally recognised through numerous case studies which have found that there has been significant movement towards building a culture of learning within the Shire; the skill base within organisations and within communities has increased; the involvement of local government is crucial; support for individual learning contributes to community capacity building (<http://pascalobservatory.org/search/node/gwydir>).

The GLR demonstrates that networked approaches, led by local government, can have a long-lasting and profound impact:

Gwydir Council is the largest employer in the Shire and because of the learning nature of that organisation the flow on to the rest of the communities through their families has been noticeable as well as that culture of learning. At the start it was quite difficult but we can now see that change in attitude to education (local Federal MP).'

'People have learnt and got employment in the area, in the Gwydir area, and it's helped with the hostel, hospital, and all the Shire work, some of the trainees and even in the community. They've helped with all the learning, and it's kept the younger ones in the community, and some of the older ones that haven't moved away (learner).'

There is also considerable evidence of the wider benefits of learning:

'We spent quite a bit of money employing mentors to teach basic literacy and also supporting learners. For example: a student who had been a poor student all through school, has been doing one day a week as a trainee with the Council as a plant mechanic, and one day a week at TAFE and the other three days at school and the change in that boy's attitude has been very noticeable. He is now a school based apprentice and is applying for a full time apprenticeship next year. Without the GLR he would have dropped out of school without any skills (Training and Development Manager).'

A young person was supported to get a traineeship at McMaster Research Station when he was in Year 11 and 12 and this combined with good results has enabled him to get a place in a Bachelor of Agriculture in Armadale.

A young woman is now social services assistant employed by Gwydir Shire. Her dream of working in children's services was fulfilled because as she was able to undertake a Certificate III in Children's Services as well as HSC while still at school. Normally students are unable to enrol in the certificate before the age of 18, but 'they pushed and pushed and pushed and a few rules were bent and broken and twisted around which enabled me to start my Certificate Three in Children's Services (learner).'

A young man was guided into a week's work experience in auto electronics and went on to do a computer electronics course at school and then an apprenticeship. He now runs a successful auto electronics business in Moree which has grown considerably over the last three years. He has won awards, including best auto-electrician under 25 in Australia. He now employs a number of apprentices including students from Warialda High School.

While in Year 10 a young woman expressed an interest in film, television and media, yet there were no courses offered at the school. The careers teacher worked hard to get the course up and running. The course was held after school and on Saturdays. The students met high profile industry people and got the chance to work on commercial work. Now as a young mum living in a rural town, she is working with others to secure the local cinema with a view to revitalising it into a café, bowling alley and working cinema so that in the future there is something for her children in the town.

A young man found it hard to settle at school. The careers teacher secured a traineeship for him out on a property and now, several years later, he continues to successfully work on the farm.

It is also making a difference to families:

'My husband is on a disability pension... and now with me having a job we can go places and do lots of things that we hadn't been able to do for years (former learner who is now a VET Nurse Manager)'.  
A woman who is currently the technology support officer at Warialda High School, commenced at the school as a learner in IT. Her son also did a mechanics traineeship with Gwydir Shire Council. These options kept the son at school and enabled the mother to have a career path in IT.

Behind the stories illustrated is the tenacity of the local people such as the careers teacher at the High School and the Training and Development Officer at Gwydir Shire. On numerous occasions learners mentioned the individualised support they received.

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### **YOUTH OPTIONS GUARANTEE (YOG)**

The Youth Options Guarantee was a pioneering initiative of the Highlands LLEN, which was predicated on a set of arrangements put in place by those organisations that are signatories to a Memorandum of Understanding. It was developed as a result of concern at the relatively high proportion of young people in the Grampians Region who left school before completing year 12 and who dropped out of education or training.

The main elements to the Youth Options Guarantee were:

- A coordinated, place-based referral process, ensuring no-one slipped through the cracks
- Supportive intervention for those young people identified as potential early leavers to prevent early leaving
- Transition support for early leavers to and between education and training providers or employment with structured training (DCA eHealth Solutions 2014).

Features of the YOG worth noting are that the development of the model included a study trip to explore existing youth safety-net initiatives in Scandinavia. The potential partners of the YOG raised funds for the study tour through sponsorship and government grants. The impact was far-reaching with similar initiatives being established across Victoria with the support of local organisations and the Department of Education.

In the Grampians Region, the YOG now operates as Community Action Networks (CANs), in Daylesford, Bacchus Marsh, Beaufort, Creswick, Ballarat and Golden Plains. These networks are strategic and focus on place-based approaches to addressing the barriers that young people face in participating in education, training or the community (Highlands LLEN n.d.).

#### 4. BEST PRACTICE ELEMENTS OF SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIP NETWORKS

Sustainable partnership networks, competently developed and managed by community strategic partnerships assist in the achievement of giving 'communities a greater say in how services are used to solve local problems' (Government of Victoria 2005). Such partnerships are charged with overseeing the work of community initiatives to increase community participation, using a community strengthening methodology, that in time deepens community engagement and delivers robust plans for building sustainable community capacity.

Where local government has led a more collaborative approach, local communities have been empowered to make decisions about their place and to play a direct role in delivering services and undertaking projects in order to achieve their desired outcomes (Wheeler and Wong 2014: 4). The ambition to be a dynamic community requires a collective and continuous commitment. To this end, good governance is required to provide consistent management and a cohesive approach to policies, processes and decision-making (City of Greater Geelong 2009: 44).

Effective governance networks link 'individuals to institutions and therefore to power, resources and Ideas through these networks, communities can turn their assets into specific outcomes such as employment, increased economic opportunity or improved services and facilities' (Pope 2011).

When strategies adopted in the past have not achieved the desired outcomes, new approaches are required.

Features effective community partnerships aiming to address educational disadvantage include:

- 1) Focused leadership from all sectors - Federal, State and local government, as well as education including schools, vocational education, adult education and Universities to form regional learning hubs (GLR), Learning Communities (Melton), or Networks (ELN).
- 2) Demonstrated leadership by local government. For example, the CEO of Gwydir Shire Council addressed the lack of literacy, numeracy and educational achievement within his own staff. This has had a ripple effect into the community.
- 3) Planning and 'collective creativity' are harnessed to identify local employment training opportunities (Mitchell 2006). For example, the Grampians YOG, Melton Community Learning Board.
- 4) Evidence-based planning using data and contemporary literature about lifelong learning and social capital and the roles of education in building social capital in regional areas is shared widely (Mitchell, 2006) For example, ELN.
- 5) Personalised learning to change the lives of those embarking on further education and training learners. For example, BizE Centre in Wong et al. (2014).
- 6) Building bridges between generations and cohorts of learners - as a mature age learner said:



'It was just so funny going back to High School and the kids just - they didn't talk to you. They didn't want to have anything to do with you. Then when they found out we beat them all with their marks, it was, oh can we sit with you?' (Wheeler and Wong 2014).

Innovative approaches to investment in learning and social infrastructure add value to the provision of training and employment:

Gwydir Shire is now an RTO and has successfully applied for and (uniquely) now manages three Trade Training Centres. This means that adults as well as students have access to the training:

- Roxy Theatre is now a beautifully restored art deco theatre in the town of Bingara. It also incorporates a hospitality Trade Training Centre. People who undertake the training also have the opportunity to cater for functions at the Theatre.
- The Living Classroom in Bingara. This incorporates a primary industry trade training and research centre and is located on 150 hectares of degraded town Common and will be turned into 'a highly productive food forest – combining a wide range of agricultural activities with horticulture, aquaculture and forestry.'
- Warialda High School incorporates a new automotive trade training centre (Wheeler and Wong 2014).

In another example, YouthNow in Melbourne's Western suburbs established the BizE Centre within its own workplace. Vulnerable young people are engaged as trainees in Business and Office Administration. In-house staff provide on-the-job training in the YouthNow workplace and qualified trainers integrate the intensive literacy, numeracy and personal supports required by the trainees.

All trainees have successfully transitioned to further education, training or employment. The innovative approach has also seen YouthNow be successful in attracting further funding for building the BizE Centre as a social enterprise (Wong, S, Wong, I, et al. 2014).

Key learnings from these examples for other communities:

1. The underlying philosophy, the goals, and commitment to working together are absolutely transferable across communities.
2. Partnerships with employers are critical so that they are willing to take on trainees or volunteers to get some experience.
3. The collective resources of partnerships can be used to develop innovative ways of delivering training, especially when in a rural community. For example, use technology to deliver lectures, but have local mentors so that learners get a personal touch as well. It will differ from place to place.

'Some ideas will also be transferable, some will need adaption and some ideas need to be home grown' (Thompson 2012).

4. Governance and committee structures are essential but will also differ from community to community.

## **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 (Sotaarauta 2005: 54) such as those that are relevant to LLOs. Sotaarauta (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 (Sotaarauta 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 (Sotaarauta 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. Sotaarauta 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:

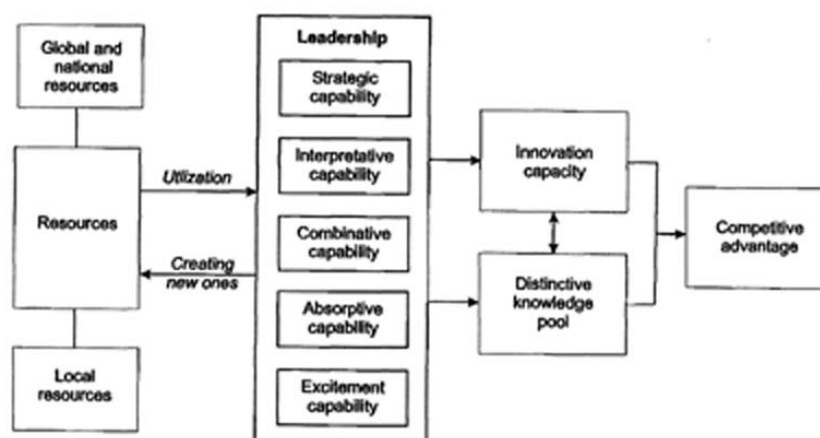


FIGURE 1 - CAPABILITY MODEL FOR REGIONS (SOTARAUTA 2005: 62)

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).

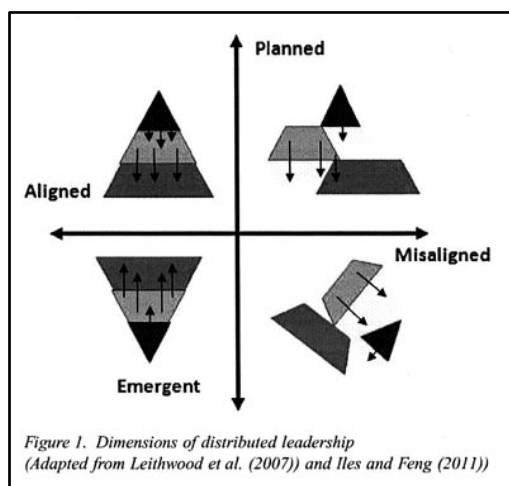


FIGURE 2 – DIMENSIONS OF DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP (THORPE ET AL. 2011: 244)

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. (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.

One of the pressing issues is how does an LLO view its role in the long term as part of such collaborations. When an ACE provider is financially sustainable, 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. However, Wheeler (2004) 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).

A principle challenge identified in the GLR case study is the increasingly complex funding system that makes it harder to be as flexible as in the past. 'The new challenge is for current leaders to understand the funding system and what it means in terms of the model that GLR puts in place going forward. It makes it a different type of challenge than it was in the beginning' (TAFE Director, in Wheeler and Wong 2014)

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. The more intensive supports required for low-skilled, disadvantaged learners require additional funding 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: 56).



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.

### **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Better engagement of employers remains a key focus for improving employment pathways for vulnerable learners. Employers in rural areas say they cannot find the people they need. Skilled workers move to cities. Even when employers are prepared to invest in training, finding labour can be a challenge. Employers are not always interested in formal training so much as their employees developing the required skillset, so there may be opportunities for creative partnerships with LLOs to prepare and continue to develop employees in close partnership with employers. There are also opportunities to work with employers as business advisors to assist them to be specific about the skillsets they require for their business, to develop sound recruitment and employee development practices and to help them navigate the options available through VET and informal training.

If programs contain the features that have been identified as important to re-engagement, and they are resourced adequately, then improvements in participation of disengaged learners, in achievement, articulation to other types of study and a reduction in the numbers in the population without qualifications could be expected (Davies et al. 2011: 42). The Learning Community Framework Toolkit (Wheeler and Wong 2014) provides resources that will assist in the evaluation of such capacity building interventions.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Based on the research into the wider benefits of learning in areas such as health, employment, social relationships and volunteering and the realisation that it will take strong leadership and a collective approach to solve some of the social and economic issues, there is no doubt that the network of LLOs across Victoria has 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. LLOs 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 subsidise services, especially for those providers dealing with the most hard to reach learners, and those located in rural and regional areas, may be necessary. Needs-based funding models operating in other sectors provide approaches could also be applied to the education and training sector.

LLOs are well placed to initiate, lead and develop community coalitions. They have the flexibility, agility and network experience to bring together partners that will build the community safety-nets for vulnerable people. The many attempts to address these trenchant issues without sustainable improvement over time would indicate that the coalitions should now be based on a more structured footing to ensure accountability, clarity of purpose, clarity of roles and a mechanism for ongoing monitoring and adjusting. Resources such as the ACELG Learning Community Framework, the VicHealth Partnerships Analysis Tool or the Regional Development Framework (Walker 2013) have been developed for Australian conditions and are readily available. UNESCO's Key Features of Learning Cities and the Collective Impact Framework will provide further ideas for adaptation to local circumstances.

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