Implementing a Report's Findings:  
A Conceptual Model for Action Learning in the Workplace

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Abstract
The transformation of any report and its recommendations into an implementation process, represents an opportunity for action learning in the workplace. While there are many different factors involved in successful implementation (Fullan, 1993), this paper suggests that one of the keys is involving managers in action learning.

A content analysis methodology was used on sections of the report, Enterprising Nation (The Karpin Report 1995a) to examine the coherence among the report's recommendations and the research evidence to support them. Two 'levers for change' - cultural diversity and management learning- were examined as case studies.

Action learning (Revans, 1985), as a change management process, can be used by managers to facilitate the implementation of a report's recommendations in three ways: (i) by examining the (implicit) models of change used; (ii) by reflecting on the problem-based methodology of the report and (iii) by assessing the typology of interventions that are planned for implementation action. The findings and recommendations of the Karpin report into management skills provided a framework for comparison with recent data from a report on the Australian housing construction industry (Hayton et al., 1995). A model of implementation of a report through action learning is proposed.

Introduction

Why do so many recommendations in commissioned reports fail to be implemented? In the field of vocational education and training, part of the answer lies in conflicting state and federal policies; in the most recent Report dealing with management development, implementation is much more complex. The latest national report designed to make an impact on the education and training of Australia's 900,000 managers is called 'Enterprising Nation': Renewing Australia's managers to meet the challenge of the Asia-Pacific Century, (hereafter the Karpin Report), after the chairman of the Task Force, David S. Karpin, a CRA executive. If implemented, this report could have a major impact on our educational, vocational and training institutions.

The findings and recommendations of this federally-funded Report, published in April 1995, like many of its predecessors, have raised at least two fundamental questions:-

- What is recommended by the Karpin Report that is research-based?
- What models of change and implementation are implicit in this Report?
These two questions therefore temporarily side-step more fundamental political issues. For example, the Report's findings and recommendations, although based on two volumes of extensive research reports, will ultimately become a political football in the wider arena of 'micro-economic reform' for the next election. That is, the twenty-eight recommendations of the Report (prioritized by the Task Force into Band I and Band II clusters) may not all be implemented over a period of three to five years. The competing and contested interests of the various stakeholders will determine to what extent Australia's managers will learn "to develop a positive enterprise culture".

This paper suggests that future problems of implementation planning by the key stakeholders, could be anticipated by a more critical content analysis of the findings. That is, government agencies, management training providers, industries and the proposed Australian Council for Management Development have an opportunity to examine the Karpin recommendations for learning management skills from different perspectives. More specifically, it is proposed that the workplace perspective for learning management skills on-the-job, through 'action learning sets' or action research, has been undervalued in the Report, in comparison to the more formal approaches offered by the universities in their MBA programs.

The assumption is made that the 28 recommendations of the Karpin Report do not adequately address the issues of learning espoused in their philosophy of the 'learning organisation'. The scope of this paper is therefore limited to implementation questions about how and where some management skills will be learnt. These questions are of course as important as those that focus on what managers need to know to succeed in the next 'Asia-Pacific' century. Understanding the management of learning is the key.

1. Purpose and Structure of the Paper

The recency of the Karpin Report has meant that the implementation of the findings and recommendations are still in the early planning or developmental stage. The purpose of this paper is therefore limited to a critical content analysis of several key recommendations and to consider (a) to what extent they are supported by research and (b) how they might be implemented if managers were committed to a 'learning organisation' and so become involved in 'action learning' (Revans, 1983). Specifically, this paper will focus on how future managers might develop new skills through strategies of 'action learning' in the workplace, as distinct from more traditional course-work approaches offered mainly by universities.

The first part of this paper deals with what in the Report are described as 'key levers for creating a positive enterprise culture'.
Two of these levers, (a) harnessing the talents of diversity, and (b) reform management education were often criticised in the media because of the selective use of research findings. We therefore need to develop a research methodology that can identify if there are gaps between: (i) the research findings; (ii) their alignment to the Recommendations and (iii) the proposed implementation strategies to be used to manage the change.

The second part of the paper describes a methodology of content analysis used, and suggests how this could be adapted to incorporate a simple computer-based search of any Report (e.g. using Filemaker Pro). In order to identify appropriate categories for a content analysis, a problem-based methodology, derived from Robinson (1993), is outlined, together with a simplified content analysis framework.

The third part of the paper provides some illustrative data from the Karpin Report (1995) on 'action learning' and compares this with recent data from an Australian report on the development of management skills in the housing industry (Hayton, et. al. 1994). Finally, this paper suggests how 'action learning' can be linked to models of implementation and change within universities, TAFE colleges and private training providers to improve management skills training at all levels.

2. 'Levers' for Change: Recommendations in the Karpin Report

The claim by Archimedes, that if he had a lever long enough he could move the world, has been indirectly adopted by the Karpin Task Force in their suggested model of five 'levers' for changing management practices in Australia (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Model for Management Reform

The Karpin Report shares with many of its predecessors, the belief that it should provide a blueprint for change or in this case a 'Model for Management Reform'. This 'big picture' approach to the management of change carries within it the taken-for-granted assumption that the implementation of change will be underpinned by better leaders and managers. Four subsidiary levers: (i) Upgrade the capability of TAFE and business support; (ii) capitalise on the talents of diversity;

(iii) achieve best practice management development and (iv) reform management education might improve management practices but it cannot guarantee better leaders. The next section will examine one of these levers dealing with 'the talents of diversity'.

2.1 'Diversity' in the Workplace as a lever of change
In the voluminous Research Reports (Midgley, 1995a, 1995b) accompanying the Karpin Report (Volumes 1 and 2 total about 1500 pages), there are a wealth of diverse research findings designed to illuminate the 28 recommendations. Reviewers of the Karpin Report in the media have focused selectively on a range of issues that (in part) reflect the concerns about proposed changes and their possible impact on several groups of managers. For example, the Business Review Weekly has for the past six months featured at least one article in its 'Managing' section, on key recommendations of the Karpin Report. A sampling of BRW articles dealing with 'diversity' in the Karpin Report focuses on two areas: (gender; and the diversity of offerings among Australia's MBA providers). Both provide an interesting basis for comparing several sets of data:-

(i) What were the recommendations in the Report (e.g. on 'diversity')?
(ii) To what extent were these recommendations grounded in current research?
(iii) What implementation strategies were proposed?
(iv) What model of change management is implicit in the recommendations?

(i) The Recommendations
Chapter 9 of the Karpin Report outlines how better management skills are needed to 'harness the talents of diversity'. "It (then) focuses on two areas of immediate challenge: capitalising on the talents of women in improving the management performance of Australian enterprises, and of our multicultural workforce" (Karpin, 1995a: 232). What is interesting in this chapter is the Task Force's decision to define 'diversity' primarily in terms of gender issues and how women's management skills and development should be given greater priority as illustrated in Recommendation 10a.

(i) Recommendation 10 (a)
Management for Diversity (Band 1)
It is recommended that the private sector and the government give higher priority to strategies to improve utilisation and management of Australia's diverse population in Australian business and industry. Details include:-
- Management for diversity in general should be the focus of improved strategies;
- Women should be a particular target group, and the multicultural workforce;
- The primary emphasis should be on action by the private sector; and
- Task Force research material outlines a range of specific strategies related to management for diversity for implementation by the private sector including best practice and improved human resource development models.

(ii) The Research.
It is first worth noting that the 29 different research teams who undertook commissioned research for the Karpin Report, were themselves predominantly led by males. In fact 33 out of the total 45 chief investigators were male. Out of the 24 project titles of commissioned research reports, listed in the Executive Summary (1995b pp xiii-xiv), not one mentions the word 'diversity' in its title.

The language of the report and the conventions used by these writers may be reflected in the structure and style of the Report itself. For example, in the Table of Contents for Volume One, there are 30 chapters listed, although chapter 18 is titled 'Managing for diversity', it is curious that the words 'women', 'gender', 'multicultural' or 'affirmative action do not appear anywhere in the contents. To take this notion one step further, a content analysis of Chapter Nine was undertaken (Table 2), using the key words and phrases used in the chapter to highlight the two main issues of diversity in the workplace - gender and multiculturalism.

Table 2: Content Analysis of Chapter 9 (Diversity)
Key words/ phrases used in Chapter 9 of Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key words/ phrases used in Chapter 9 of Report</th>
<th>No. of times used</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'women' or 'women managers',</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or 'women in management'</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recommendations Made in the Report
10 (a) Band 1. women should be a particular target group
10 (b) Band 1. National strategy for women: women in private sector management, corporate boards & academia.
10 (c) Band 1. Improved Agency support for promoting diversity.

Key words/ phrases used in Chapter 9 of Report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key words/ phrases used in Chapter 9 of Report</th>
<th>No. of times used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'multicultural' workforce</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethnic diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islanders/ 'women of colour'</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recommendations Made in the Report
10 (a) 'Management for diversity in general should be the focus of improved strategies.
10 (b) ?
10 (c) The educational support role and resources of the ....
Office of Multicultural Affairs should be upgraded so as to make multicultural management strategies more broadly known and accessible to the private sector.

Each group of people who perceive themselves to be disadvantaged by various 'glass ceilings', can identify gaps in the reported research literature on 'diversity' in the two volumes of the Karpin Report. While women were strategically targeted for greater involvement in management, the 'cultural' dimension of diversity and pluralism received too little attention. Perhaps the short time lines facing most research teams (6 months), meant that there were inevitable gaps and limitations in the research agendas supporting the various recommendations. Time constraints also prevented the Task Force from producing a comprehensive index to the terms used and their cross-referencing to the research literature. This is an unfortunate omission.

The most perplexing omission from the research literature in Chapter 18, was the absence of any reference to the concept of 'productive diversity' (Cope and Kalantzis, 1994). These authors argued that Australian workplaces in the private, public and community sectors have developed practices...(which) "have the potential to set global standards by establishing a new model of work and management. This model might be called a 'model of productive diversity' " (Cope & Kalantzis, 1994: 163). The key elements of this model, deal with rebuilding the workplace culture through participation, collaboration and negotiation. Even the Prime Minister Paul Keating has recognised how productive diversity has direct implications for micro-economic reform.

(iii) Implementation strategies
Although each of the twenty-eight recommendations in the Report make reference to proposals for implementation (often in rather vague terms), the key lever for future implementation appears to be Recommendation 28- the establishment of an Australian Council for Management Development. The details of this recommendation (set out in Appendix Two of the Summary Report, 1995b: 83-88), best illustrate the implicit model of change that is most valued by the Task Force.

(iv) Implicit change management model
The text as well as the sub-text of Recommendation 28 points consistently to a 'top-down' change model that will create "an independent, not-for-profit body established by the Commonwealth Government". Key phrases suggest a shared belief that changes will be managed through: 'high profile leaders'; 'government and industry at the highest levels'; 'major stakeholders'; 'national focus'; 'major policy advisory body'; 'best practice' etc. 'Productive diversity' is
not mentioned. More importantly the strategic management issue of 'the thickening glass ceiling' for women (Karpin, 1995a:124-129; and 243-258) is not mentioned. There appears to be some incongruence in the research, the recommendations and the model of change to be used for future implementation. One way to examine this is by means of some forms of content analysis.

3. A Methodology of Content Analysis

The main purpose for designing a content analysis of the Karpin Report is to devise a methodology that can validly relate known characteristics of sources of information (the two volumes of Research Reports) to the messages (The Report's Findings and Recommendations) they produce. A secondary purpose is to describe some emerging trends in the content of the Report dealing with particular issues, such 'diversity' and 'action learning'.

The narrow positivism found in traditional definitions of content analysis can be seen in the assumption that any historical document, based on verbal, non-quantitative text can be systematically and (rationally?) transformed into quantitative data. For example, Holsti (1969) defines it as 'any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specific characteristics of messages' (in Merriam and Simpson, 1989 p. 14). The examples in Table 2 (above) illustrate that the simplest approach to content analysis is a word count on those words which are perceived to be most germane to this review of the Karpin Report. As in any discourse analysis, this has obvious methodological implications - which words are to be 'counted'? who says?

The choice of which words to search for in any report, is the product of what Robinson (1993) has described as a 'problem-based methodology'. She argues that educational researchers who wish to make a contribution to improving (rather than merely changing) practice, should adopt the goal of problem understanding and resolution, rather than the goal of change. To do this effectively requires an integration of the problem-based methodology with an appropriate research tool for content analysis. The reason for adopting such a strategy for the Karpin Report is summarised as follows:-

"Educational research has made a greater contribution to educational change than it has to the resolution of educational problems. A major reason for this difference is that many educational problems are irresolvable unless fundamental assumptions about the nature of the problem and its solution are altered."

(Robinson, 1993: 20)

To illustrate this we could consider the distinction made by commentators on the Karpin Report, between making recommendations about
'changes' to Australia's management training systems and describing what are 'improvements'. For example, during a six month period (January-June 1995), the Sydney Morning Herald published 18 articles on the Karpin Report. Most of these commentators focused on two sets of recommendations: (i) those dealing with changes to the formal education and training of managers (particularly at the MBA level); (ii) those dealing with issues of gender and the 'glass ceiling' that prevented women from reaching senior management positions and thereby denying the potential for achieving world 'best practice'.

According to Cohen and Manion (1993:56), "More sophisticated approaches to content analysis are careful to identify appropriate categories and units of analysis, both of which will reflect the nature of the document being analysed and the purpose of the research." What was lacking in the media commentaries on the Karpin Report was an analysis of the relationship between the report's recommendations, the research on which it was based and the unexamined, taken for granted assumptions of the commentators themselves. To undertake a more sophisticated content analysis of the Report, it would help if the full text was accessible on disc and a computer-based problem-solving process was designed. It could focus on one problem previously identified, e.g. "How are the Report's recommendations supported by research evidence?"

According to Robinson (1993:37-45), the criteria for adjudicating theories intended to serve as 'solutions' for these practical problems ought to be made explicit. e.g.

- **Explanatory accuracy**: one theory is more adequate than another if it can provide a more accurate causal account of the phenomenon it seeks to explain;

- **Effectiveness**: a theory of action is effective if it produces the intended consequences without violating important constraints;

- **Coherence**: ensures that our judgments about the improvement of practices, (through solving one particular part of a problem), are consistent with solutions to the whole problem, or the problem in context.

- **Improvability**: provides opportunities to assess if the recommended solutions to a problem are open to the possibility of error and revision.

The criteria which media commentators used to critique the adequacy of the Karpin Report, e.g. evidence of Australia's economic need for better management skills to create an 'enterprise culture', were seldom made explicit. In fact the contents of the two volumes of research
reports that supposedly backed up the Report's recommendations, received only scant attention by media commentators. One critic, Graham Williams (SMH 15 June, 1995: 18) quotes Professor Chris Terry, head of the graduate school of business at UTS, who says that he is unaware of any research by Karpin to support the claim that our managers are 'poorly trained'. A content analysis of the major research studies dealing with the question: "How good is Australia at developing managers?" (Section III, Vols. 1 & 2) might support this view. However, such a content analysis of what constitutes 'poorly trained managers', requires digging deeper to consider such criteria as effectiveness, coherence, and improvability. A more daunting task.

Content analysis of a report can also illuminate thematic or pattern data on what was reported and how this was supported by the 'evidence'. Consider for example the relationship between the five challenges or 'levers' in Figure 1 and the location of recommendations supporting these, in terms of Band 1 or Band 2 priorities. The data in Appendix 1 suggest that there were considerable gaps and incongruities. In this way, the content analysis of a Report's finding could be used as a heuristic device to develop critical research questions about why the recommendations were made.

Content analysis can also be focused on the commentaries that are made on Reports. Sometimes commentators deal with exceptions to the dominant patterns, while critics seek to identify what was not mentioned in the report. Negative impressions of a report in the media, can distort the positive contributions a report could have made. For example, only two out of the eighteen articles about the Karpin Report in the Sydney Morning Herald (between January and June 1995), focused on the positive or successful dimensions of Australia's management. The exceptions focused on creating a culture of self-employment and enterprise in small business through improvements to school curricula, teacher training and networking (Simpson, 1995); and the fact that the Health industry was already achieving its management targets. The omissions in the research agenda of the Karpin Report included questions about: teaching ethics in management decision-making (Milton-Smith, 1995); participatory management training programs (Sashklin, 1984), and the management of learning in business schools (Ashton, 1988).

One of the strengths of a more rigorous content analysis methodology is that it may open a document to a more critical and reflexive analysis. The authors of the Karpin Report locate the recommendations of their Report in the context of their 'vision' for the 'Asia-Pacific century. The first three, out of the six components of that vision, focus on learning (Exhibit 1). This deserves some closer analysis.
Exhibit 1  The Task Force's Vision:
"Is that by 2010 the following will be true of Australian enterprises and their managers:

- Knowledge, the ability to learn, to change and to innovate in this new marketplace, will be accepted as the more relevant criteria for selecting managers than gender, ethnicity or even prior experience.
- The 'learning organisation' will be the standard philosophy for many Australian enterprises and a major way they cope with change and turbulence.
- Managers will create conditions conducive to learning for both individuals and the enterprise as a whole, within and between groups, across individual business units and between enterprises and their external environments. Employees will be more motivated and skilled.
- etc....

The following section explores how these key aspects of the Task Force's Vision might be implemented, through alternative models of change that rely on participative approaches to management development in the workplace, e.g. 'action learning'.

4. Management development and 'action learning'

In this section it is suggested that the lack of coherence among a report's recommendations, research base and implementation outcomes, is a product of the political policy process. The lack of coherence in some of the Karpin Report's research findings and recommendations on management development can be identified in the extensive research data that were collected on the formal, educational programs (such as the MBA). This focus on formal courses contrasts markedly with the widespread perceptions of managers that informal (on-the-job) learning is generally most valued for the development of management skills. It will be argued that a combination of both, through participative 'action learning' programs, have the most potential for successfully achieving the visions of the learning organisation, espoused by Karpin's Task Force.

How good is Australia at developing managers? The research findings to this question were extensively reported by Wawn, Green and others in Barraclough & Co's findings, published in Chapter 13 of the Research Report (Midgley, 1995a). The following table reports the management practices considered most effective by a cross-section of managers (n=91) who were participants in four focus groups and interviewed at length. It is worth considering how these data came to be reflected in subsequent recommendations of the Karpin Report.

Table 3: Most effective management development practices
Ranking of Development Practices % of Participants
1. job rotation 53%
2. external providers - including business schools 50%
3. mentoring and coaching (on-the-job) 42%
4. on-the-job experience 36%
5. 'action learning' programs 36%
6. job assignments 35%
7. in-house training and development programs 24%
8. work with other organisations 12%

According to Wawn et al. (1995: 554) "Action learning programs straddle the academic and working environment by incorporating classroom components, group discussion, simulations, team work, peer networks, case studies and in company assignments." This instrumental definition fails to capture the essence of action learning as a continuous process of learning and reflection from experience, that involves individuals working with and through each other on real problems that are of shared concern. Action learning as a form of management development, is also about taking action through 'action sets' - a group of people with an intentional commitment to make changes in their (management) practices.

"The results of this research project confirm the findings of previous studies which indicate a gap between the requirements of the business community and the educational services being provided by educational institutions. The gap reflects both 'content' issues (what managers learn) and 'process' issues (how managers learn)." (Midgeley, 1995a, Vol. 1 p.574)

Action learning as a management development 'process' issue could be linked to some of the other work-based processes listed in Table 3 above. For example, (i) on-the-job experiences (through 'reflection on practices') ; (ii) job rotation (through better team work and networking); (iii) mentoring and coaching (through the use of 'set advisers') and (iv) using job assignments as opportunities for experiential and 'double-loop' learning. However, a content analysis of the 28 Recommendations and their Implementation Strategies listed in the Summary Report (pp. 61-81) failed to find any mention of the use of 'action learning' as a work-based management development process. Even though 36% of respondents in one major study identified this as a preferred mode of learning, the great majority of education and training recommendations focused on improving formal university & TAFE courses (Table 4).

Table 4 : Content Analysis of Key Recommendations of Karpin Report: re Formal Education Processes* versus 'Work-based Learning' Processes
Part A
No  Recommendation re. Formal Education & Training Processes  Band

1  Development of an enterprising culture - with formal education & training  I

4  Upgrading of TAFE's capacity to deliver management development courses and incentives to improve quality  I

9  Development of articulated TAFE/ University undergraduate courses in small business management  II

16-27 All these recommendations focus on some aspect of Management Schools, formal courses of management development, academics, articulation and links to industry and Human resources.

Total
14  * These categorisations are somewhat arbitrary in the absence of root definitions of 'formal' education and training requirements

Table 4: Part B
No  Recommendation re. Work-based Learning* Processes  Band

2  Development of an enterprising culture - through community education  I

7 & 8 Piloting the training and support of small business owner managers, via the latest technologies plus the networking of support agencies  II

11  Front line manager program  I

12  Structured industry based study tours  I

13  Benchmarking and best practice materials  I

Total
6  *Work-based learning' = 'non-formal' & informal education & training

The history of any proposed educational changes to management training
and education, will be written by those whose models of change management are actually implemented. I suspect that the inertia provided by the Australian universities, through 35 expanding business schools of uneven quality, (most producing fee-paying MBA students), will succeed in maintaining much of the status quo in management education. It will be interesting to see if this prediction will be influenced by the growing demand for distance learning, open learning and action learning models.

Action learning (Revans, 1985), although successfully developed as a widely-used management strategy in British industry forty years ago, is still perceived as a curious novelty by some administrators and academicians in business faculties.

Fortunately, in some Australian industries, such as building and construction, there are signs of a growing demand for developing management skills training that begin with the special needs of the industry, rather than the curricula offered by the university or TAFE. A national report, Management Skills in the Housing Industry (Hayton, Garrick, Schaafsma, Fishman and Stone, 1995) provides an industry case of the need to tailor management training to the different learning needs of managers in small, medium and large firms. Table 5 provides several examples, linking recommendations on developing management skills to a long list of suggested changes to current training.

Table 5: Management Skills and Learning in the Housing Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tr>
<td>7. A project be funded to develop distance learning programs covering the management skills identified in this study. The 'packages' ....to be used in the workplace or at home after hours by builders, sub-contractors and spouses who are involved in managing the company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Skills Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. an education program on the value of management skills training for builders;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Audio and video packages and 'modules' for specific management skills;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Better information on alternative management skills training (for exampleaction learning courses on the job etc.)</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. Stronger 'learning cultures' within the larger companies need to be promoted....through a broader range of management training strategies ...in promoting the links between training and career development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Skills Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. interactive management training linked to practical case studies &amp; problem solving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. using a panel of master builders as mentors and coaches - on the job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
learning or group seminars.

(Hayton et. al. 1995: 53-55)

This report and to a lesser extent the Karpin Report, also leave partially unanswered the key implementation question: "Who will do what, when, where and how?" Perhaps what these reports share with all federally commissioned reports in Australia, is a belief that somehow the government (and industry) will provide. The final section of this paper suggests an alternative perspective. In particular, how 'action learning' as a change management process, can be integrated with a report's implementation planning.

5. Implementation through action learning

Implementation of the Karpin Report's recommendations in the workplace is potentially an 'action learning' process. A model of action learning involves all the stakeholders in the process of culture change (see Enderby & Phelan, 1994: 74-82). Action learning usually involves small groups of people, sharing a commitment to learn from their experiences, by critically reflecting (with the help of some set adviser or facilitator) on both the changes needed and the underlying assumptions and values on which they are based. Action learning is a form of collaborative intervention that could operate at each of the four levels of change management - depending on who is involved (Table 6). Unlike the top-down change management models that have so dominated the change management literature (e.g. Berger, Sikora, Berger, 1994), action learning ensures both equity and ethical involvement in building a learning organisation - at all levels.

Table 6: Action learning at Four Levels of Managing Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Change</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Types of Intervention</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>The Paperwork (Karpin Report)</td>
<td>e.g. Vision, model, findings from research and recommendations and their dissemination. Developing policies e.g. action learning sets are adopted as a preferred mode of policy implementation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Level 2
The Administrative Structures
E.g. New structures, budgets, staff, resources and strategic plans are developed by each set of stakeholders.
Initiating action learning sets with stakeholders in:- schools, colleges, uni's. etc.
The Australian Council for Management Development

Level 3
Implementation Level of Action
E.g. Managers everywhere begin to make changes to practices, based on integrating new modes of education and training in the workplace.
Doing action learning in the workplace provides a 'grounded' basis for a diversity in management development programs.

Level 4
Impact level of change on clients
E.g. Measurable gains are noted in the levels of client and customer satisfaction. Managers evaluate what they have learnt and achieved in terms of contributions to business goals and 'improvements' in standards of living.
Collecting evaluation data on organisational and enterprise performance - from clients and customers through action learning.
Action learning is also critically assessed by all.

Publication of a major report such as Enterprising Nation, does not of itself bring about improvements to the economy or management training methods. Similarly the interventions that are made by universities or TAFE colleges to facilitate changes to management education, will only be important to those education and training providers who believe that the creation of an 'enterprise culture' is essential for Australia's standards of living. The key ingredient in any implementation change process is the commitment of people - the stakeholders - to make it happen. Commitment to change may grow out of successful action learning processes.

Action learning as a process can therefore help to crystallise a commitment to change; but it is not a panacea. It is therefore suggested that action learning processes should be integrated into a range of implementation strategies proposed in the Karpin (and other) Reports which are committed to building 'learning organisations'. In Australia, there is growing evidence that managers are becoming more adept at managing organisational learning (see Field with Ford, 1995), but there is still more rhetoric than real action.

Conclusion
This paper has focused on the problem of implementing the recommendations of a report which may be only partially supported by appropriate research findings.

A content analysis of sections of the report as well as some media commentaries on the findings, suggested there were considerable gaps between what was recommended and what was provided by way of research evidence. Since this finding is no doubt common to most commissioned reports with a limited time frame, more attention should be focused on implementation as a potential learning process.

The Karpin Report highlighted a set of characteristics that are also shared by many reports on vocational education and training. viz.
• The paucity of Australian research in this area ensures that the report does not adequately critique some of the fundamental assumptions it holds. e.g.
"Improved management skills underpin workplace reform, internationally competitive enterprises and improved living standards for all Australians." p. 13

• The implicit and explicit models of change, are still built on dated Research, Development and Dissemination strategies. The assumption is that Management skills per se. provide the 'leverage' model for managing change towards "a positive enterprise culture". (p.13)

Finally, this paper has suggested how action learning can be integrated into each of four levels of any change management model. Rather than reproducing the dominant models of change top-down management so often found in change management literature, it has been suggested that participation through action learning can involve all stakeholders. Before the rhetoric of the next election campaign tells us how to build an 'enterprising nation' through learning organisations, we should begin to examine critically through action learning what it really means in practice.

References


Appendix 1: Incongruence between Challenges, Recommendations & Research on Change

Five Challenges
Band 1 Recommendations
(High Priority for Change)
Band 2
(Lower Priority for Change)
26 Research Reports

CHALLENGE 1
Developing a positive enterprise culture through education and training.
1. Development of an enterprise culture - within formal education and training
3. Leadership initiative
2. Development of an enterprise culture - through Community Education

CHALLENGE 2
Upgrading vocational education and training support.
4. Upgrading of TAFE's capacity to deliver management development course and incentives to improve quality.
6. Small business, one-to-one,
Qualified mentoring/ Advising

5. Accreditation of small business trainers, educators, counsellors and advisers
7. Piloting the training and support of small business owners, managers, via the latest technologies.
8. Piloting the networking of small business support agencies and training providers via the latest technologies

9. Development of articulated TAFE/University undergraduate course in small business formation and management

CHALLENGE 3
Capitalising on the talents of diversity.
10 (a) Management for diversity
(see above

10(b) National strategy for Women: women in private sector management, corporate boards and academia

10 (c) Improved agency support for promoting diversity

CHALLENGE 4
Achieving best practice management development
11. Frontline manager program
14. Management competencies framework

12. Structure industry-based study tours
15. People and Quality

13. Benchmarks in best practice materials

CHALLENGE 5
reforming management education
16. fees and funding mechanisms for management schools
20. Industry linkages for management schools

17. Information and management control for management schools
21. International links for management schools

18. The drive for improved quality for management schools.
22. Curricula in post-graduate and under-graduate management education

19. Research funding and the supply of quality academics.
23. International business skills program.

24. MBA students consulting with small business owner managers

25. Articulation for management schools


27 Human Resource Management of academics

H. Schaafsma, 1995: AARE