

A clash of cultures: The response of one voluntary organisation to a changing policy environment

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ABSTRACT

In the current political and economic environment, funding for voluntary organisations has not usually kept pace with the increase in demands on their services. It has become increasingly common for not-for-profit organisations to have commercially oriented functions, whether in separate business units or in wholly-owned subsidiary companies. However, this process is not necessarily straightforward. This article discusses the experience of one organisation, highlighting some of the sorts of structural and planning issues that arise in relation to this issue. It will also examine some of the tensions that have become obvious as a community-based government-funded 'voluntary' agency struggles to accommodate the development of an entrepreneurial, commercially-focused service.

In the current political and economic environment, funding for voluntary organisations has not usually kept pace with the increase in demands on their services. It has become increasingly common for not-for-profit organisations to have commercially oriented functions, whether in separate business units or in wholly-owned subsidiary companies. However, this process is not necessarily straightforward. This article discusses the experience of one organisation, highlighting some of the sorts of structural and planning issues that arise in relation to this issue. It will also examine some of the tensions that have become obvious as a community-based government-funded 'voluntary' agency struggles to accommodate the development of an entrepreneurial, commercially-focused service.

My position throughout this process has been as an active participant and is therefore not neutral. This article covers a period of six years and in that time I have been employed by a member scheme of the organisation, have been a national scheme committee member and more latterly have acted as a contract researcher for the field. Consequently, I write as a "thoughtful partisan" (Lindblom, 1987: 168), with the bias and prejudices that the term suggests influencing my perceptions and recollections of these events. The information for this case study comes from discussions with a range of local and national staff and committee members, participation at a range of meetings within the organisation and reading the organisation's records.

The ARLA federation and its members

The Adult Reading and Learning Federation (ARLA) has been at the forefront of adult literacy and basic education (ALBE) provision in New Zealand since the organisation began in the 1970' s. ARLA

started as a loose network of community based adult literacy providers, offering a predominantly 1:1 tutoring service for learners by volunteer tutors, usually meeting in the home of one of the pair. Twenty years later the Federation has approximately 52 member schemes, 26 of them based in polytechnics. The largest of these schemes have become multi-faceted educational agencies, offering combinations of educational services including Training Opportunities Programmes (TOP) literacy provision, learning support for polytechnic students, short courses in a number of literacy and language related subjects and educational support, in addition to traditional literacy support. The Federation and some of its member schemes have also become involved in a new form of provision, workplace literacy, which has proved to be an organisational challenge.

Both the national organisation (ARLA) and its member schemes (which are independent legal entities in their own right) have similar organisational structures, typical of New Zealand community-based voluntary organisations - an elected committee of volunteers, who provide overall policy and guidance, and only a few staff, usually part-time. The organisation began as a purely voluntary enterprise and although paid co-ordinator positions have been in place for some time, it is only recently that some tutors have been paid for running group. The voluntary ethos is still strong. There is also a strongly held belief that adults with literacy difficulty were poorly served by the compulsory education system and that therefore adult literacy provision tuition should be free.

Funding for the ARLA Federation has been provided from Vote Education, as has salary funding for the larger polytechnic-based schemes. However, schemes have always had to raise operating money. Some members of the Federation have been reluctant to seek corporate sponsorship as a mechanism for funding because they believe adequate literacy skills are a right of all citizens and that educational provision, of an adequate length and quality to ensure the achievement of these skills, is a responsibility of the state.¹ It is perceived that adults who come for literacy assistance do so because they did not get their fair share of the 'educational pie' and the state should be required to pay for their 'second chance'.

The ARLA Federation has always had a 'student-centred' philosophy, where learners defines their own literacy needs, rather than having to work to a curriculum set by external agencies or tutors. The organisation in its early days, was inspired by the development of the British adult literacy movement which sought to overcome an individual's 'deficiencies' so that the learner could take a fuller part in society, with

an emphasis on identifying a hitherto hidden problem and bringing light into the dark corners where the silent and sick illiterates had managed to secrete themselves (Withnall, 1994:83).

However, over time, a more radical perspective has developed as people came to an understanding of the complex social, political and economic forces at play during the formal schooling system that may result in people entering adulthood without the skills necessary to participate fully as citizens in society. This critique has been heightened for many over the last five years, with the development of Te Whiri Kaupapa Ako, the Maori development committee of the Federation, which has argued for a critical perspective on literacy.

ARLA was one of the first adult literacy agencies operating in New Zealand and has always seen itself as the lead ALBE player. Indeed, while the Workers Educational Association (WEA), which had initially sponsored a number of literacy schemes, had its funding cut twice during the 1980s, ARLA has maintained its funding (Harre-Hindmarsh, 1992). However, this lead position is not unassailable. Since the 1980s, the number of organisations providing ALBE has grown dramatically, with the advent of such things as employment related training (e.g. ACCESS, TOP), and specific provision for particular groups, such as Maori, prisoners and learners with non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) backgrounds. The types of provision and the ALBE curriculum have diversified also. Many of the initial workers in these new organisations started out as voluntary tutors within the ARLA Federation and moved on to paid work in these other ALBE agencies. However, the Federation has

a unique position in the field because the on-going annual government grant has meant it has not been required to operate in either a cost-recovery or profit-oriented mode.

The policy environment for workplace literacy

Workplace literacy and language provision is not a home grown phenomenon. Britain had a large adult literacy campaign in the 1970's initially sponsored by the BBC, which led to significant injections of funding and the development of a complex ALBE infrastructure, in which workplace was seen to be a vital component (Withnall, 1994). The major initiative for the workplace component of the British campaign was taken by the trade union movement. Canada and Australia had also developed work literacy well before ARLA began considering this form of provision. National studies of the incidence of literacy difficulty in Canada and Australia in the late 1980's have in both cases led to rapid growth across the ALBE sector, with variety of types of provision being a key goal (Statistics Canada, 1991; Wickert, 1989).

This development has been driven by international and national policy shifts. In the past, literacy has been inextricably linked with schooling. As compulsory universal schooling spread in the western world, it was assumed that illiteracy would be eradicated. Adult literacy has been deemed to be a third world problem, and attention to it was unwelcome because it suggested that the school system had failed. However, it is also argued that it has been acceptable, even necessary, for schooling to produce people with low levels of literacy, who would then be a "required pool of lowly qualified labour for low paid and low skill jobs" (Wickert, 1992:29).

Over the last ten years, adult literacy has become much more of an issue in the developed world, driven primarily by the political and economic ideologies of economic rationalism (Wickert, 1992; Crombie, 1993). The development of global markets and the struggle for the international competitive advantage, the speed of change and the loss of jobs for unskilled workers have called the values and practices of traditional schooling into question. The call has gone out to restructure the workplace into a 'learning organisation', where continual improvement practices will demand more sophisticated problem solving and communication skills from workers (Williamson, 1995; Morrison, 1995). ALBE has been recognised as a critical component of workplace reform, because it aims to enhance the literacy, language and numeracy skills that underpin a worker's ability to take part in reformed work structures, including such things as new computer-based technology, multiskilled workers, self-managing teams, the search for quality and 'continuous improvement'.

This international trend has been introduced into New Zealand's context and policy by way of the 'Skill New Zealand' strategy, promoted by both the Ministers of Labour and Employment, which has been the principal impetus to the establishment of a workplace ALBE industry in New Zealand. The policy aims to "make training an integral part of working life, and an essential characteristic of every successful business" (ETSA, 1991: 3). It has two components - the Industry Skills Training Strategy and the National Qualifications Framework (the Framework).

The cornerstone of the Industry Skills Training Strategy is the establishment of "a reformed and improved industry system" (ibid: 6). The strategy clearly links international competitiveness with the need for a highly skilled and adaptable workforce. The intention is for New Zealand industry to have a 'training culture' where on-going training is seen as essential and integral to business practice. It is recognised that systematic training and increasing the range and types of people taking part in training are necessary in an industrial environment where technology is changing all the time and where traditional low, or unskilled, jobs are on the decline.

The second component of Skill New Zealand is the development of a National Qualifications Framework,

...comprehensive system of approving, registering and monitoring all nationally recognised qualifications and their component parts (Tuck and Peddie, 1995:10).²

The key component of the Framework is the 'unit standard', which specifies the standards that must be reached to demonstrate competence at a particular skill or groups of skills. The unit standards and the qualifications which result from aggregates of the standards are ranked in difficulty and complexity from Levels 1-8, with Level 1 being approximately equivalent to the sorts of standards expected in the Fifth Form, and Level 8 being university level degree courses.

The concept of portability and transferability of skills and qualifications, both nationally and internationally, are essential to the Framework's philosophy. Qualifications may be made up of a range of standards drawn from the overall pool of unit standards. Underpinning this is the concept of core generic and communication skills, which will be common to a whole range of work roles, industries, and therefore, qualifications. The Framework includes unit standards for basic skills such as answering a telephone, spoken English language skills for workplace communication, basic written language and mathematical computation, which industries may build into their national qualifications. These core skills are the basic building blocks in the framework, but the level of literacy and numeracy competence and the spoken English required for successful completion of many unit standards, even at Level 1, is proving to be beyond significant numbers of workers, both native English speakers and those from non-English speaking backgrounds.³ The realisation that workers do not have the language and literacy competencies to take part in the training opportunities offered through the Framework is the prime catalyst for the burgeoning workplace ALBE industry.

Workplace literacy initiatives within ARLA

ARLA first put forward a workplace literacy proposal in their funding application to the Ministry of Education for the 1990 calendar year, although it was submitted as the lowest priority in a list of four. The Minister of Education⁴ agreed to fund two of the four proposals, Maori literacy and the workplace initiative for the 1990 financial year as part of the government's response to the United Nations' International Literacy Year (ILY). I had been a scheme co-ordinator and a national ARLA committee member around this time and can recall discussions when the committee considered not accepting the funding, because workplace literacy was not seen as an organisational priority. There was concern by some community schemes even then that this initiative might undermine community provision. However, it was decided that refusal may damage the Federation's credibility with the Minister, who had taken a personal interest in the idea, so a workplace literacy development project went ahead in late 1990.

The project was to investigate ALBE possibilities and the implications of workplace literacy. The first ARLA Workbase project report (Moore, 1991:3), describes the project "as forging a partnership with industry to develop the foundation skills of literacy and numeracy on which new workplace reforms can be built". A major purpose of the project was to "put literacy and numeracy learning on the training and human resource agenda of New Zealand industry".

The unit operated as a separate project within the Federation, with its own Statement of Objectives for the Ministry of Education (MOE), and its own financial accounts, both of which were incorporated into the Federation's annual audited accounts and reporting processes. Day-to-day decision were made by the manager, while the project was accountable to the Federation's national committee. It operated somewhat like a business unit within the larger organisation, although its direction was reliant on the decisions of the larger organisation.

Notwithstanding uncertain funding over the next four years, ARLA Workbase developed a reputation as a lead player in the ALBE field. By 1995, with a much greater understanding of the scale of change being generated by changes in the policy environment, Workbase had expanded its mission to

be a national resource centre promoting best practice in Adult Basic Education in the workplace" (ARLA, 1995).

It had identified its niche: the development of both learner-focused and training focused materials which would generate income; undertaking specialised lead projects in companies that would generate examples of literacy and language 'best practice' that could be made available to other providers; providing advice and consultancy in specialised areas such as workplace documentation.

ARLA Workbase funding was always precarious, because on-going MOE funding was not guaranteed. After the initial 'new policy' grant in 1990, there were periods where MOE funding for this project was not confirmed until four months into the financial year, and one year no funding was provided at all. To survive therefore, Workbase had not only to generate income but in fact had to make a large enough profit to offset the periods with no grant, which created significant difficulties for the project. Companies have been prepared to pay a market price for the direct provision to learners, but they have not prepared to subsidise resource and curriculum development and the promotion of best practice for the ALBE field at large. The project was initially made viable by the Federation's decision to provide additional financial support over and above the initial grant of \$43,000. For the first three years, ARLA's Development Officer was seconded to be the manager of ARLA Workbase with her salary coming from the Federation's general grant, leaving the special grant to be put towards the project's objectives. However, the subsidising of the project by the Federation took funds away from community-based provision and this was not always supported by member schemes. At the end of 1994 the full implementation of 50:50 Maori/Tauiwi funding came into effect, which not surprisingly meant restructuring of tauiwi staff positions. The decision was made that the ARLA Workbase manager's position would now have to be funded directly from the specific workplace grant (Scott, 1995).

The assets of ARLA Workbase were passed over to the Workbase Education Trust at the beginning of 1996, and the Trust has been contracted with the ARLA Federation to deliver specific outputs for the 1996 calendar year, for which it is paid the old ARLA Workbase grant. However, in order to be able to perform as a national resource centre Workbase Education Trust still has to generate income to augment this funding, which it has done to date by undertaking lead projects in companies.

Although some of the Federation's member schemes had also become workplace literacy providers by mid 1995, for others, the growth of workplace provision has proved uncomfortable. Some of those with roots in learner-centred community literacy are sceptical, and in some cases quite critical, of the Federation's role in industry-oriented, income-generating literacy provision in the workplace, which is perceived to be meeting the agenda of management. This discomfort and the belief that workplace literacy is inappropriate within this community ethos was reflected in a member scheme putting a remit to the 1995 Annual General Meeting that "ARLA's expertise is the provision of community based literacy" (with the implication that workplace provision is not, nor should be, an area of expertise or resource expenditure).

The workplace project itself had begun to feel uncomfortable within the not-for-profit sector and by 1995 a separate identity was being sought for it. On January 1, 1996, ARLA Workbase went out of existence and a new body, the Workbase Education Trust was formed, to continue and develop a role as the national resource centre for workplace literacy. The ARLA Federation has continued its relationship with the workplace arena by having two trustees on the Workbase Education Trust. The Workbase Education Trust came into being because of lobbying by its predecessor, ARLA Workbase, which believed the organisational structure under which it had to operate, a structure typical of the not-for-profit sector, limited Workbase's effectiveness in the commercial arena.

ARLA's strategic planning

At this point, it is useful to consider the place of workplace literacy in the Federation's overall plans. The core of strategic planning is 'scoping' or forecasting, the process of determining what are the

most significant trends the organisation has to consider (Cope, 1989; Bryce, 1987). Economic, political, social technological and competitive environments need to be considered (Schermerhorn, 1989: 148). Cope highlights the way organisations can spend too much of their energy and resources improving internal structures and processes, 'internal maintenance', while forgetting to pay attention to the external ecosystem. Until recently, ARLA has really been the only player in the ALBE field and has not had to consider competition. Concepts such as 'market positioning' and the 'assessing of external forces' are not common parlance at committee meetings and the committee has not produced any long term plans for the Federation over the last five years.

ARLA operates on a yearly cycle of funding submissions to the Ministry of Education, which in the late 1980's and early 1990's were called development plans. However, the name gives the impression of a long-range planning document, whereas they are really only operational or business plans for activities in the forthcoming year. Kilminster (1993) says that strategic planning is based on the establishment of a vision of the future, which the organisation then works to bring to reality over a five year period. Using that definition, ARLA has never had a strategic plan for any of its work. The Federation's 1990 plan refers only to the establishment of a pilot workplace project within that year, without any longer term indicators of the way the initiative might develop (ARLA, 1990). This is quite reasonable given funding had only been sought for a pilot, but as workplace opportunities and issues became clearer, one might assume the organisation would begin to develop an idea of how this initiative would fit into an overall vision for the Federation. The committee certainly discussed workplace issues in response to papers submitted by Workbase staff, making decisions on issues as required, but there is no evidence in the minutes or committee papers that the committee at any point took an in depth look at the long term relationship between the parent organisation and the new venture.

Alongside the development of Workbase, which was an externally focused initiative, ARLA has also been undergoing dramatic internal change, with the development of Maori literacy since 1990. These changes are worthy of a full description and analysis in a separate paper but in brief, ARLA now has two parts - the Maori development committee known as Te Whiri Kaupapa Ako (TWKA) and ARLA, a tauwiwi-managed arm. I believe that this development is significant because a great deal of the organisation's energy has gone into determining the nature of the partnership between tauwiwi and Maori, with less emphasis going into determining the strategic direction for the organisation as a whole. The representation of this partnership have been carried throughout the organisation's decision making processes and resource allocations: the national administration grant has been split 50:50; each national arm has its own office and workplans; the Federation committee has equal numbers of Maori and tauwiwi members; each arm of the organisation has a full time manager; the constitution has been changed to create two voting rolls, one Maori, one tauwiwi; there are now kaupapa Maori schemes, tauwiwi managed member schemes and some schemes which wish to affiliate to both partners. As part of this bi-cultural evolution, Workbase, which started as a national initiative, evolved to be a tauwiwi-managed project and during 1995, TWKA set up its own workplace literacy programmes for Maori workers, run by Maori tutors.

Kilminster (1993) pays particular attention to the role a Board plays as a 'boundary sitter', interpreting the events and priorities of the outside world for the organisation and determining what the organisation's responses will be. They are a vital source of information in the scoping process for voluntary agencies. Often the members of national not-for-profit boards and committees are people working themselves in allied fields at a national level, e.g. the board of the YMCA is made up of nationally recognised and successful business people, with keen vying for positions and a vigorous election process⁵. However, smaller boards from grass-roots organisations such as ARLA are made up of policy volunteers who often have less national experience and exposure to the issues than national staff. Nominations for committee membership are often thankfully received rather than hotly contested. ARLA does not have a structure of regional representation and committee members sometimes struggle to develop a macro-analysis of the

organisation's issues, using instead their small local schemes as their point of reference. These factors limit the organisation's capacity to plan strategically.

Local workplace literacy

The changes and developments in education philosophy and policy outlined above have also had consequences for the wider Federation membership. As the Skill New Zealand initiative got underway, member literacy schemes throughout the country began receiving requests for ALBE from companies. Six workplace providers have sprung from ARLA's community literacy scheme roots, each set up in a different way. This section of the paper outlines the organisational structures they had in place in mid-1995 and considers the strategic planning behind their formation.

A partnership alongside but separate from a literacy scheme

The part time co-ordinator and a voluntary tutor in one scheme saw ARLA's educational philosophy and practices as an important alternative to the structured 'training' focus they saw being offered in the workplace by other educational providers in their region, which did not make allowances for the social, political and cultural variations in language and literacy practices in the workplace⁶. However, their scheme committee had decided not to be involved in workplace literacy, primarily because they did not want the financial responsibilities that go with this sort of income-generating, higher cost activity. These two workers therefore set up a business partnership, quite separate from the scheme. The partnership chose not to become a member scheme of the Federation in its own right. They see the Federation and ARLA Workbase as important to validate their literacy practice, but believe that the structure and workings of the Federation as a whole have no bearing on their work. The partnership and scheme have a Memorandum of Understanding which explicitly describes the respective roles of the workers, to avoid potential areas of conflict between their in-house ARLA work, which they intend to continue, and their business opportunities.

Both organisations seem to have considered their positions carefully, taking into account the current and future potential of the business and their respective philosophical positions in order to define their relationship so clearly. Bryson (1987) describes this kind of collaboration between not-for-profit and commercial ventures as "co-production", where the potential clients for each party are heterogeneous and discrete but could overlap.

A business unit of an existing scheme

In a larger centre, workplace provision has developed under the auspices of its host scheme, administered by a separate sub-committee which provides the management and administrative structure. The sub-committee does not have an independent legal status, but this sub-committee is financially self-sufficient with separate bank accounts, a co-ordinator and administrative systems of its own. A significant proportion of each contract is earmarked for administration and resource development. Some tutors working under this arrangement would like to become fully autonomous from the host literacy scheme. Others believe that the loss of the parent body name would limit their ability to attract business and consider that they don't yet have the resource base to become fully independent. The parent scheme continues as a member of the Federation and the sub-committee has not sought membership in its own right.

There are parallels here with the concept of a business unit, a special trading section operating alongside an organisation's core business. In this case, staff recognised a strategic opportunity and having found their feet in this new venture are now considering independence from the parent organisation. This sort of business unit has little real power and is vulnerable because their service may not be perceived as central to the organisation (Rainey 1991). The workplace development in

this instance has been ad hoc and reactive, rather than coming as part of planned scheme developments and the future looks uncertain.

A collaborative venture

In another region, where both polytechnics and other commercial training consultancies have been offering workplace literacy, another model has emerged. The five ARLA member schemes in the region met and decided they did not want to take part in this new initiative, for both resource and philosophical reasons. However, they supported the concept of a regional venture because they, as in the first example above, wanted to ensure the 'ARLA way' was available to learners in workplaces. A Charitable Trust has been established, without formal participation from the schemes but which has drawn its trustees and staff from ARLA-trained tutors, some of whom continue their ARLA roles. This group has also chosen not to become a member scheme of the ARLA Federation, because they do not believe the Federation has anything specific to offer them.

This strategy could be likened to workers setting up their own business in a field related to that of their employers but not in direct competition.

Workplace provision as another service

The other three ARLA-linked workplace providers have, in essence, incorporated this new provision in with their existing services. One of these schemes makes no distinction at all between community and workplace provision, includes workplace income within its community-scheme accounts and the existing committee make the necessary decisions for both. This scheme's committee consider that offering workplace literacy is simply an extension of the ARLA philosophy to ensure as wide a range as possible for as many learners as possible. They do not anticipate any problems with this organisational structure, although it has been acknowledged that the financial arrangements may have implications for the charitable and tax status of the scheme, which is an incorporated society.

Two other schemes keep workplace-generated income separate from scheme financial arrangements but follow a similar sort of organisational pattern with the workplace work and decisions being made by the ordinary committee or a small sub-committee. Obviously they do not see any potential for organisational dissonance in using this structure at this stage.

In all of the examples above, the organisations have simply added a new function to the services they already provide. Each of these schemes has a one year plan and none of them undertake any longer term planning.

It is hard to generalise about the role strategic planning has played in these developments, partly because of their short histories. Each is still in their first two years of operation and all have found getting established more difficult than anticipated. In mid 1995, two of these organisations had business plans with targets which they were unlikely to meet that year. The others did not have specific plans for the future, and simply responded to offers and situations they develop. Two have had to actively market their services because they are new organisations, while the others are getting customers by virtue of their reputation as long-standing community literacy providers. In all of these examples, the initiatives generated an expectation of paid work for tutors. However, these ventures appear to differ from ordinary businesses in that they do not seem to have needed to quickly generate profits. In most cases, it appears the tutors were not doing this work as the sole family income and in at least three cases, the host scheme was supporting the work and workers as part of its standard overheads. In one case, the organisation managed to get base funding for a coordinator from a business development fund.

Sources of tensions

The move into a commercial environment by these six local literacy provider and the ARLA Federation is 'in keeping with the times'. However, the fact that two of these organisations schemes sought an structure independent of ARLA Federation membership at the outset, and the call for Workbase to become a separate organisation, suggest that in the case of the ARLA Federation the relationship between commercial and community entities may be neither compatible nor comfortable.

Firstly, there is the tension evident in the ideological debate raised by the concept of workplace education. ARLA's philosophy, like that of most community-based adult education, is underpinned by either liberal-humanistic notions of 'second chance education' geared to meet individuals need for personal and academic development, or by more radical beliefs about the relationship between literacy and oppression. Needless to say, policy is not usually influenced by "the individual learner rationale" but rather by arguments from a macro-view of society, "society's benefit rationale" (Quigley, 1993:18). Clearly, the New Right rationale is that societal benefits are to be gained by upskilling the workforce and that these take precedence over any concept of life long learning or individual rights. The Skill New Zealand Strategy is an example of the New Right shifting the focus away from failings in initial schooling, towards an emphasis on the new learning demands that will be made on adults as the nature and conditions of work change with increasing rapidity. It is useful to note that this new emphasis has not always led to a cementing in of comprehensive and adequate funding for literacy provision. In those countries where ALBE provision has grown dramatically over recent years, such as Australia, Canada, Britain and the USA, increased funding has been clearly aligned with economic restructuring and the needs of the labour market. However, the recent election of a Republican majority in both the United States Congress and Senate has seriously threatened ALBE funding across the board.

Commentators on workplace literacy overseas (Forrester et al, 1995; Morrison, 1995 Williamson, 1995) argue that vocational outcomes primarily serve the needs of the state not the learner, and that therefore, the concept of a learner-centred philosophy and pedagogy is compromised. Because the employer is paying for provision, because it is in work time and takes place in the workplace, provision will be functional , primarily serving the needs of the employer. The concept of literacy as a right of citizenship and a measure of social justice will be lost. The linking of ALBE with the development of post-capitalist society, has been hotly debated (see Gee and Lankshear, 1994; Wickert, 1991, 1992). Lankshear (1994: 10) describes the tension,

The fast capitalist world, then, holds out deep opportunities and risks for those of us interested in education. If we as educators accept the fast capitalist vision uncritically, we risk becoming party to 'enchantment' as a spell cast on workers to a achieve a new 'high tech' hegemony and party to processes which create enchanted conditions for some, but at the expense of possibly deeper disenchantment for many and ultimately, perhaps, the society as a whole. If we fail to engage with fast capitalism altogether, we risk being left on the sidelines as education at all levels simply aligns itself with the values, visions and practices of fast capitalism.

A second source of tension is that as the focus on work-related competencies increases, the future of funding of education oriented to non-vocational outcomes is uncertain but seems likely to decrease. NZQA requires that any units registered on the Framework must contribute to the economic well-being of society. There is an expectation within much of the ALBE field that, eventually, state funding for community education will be tied to the registration of courses on the Framework (as has happened in Britain) and that learning for life and non-accredited courses for people not in the job market will be on a prohibitively priced user-pays basis. ALBE practitioners argue that this will leave no place for the nonvocational aspirations of many learners. Crombie highlights the dilemma for ALBE organisations, restating the dilemma that Lankshear raises - the price that may be paid by not engaging with these issues,

The Training Reform agenda is a strong tide running, with the lure of gold for those who can perform. Who would be left out in the cold? On the other hand, it means making friends with some strange new people, and giving into the idea of adult education as a two class service. First class is vocational, accredited, of recognised national importance; Second class is hobby or ... and a healthy alternative to bingo. (Crombie, 1993:6)

The differing organisational and planning needs of commercial versus community organisations are a third source of tension. The ARLA Federation is a traditional not-for-profit organisation with a nationally elected committee who meet four times a year. It has a strong mandate to support and advocate for its member schemes. The Federation committee has historically been made up of member scheme tutors and co-ordinators, who often have come to the national role without a great deal of management or strategic planning experience at this level, and who are more likely to want to manage the organisation, rather than to provide 'governance'.⁷

On the other hand, ARLA Workbase and local workplace providers have had to operate in a commercial environment with direct competitors. Workbase needed to make a profit, because the Ministry of Education grant met only a proportion of its costs, while local providers expect, and need at the very least, to recover costs. In both cases, tutors must use and be comfortable with industry-focused language and communication practices, which are quite different from those of small voluntary agencies. Whereas most literacy schemes have managed to avoid considering the National Qualifications Framework, Workbase staff have had to use the standards to develop curriculum and have been active in discussions about their application, while local providers have yet to engage fully with the Framework. Workbase staff believed they had been operating in an arena where the committee were both unsure and uncomfortable, at a time when the organisation was intent on internal restructuring. When the Federation committee considered policy developments in the workplace arena, the processes used did not always produce clear and timely decisions that enhanced the work of the developing project.⁸ Similar statements about their committees might well be made by some tutors in local provision.

Conclusion

Strategic planning is not necessarily a carefully planned process. A "garbage can model" of strategic planning (March and Olsen, quoted in Rainey 1991: 86) operates as much by serendipity as good planning,

the right problem arises when the right decision participants are receptive to an available solution, all coming together in a choice opportunity they result as much from coincidence as from rational calculation.

I suggest that the creation of ARLA Workbase as a development project was an example of the "garbage can model" working effectively. However, the decisions the Federation went on to make on the development and Afture of this new initiative are more accurately described as incremental planning. The organisation certainly appears to have responded piecemeal, to each new situation, rather than acted as a result of careful consideration and the active seeking of new directions and structures. Johnson and Scholes (1988: 44) suggest that the outcome of an incremental process may be

a sort of drift ... in which the organisation's strategy, gradually, if imperceptibly, moves away from the environmental forces at work.

In this situation, it may be that those who are developing workplace literacy provision are more in time with environmental forces than those who do not.

The tensions that have arisen in this voluntary agency as it faces challenges to its core philosophy, practices and funding continue to be played out. Although the Workbase Education Trust is an independent legal entity, the ARLA Federation still has representatives as Trustees and the two organisations are yet to negotiate future funding relationships. Meanwhile, more schemes

are considering the development of workplace literacy provision in a variety of forms. The autonomy of schemes means their right to operate in this arena has not been questioned by other schemes, unlike the challenges made about the nationally sponsored project, but the legitimacy of workplace literacy within the Federation's gambit is unclear.

The release of the results of the National Adult Literacy Survey in early 1997 and any resultant publicity may well throw workplace literacy provision back into the spotlight. National incidence studies overseas have resulted in more resources for the field, usually targeted for workplace literacy (see Calalmai, 1987). If New Zealand follows suit, the ARLA Federation and its member schemes may have to consider their relationship with workplace literacy more fully. Continued ambivalence to workplace literacy vis-a-vis community provision may very well limit the ARLA Federation's position as a major player in the ALBE field.

Notes

1. See Lo Bianco, 1993 for a description of Literacy as a 'Right'.
2. See also the article by Peddie in this volume.
3. See Bos, 1995.
4. Phil Goff was the then Minister of Education.
5. Personal communication with a former CEO of the National YMCA
6. For a full description of the nature of literacy and language in the workplace see Cope and Kalantzis, 1995
7. Governance is defined as 'establishing the purpose, developing and monitoring policies and ensuring, together with the CEO, that the organisation's objectives are met'. (Kilminster, 1993: 8)
8. Personal communication with Workbase staff.

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