WORKING ON CURRICULUM RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WOMEN LEADERS AND MANAGERS, 2010

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ABSTRACT

In 1995, a consortium comprising a number of TAFE Colleges and university representatives was funded by ANTA to investigate recommendations for curriculum, to prepare women leaders and managers for the twenty-first century. The investigation had had its beginnings in early 1994. Based upon the earlier enquiry, the 1995 project investigated social, political and economic perspectives of the topic. A broad set of recommendations was developed. The next generation of the project is to focus on various components within the recommendations and decide upon viable audiences and products for 1999.

The consortium model created spin offs into linked areas of activity, for example two WA TAFE Colleges won funding to investigate leadership programs for people represented within diverse groups. Another link was created with a longitudinal study about gender inclusively and organisational culture, involving two WA TAFE Colleges with the four WA public universities.

In terms of describing a model to represent activities linked with the investigations, it appears to be an evolutionary process, with replications which have links back to the early discussions and theories but with changes created through new information gains. The ideas of Margaret Wheatley are brought to mind to describe what is happening.

Background to the ANTARAC investigation

The investigation had had its beginnings in 1994 when South Metro TAFE, WA was funded with a WA Department of Training small research grant to develop a Leadership and Management Program for Women staff. Midland TAFE, WA staff were invited to join in the six sessions conducted. Facilitation of these sessions was provided by a private sector staff training organisation. The two investigators identified features of the program which they believed should be addressed in any further activity in the area. These were that numbers of the 16 participants in the program had in mind very small goals, for example, achieving a promotion to the next level in the organisation. The participants demonstrated very little facility with or interest in the finances of their organisation. A third observation was that there was a need to enhance strategic networking for results in the organisation and to identify opportunities outside the organisation to make things happen in their workplace or for them as individuals. One further observation related to beliefs about leaders being without flaw. The problem of this view was that it effectively wrote the women, perhaps conveniently, out of a leadership script and was an unreasonable or unrealistic perspective for them to apply to others.

The following year, in early 1995. a second round of training was funded through a WA Department of Training special grant for activities relating to female staff. On this occasion 25 women participated in all or some of the two hour sessions which were conducted in the middle of the working day. Networking for results, money in organisations and organisational politics were the topics covered. These sessions proved very successful and informative. The presenter provided a very effective mix of women's culture and strategic thinking.

In early 1995, the Commonwealth of Australia released Enterprise Nation: renewing Australia's managers to meet the challenges of the Asia-Pacific century. Commonly referred to as the Karpin Report, named after David Karpin the private sector Chairperson for the steering committee, the report comprised 27 separate documents and made a range of recommendations on skills acquisitions for Australia's leaders and managers to prepare them for a global business environment. Much of the forecasting was through to the Year 2010. In seeking funding to identify skills to prepare women as leaders and managers, a similar timeframe was adopted by South Metro TAFE. Jacquie Hutchinson from Edith Cowan University had been instrumental in establishing a Women's Leadership Program at Edith Cowan University and extending it into the education sector and the business community. She played a key role in identifying the Karpin Report as a significant platform from which to launch the next phase of the investigation.

Problematising the Karpin Report

There was a range of speculative questions which a reading of the Karpin Report triggered. for example, what might happen to the integrity of local indigenous cultures in a global trading environment; would there be middle management positions to provide vital transition experience from supervision/frontline manager level in an enterprise to senior levels of management; what would downsizing of the workforce mean for women seeking employment and for women seeking senior roles in organisations? Where would migrant women and women from culturally diverse backgrounds sit in the picture – would they be advantaged or disadvantaged by global trends – would different categories of women experience the work environment in different ways? To what extent would women who occupied senior positions in international business environments have opportunities for family roles? Would there be some industry categories were women might be more successful than others? Would a scan of the literature relating to the future provide similar predictions to those on which Karpin Report recommendations were based?

Texts and Contexts

From the questions raised by the Karpin Report, it seemed that a project steering group which offered a range of perspectives could provide expertise in different ways. to that end, a steering group was identified which reflected:

1. the history of earlier aspects of the investigations

2. different kinds of expertise

3. a number of geographic sites, to assist with data collection if necessary

4. some formal academic rigour to ensure the processes and report would be acceptable and

5. representatives from public and private sector enterprises

As well, it was likely the investigation would encroach upon a number of subject disciplines and would therefore require a theory and model which could accommodate a multi-disciplinary approach. One element of the investigation was likely to include an investigation of women's views on occupying positions of influence. The rationale for this was that these women could be in a position to add their wisdom to the advice being offered through published works. As well, the steering group considered a survey would provide a useful window into the lived experience of these women at a particular point in time, namely 1996-97.

Structure of the Investigation

The project was formulated from two underlying concerns, issues which surrounded the Karpin Report recommendations and matters relating to women occupying positions of influence. the two strands of the investigation were developed in the following ways.

A literature search was conducted on areas raised by the Karpin Report, for example, predictions on social, political, economic, personal and global impacts. These were assembled as international considerations and matters relating to Australia and its citizens. The second area of enquiry was three pronged. One element of the investigation related to identifying existing curriculum and texts, both hard copy and on-line, addressing leadership and management skills acquisition. A second element was of research literature which discussed relationships between women and power, and a third element comprised a survey of women leaders and mangers.

Within the survey activity 90 women's views were canvassed. In all, more than thirty matters raised through the earlier literature search on women and power and from the curriculum investigation warranted clarification. the survey group was therefore divided and two sets of questions were developed and applied to two subgroups. Women in and outside Australia were included. There were indigenous women and women from culturally diverse backgrounds. Public sector organisations and private sector employees were included. some women did not attract income from their leadership roles. Most industry groups were represented however women tended to cluster in particular industry sectors.

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