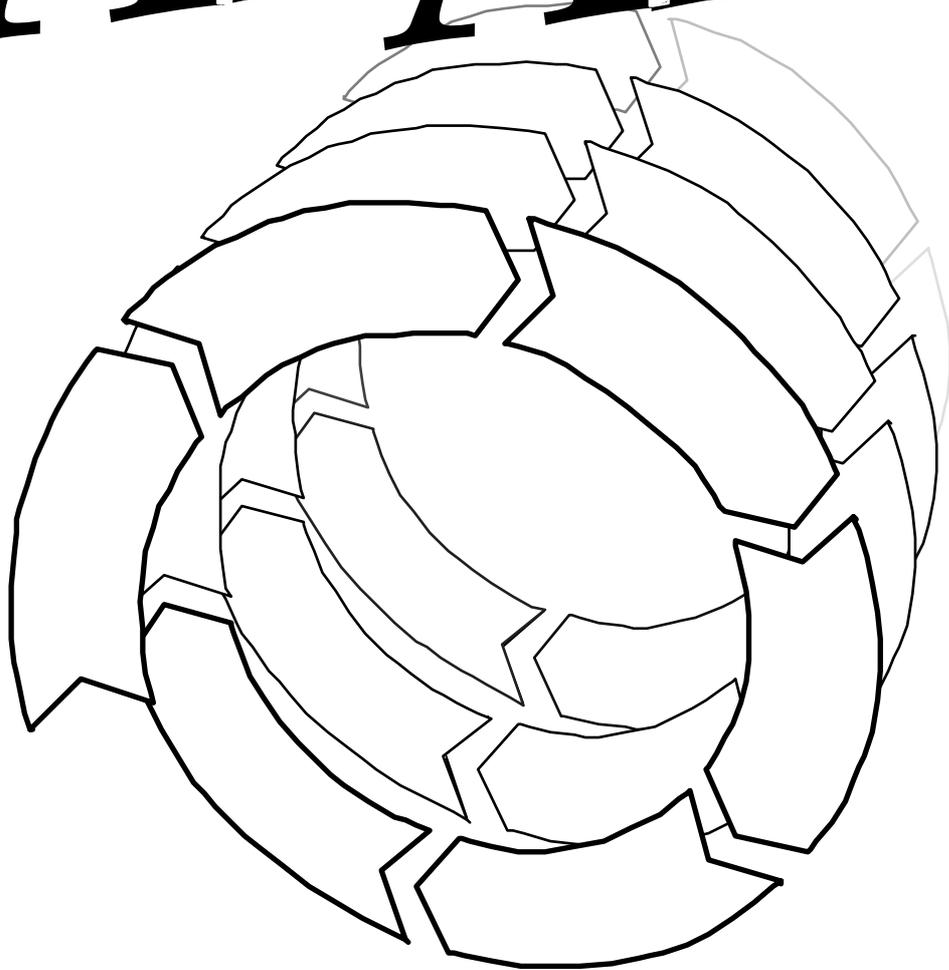


# ALAR



*Action learning action research journal*  
*Volume 3 No. 2 December 1998*



*ALARPM is a strategic network of people interested or involved in using action learning or action research to generate collaborative learning, research and action to transform workplaces, schools, colleges, universities, communities, voluntary organisations, governments and businesses.*

*ALARPM's vision is that action learning and action research will be widely used and publicly shared by individuals and groups creating local and global change for the achievement of a more equitable, just, joyful, productive and sustainable society.*



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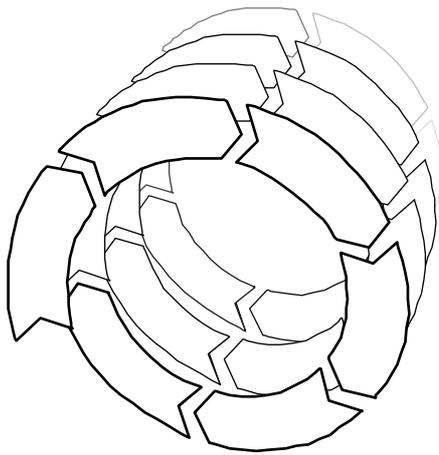
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## **CONTENTS**

<b>Editorial.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Action Learning and Manager Development</b> Julie Manuell and Ted Sandercock.....	<b>3</b>
<b>Leadership Learning: Effects of Profitability</b> Robert Burke .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Learning for Leadership and Sustainable Profitability</b> Ron Passfield.....	<b>32</b>
<b>People .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Noticeboard .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Guidelines for contributors .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Publications catalogue order form.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Information for subscribers .....</b>	<b>69</b>

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# Editorial

This Issue of the ALAR Journal challenges us to think about our personal leadership role in society and about the kind of future we are creating by our thoughts, communications and actions. As we move towards the new millennium and our Fifth World Congress in the year 2000, we are reminded to take up the challenges presented in the World Congress 4/8 at Cartagena, Colombia (ALAR Journal, Vol 3 No. 1).

In this issue, Julie Manuell and Ted Sandercock discuss an approach to the development of leaders and entrepreneurs through an accredited course that uses action learning to challenge existing mindsets and perspectives.

Robert Burke stresses the need for leaders to develop knowledge and skills in the non-rational elements of organisational life to harness the energy, creativity and innovation that are essential to organisational survival and prosperity. He proposes action learning as a means to the learning and development of leaders, the realisation of empowerment and the growth of organisations that are ecologically aware and geocentric.

Ron Passfield identifies “ecological literacy” and heroic leadership” as essential pathways for the development of sustainable organisations. He suggests that these perspectives, in common with action learning, recognise the systemic principles of interdependence, relationships, flexibility, diversity and feedback systems. Action learning is seen as a mechanism for organisational and social transformation through personal consciousness raising.

The “futures” theme is further developed through the introduction, in “Noticeboard”, of a multi-media package produced by Sohail Inayatullah and Paul Wildman. We are challenged to explore the issues involved in future studies and to answer the question, What kind of future are we creating?” A corollary question might be “Whose ‘future’ counts?” We also announce the Fifth World Conference on Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management, September 2000 and the ALARPM National Conference, Brisbane, July 1999.

In “People” we introduce the new Management Committee for ALARPM Association and present a profile of the new ALARPM President, Iain Govan.

# Action Learning for management development

Julie Manuerll and Ted  
Sandercock -

## Abstract

This paper describes the application of action learning to a management development programme, Applied Business Practice, within a Diploma in Business conducted by a private Australian education and training provider, Clements School of Management. The setting up of the programme is described and the learning process is outlined. The outcomes and the participants' comments are discussed. The learnings from this program and proposed changes are identified.

## Introduction

The September 1997 issue of ALAR contained two articles on action learning within the context of higher education in the UK. Frank (1997) discussed the value of action learning as an approach to management development and provided insights into the role of learning sets and learning logs. Webber and O'Hara (1997) discussed issues related to the formation of learning sets within management education programmes. The authors contend that participant-led sets are more aligned to action learning philosophy. This paper sets out the design, procedures, processes and outcomes of an action learning based programme, Applied Business Practice, conducted in the Clements School of Management,

Adelaide, South Australia. The authors were involved in the programme as a participant (Julie Manuell) and the facilitator (Ted Sandercock).

## **Context**

Clements School of Management is one of the many private providers of education and training in Australia. Since its establishment in 1972, the School has been dedicated to developing both practising and aspiring professionals in Sales, Marketing, and Management. Over the last five years, the courses offered have been nationally accredited to enable articulation into major business schools of Australian universities. The part-time study courses provide participants with programmes in marketing, sales and management. Successful participants are awarded certificates in the various programmes undertaken, advanced certificates in marketing, sales or management and the nationally accredited Diploma in Business. The programme, Applied Business Practice, discussed in this paper is a full year study that consists of a workplace based action learning project and supporting studies in Business Law and Business Statistics. The paper focuses on the action learning project.

## **Background**

Applied Business Practice was designed in 1993 to provide participants, already holding an Advanced Certificate, with a programme to enable them to meet the requirements of a newly accredited Associate Diploma. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) was applied to meet the work experience requirements in the award. Deb Lange, an ALARPM member, was contracted to develop an action learning process for this workplace based programme, which would meet the needs of the part-time participants and the requirements of the Associate Diploma.

The Applied Business Practice programme was to integrate and apply the participant's learning from their Advanced Certificate studies by initiating and managing a workplace based project in their organisations. The programme was designed to have participants:

- challenge themselves and others in their organisations
- encourage them to collaborate with others
- critically examine work situations and become reflective professionals
- initiate and change and experience learning as a continuous process
- integrate rational and imaginative thinking
- understand themselves in relation to the culture of their organisations and in relation to cultures of other organisations
- use theories to analyse and explore complex interconnections within a situation.

The methodology proposed highlighted:

- individual and group learning - planning and implementing a project to be shared and discussed with a small group of participants in an action learning set
- undertaking an organisational project utilising action research methods - collaborative planning and review with key stakeholders.

Participants were required to attend nineteen workshops to share and discuss their enterprise improvement projects. The final workshops were to be used for formal presentations on the outcomes and personal learning gained

from undertaking the projects. Participants were also asked to find and negotiate with a person in their organisation who would be their mentor while they planned and implemented the workplace based project in their organisation. During the year, participants were encouraged to keep a journal/diary, to present progress reports to the learning set and submit a final report for assessment.

Deb Lange also prepared guidelines for writing each chapter of the final report and Course Notes. The Course Notes consisted of overviews of the following topics:

- Cultural change
- The need for a strategic change audit
- Windows on the world
- Turning the organisation into a learning community
- Sample planning process
- Discovering common ground
- Facilitation methods
- Key challenges for sample projects
- Competency Based Training
- Key challenges for the role of a change agent
- Evaluation.

Deb Lange facilitated the programme until July 1996, when Ted Sandercock assumed this role.

## **Description**

In 1997, ten part-time participants undertook the Applied Business Practice programme. These people, holding management positions in their organisation, came from varied business backgrounds - engineering, manufacturing,

retailing, semi-government, petrochemical, education and finance.

The programme commenced with discussions on action learning. Participants had been provided with articles on action learning (for example, Getting started: a manual on action learning, an extract from Pearce (1991, pp 349-366)). During these discussions the formation of the action learning set was raised. The participants decided to form one set. During the year the average attendance was seven and so the choice of one set was justified. The purpose of the learning set was to:

- share ideas and experiences
- learn from each others' experiences
- support each other
- determine what and how participants might acquire the specific knowledge needed for participants' chosen projects.

The role of the facilitator was to:

- co-ordinate the programme
- be a coach - process and information
- reflect on the process
- provide feedback to participants on the process and on their progress
- assess the final reports ( taking into account the comments of other members of the set).

The meeting time, day and location were chosen by the participants. The majority of meetings were held in the School's facilities. However, the presentations about progress were held over a light meal in a coffee shop.

At the first few meetings, the facilitator offered videos on paradigms, organisational change and change processes. Participants were provided with two texts - Dattner (1996) *The Naked Truth* and Owen (1993) *Program Evaluation*. The Dattner (1996) text formed the basis for many early discussions. Participants were encouraged to share articles and books that they found useful. During the year current journal articles and books found by the participants and facilitator were added to the course materials.

In the early meetings participants shared their ideas about action learning and action research, organisational cultures, experiences of change in their workplaces, possible topics for projects, and their reactions to the views expressed by Dattner (1996). After about five meetings, participants presented their initial thoughts on their potential projects. All projects suggestions were accepted by facilitator, even though some appeared to be inappropriate on first sight or far too large to be addressed over the coming months. The feedback from the members of the learning set, led to revisions and in two instances a different project. In weeks 6-8 participants formally presented their draft plans for their projects. It should be noted that one participant after exploring and designing a project, decided after some extensive reading and discussion with other members of the set, to change direction and so proposed a different project near the end of Semester 1.

Over ensuing weeks participants discussed and shared ideas on:

- background literature on organisational culture, management of change, and literature related to their specific projects
- various methodologies, and data gathering techniques
- modifications to their projects
- significant results as they occurred

- evaluation formats
- various outcomes as they arose.

Business Law and Business Statistics formed an interlude in the latter part of Semester 1. The presentations of the participants' reports were carried out in December, followed by dinner in a nearby restaurant.

Nine participants completed the course and presented the outcomes of their projects and their personal learning experiences in early December. An executive summary was provided by each participant to other members of the learning set. Bound copies of the participants' revised reports were provided for retention in the School.

### **Outcomes**

A variety of projects were undertaken, as shown by the following list of titles.

- Development of a Strategic Plan: a working document
- Implementation of part-time employment into a major organisation
- Alignment of organisations and culture
- In the race to get to market we give you an unfair advantage - A Business Plan
- Developing Tooling Specifications
- Evaluation of Internet application
- Increasing revenue from in-house training
- Job analysis as a development strategy.

The following are some comments from the participants' reviews of their reports.

*During an applied business practice study such as this one you allow yourself to take a step back and reflect. This is a critical phase in designing a model that does not appear to contain the presumptuous views that will appear as a result of your daily activities.*

*Technology is changing so rapidly that a system that you could not afford today may become affordable in two years or a new technology may supersede it. Get into the market now with something that you can make margin with. Build up a reputation and experiences in the fields of expertise, do a formal appraisal of new technology in the market, and keep up to date.*

*My response to the need has proven successful, not because the company adopted it but because it worked.*

*I have had reinforced that I must always involve those who are going to use it to ensure ownership and input so as not to include unnecessary information.*

*This project and the research required to complete it has outlined (for me) the importance of taking each change situation individually and to consider the factors affecting each situation such as the political, both internal and external, type and scale of change and the context of change.*

*My awareness of the corporate culture and the HR function have been highlighted throughout my studies and research during the year. This report has provided a vehicle for new ideas and recommendations towards the successful implementation of part-time employment.*

*The benefits of action learning in a group of professionals, the class of 1997, I found very valuable.*

*My project has allowed me the opportunity to learn on-the-job.*

*Whilst it has been a good 'learning' year for me, I feel that the more knowledge and skills I learn, the more I don't know.*

## **Further developments**

The programme was reviewed by the participants in December and by the authors in January the following year. The following suggestions from these reviews are listed in no priority order:

- review more carefully the participants' choice of mentor.
- check at regular intervals how the mentoring process is developing.
- some mentors may need some guidance about the role.
- more attention needs to be given to data gathering skills such as:
  - interviewing
  - facilitating focus groups
  - the development and use of surveys
- the change process needs to be discussed earlier in the first half of the year.
- the impact of the participants' projects on their workplaces needs to be raised regularly
- reflection skills need to be more formally developed
- the programme facilitator should visit the participants in their workplaces early in the programme
- the participants might set up a programme of visits to each others' workplaces.

## **Acknowledgments**

Thanks to the participants of Applied Business Practice for their openness, trust, and enthusiasm during the year. Both authors learnt much from the experience. Special thanks to Lien Cheers for her assistance with administrative matters

throughout the year. Materials were promptly made available and reminders sent to all of us in a timely and courteous way.

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## **About the authors**

### ***Julie Manuell***

Julie Manuell is the Head of School, Clements School of Management in Adelaide, South Australia. She recently completed the Diploma in Business by participating in this programme. With Julie's experience in commercial management, she was employed in 1994 as the Business Development and Administration Co-ordinator for the School. At that time the School, recently registered as a private provider of nationally accredited courses, offered Julie new opportunities. Since that time the School has doubled its annual student intake for courses articulating with the Diploma level. Simultaneously the reputation of the School for accredited in-house courses has grown. Programmes are offered within the corporate business sector including general business, manufacturing, banking, food processing, agriculture, and retail. Julie's other responsibilities include the on-going development of interstate offices so that they can offer programmes similar to

the successful offerings at the Adelaide head office. Julie has been involved at a management level with a variety of industries including training, finance, real estate, hospitality, and retail. She has competencies in public relations, customer service, and marketing and has been involved in recruitment, selection, and training and development of people. Other interests include project management, franchising, and advertising design.

### *Ted Sandercock*

Ted Sandercock is principal consultant of Concerns-Based Consultants, an organisation that focuses on management of change, developing learning organisations, and team development with an emphasis on small business. He has a Bachelor of Science and a Doctorate of Philosophy (Physics) from Adelaide University and a Graduate Diploma in Management (Human Resources) from the University of Central Queensland. In 1969-71 he was a Harkness Fellow, as an Associate Professor at the University of Michigan and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York. Until 1994, Ted was the course co-ordinator of the Bachelor of Business (HRD) and Head of the School of Human Resource Studies, University of South Australia. Ted is a Regional Vice-President of the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) and chairs the South Australian Professional Development Committee. Recently he has co-authored HR study material for Deakin University, Australia and AHRI, and a unit on 'Strategic HR Planning' for Deakin University and the Recruitment, Curriculum Services Association (RCSA). Ted co-ordinates two distance education units for Deakin University. He is a visiting lecturer in the Department of Social Inquiry, University of Adelaide. Ted is a sessional lecturer for the Clements School of Management and a member of the School's Curriculum Board.

# Leadership and Learning - Effects on Profitability Robert Burke -

## **Abstract**

This article represents a keynote paper provided to participants of the 'ATICCA 98' Conference held on 23 July at Surfers Paradise, Queensland, Australia. The theme of "Managing for Profitability" was the focus of this conference conducted by the Australasian Tertiary Institutions Commercial Companies Association.

The article stresses the need for leaders to develop knowledge and skills in the non-rational elements of organisational life to harness the energy, creativity and innovation that are essential to organisational survival and prosperity. It identifies new opportunities for leadership, learning and profitability.

Action learning is proposed as a means for the learning and development of leaders, the realisation of empowerment and the growth of organisations that are ecologically aware and geocentric in character.

## **Introduction**

Students of management have sought for years to understand why the very same activities lead to renewal in one company and to more-of-the-same performance in another: almost always the answer is leadership (Chan Kim and Mauborgne, 1992).

There has long been recognition that leadership is the difference between high performing and profitable organisations and the others.

Jack Welch, Chief Executive Officer of General Electric, has been signaled out as one of the most successful CEO's in history and is quoted often in telling people why - *but do we listen or understand?*

The Karpin Report 'Enterprising Nation' updated in October, 1997 by Professor David Karpin quoted Australia as now ranking 18 out of 22 in managerial capability of the O.E.C.D. nations - a drop from 12<sup>th</sup> the year before. Why?

Lack of Leadership and Innovation are seen as the greatest single block to the development of Australian enterprises as world class as highlighted by both Professor David Karpin and Professor Jane Marceau at the Australian Business Limited Conference "Solutions to Global Challenges" October 1997. And so the story about Leadership goes on.

### **So What is Leadership?**

Some would argue it is an advanced state of management. In Australia we have over 50 MBA programmes and other high quality management programmes. Yet we do not appear to have the same quality of leadership as do our competitors and this is despite our educational opportunities and our wealth of natural resources.

Could it be that the management solutions, or rather the heavy reliance on them, is part of the problem? If management solutions are looked at in an entirely cognitive rational way what happens when the problem is to do with the non-rational?

If we begin to look at organisations as a system then we can begin to see that the system is made of many parts much the same as a human body is. And like that human body if one part of it is sick it affects the rest of the body. Similarly with

an organisation. Malcolm Davies has defined organisations as rational and non-rational. Within the rational, or cognitive intelligence, an organisation has its processes, strategies etc which it needs to have to run effectively. It also has its non-rational, or emotional intelligence, which it also needs to understand in order for the organisation to be really effective and thus profitable. Davies (1997) identifies the different parts of the organisational system that make up these elements:

<b>Rational</b>	<b>Non-rational</b>
Strategy	Relationships
Structure	Identity
Systems	Information
Processes	Culture
Procedures	Beliefs
Policies	Courage
Standards	Faith

He argues that a really effective organisation is one that is good at both elements identified by:

- Management – effectively coordinating the **rational** elements of the team
- Leadership – positively influencing the **non-rational** elements of the team

Learning the skills to influence the non-rational can be challenging:

*The split between rational and non-rational is useful because it draws attention to an important area of social systems that is not amenable to rational analysis. In the non-rational we begin to realise the importance of emotion and intuition which*

*can both add a great deal of value to the predominance of cognition on the rational side. Having been trained and acculturated into the rational many find it challenging even to admit to themselves that there is a great deal of power and potential in an area where they have little skill and often much discomfort. (Davies, 1997)*

Many articles have been written about the importance of the way people in an organisation are treated and feel about their work. Many people have successful businesses built around this topic. Resources such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) are extensively used in organisations, often with great effect. So some of us are aware that a different paradigm is needed and that, indeed, some Australian Leaders are as good as any in the world as a result of this knowledge.

The answer then seems to be that Australians are in fact learning about leadership but it appears we are learning at a slower rate than our O.E.C.D. competitors.

### **Developing Leadership**

It is my belief that organisations are not in business to make a profit; they make a profit to be in business. Organisations can no longer be separate from their social and community responsibilities. They cannot ignore their responsibilities towards the environment, education and other 'human' factors of life. It is therefore very important that we learn the skills of leadership, the non-rational skills, so we can *manage* more effectively and introduce '*meaning*' into our working lives.

The good news is these skills can be learnt, *providing* there is the will and the courage needed to accept the challenges. One very effective way of learning these skills is by extended Experiential Leadership Development Programmes (ELDP).

The fact that the so-called 'soft skills' are indeed hard to acquire may have something to do with why they are not

widely taught. If the emphasis is only on cognitive rational skills in our business education, important as this is, then it is fair to say that Australia will continue to fall behind other nations who are more in tune and skilled with the non-rational. This will have a substantial effect on profitability.

The ability to learn is the fundamental purpose of living - by being able to deal with complexity. This is the argument of the systems thinkers and it makes a lot of sense because it is dealing with how institutions work rather than what they are doing.

The question of whether tertiary institutions are part of the leadership problem needs to be closely looked at. Recently we learnt that Peter Senge, the much lauded guru of system thinking and the learning organisation, found that being part of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) was limiting the growth and development of his Centre for Organizational Learning because "*the university was just impossible to work in*". As a result he has taken his US\$15million a year business out of MIT and the university system to create a 'stand alone Centre'. This is despite the international reputation of MIT.

This seems to be the growing trend and universities need to understand why, so they can change and adapt to what organisations really need to be viable and sustainable.

I mentioned Jack Welch earlier in this paper. Jack Welch is the CEO of General Electric, a company whose profitability is more than double that of its nearest competitor. GE created their own university 'Crotonville'. Why? Perhaps Jack Welch gave the answer in the 1997 GE Annual Report:

GE had another huge advantage that accelerated our quality effort: we had a Company that was open to change, hungry to learn and anxious to move quickly on a good idea.

Could it be that "*hungry to learn and anxious to move quickly on a good idea*" holds the answer?

The most obvious reason for GE's success is that GE spends (invests) around US\$500 million dollars a year on education – primarily action learning.

If you look at GE's approach, and compare that to what a traditional economic rationalist approach is like, you can see the difference.

The 1997 GE annual report provides an example of this different perspective:

The uncertainty brought about by the Asian economic difficulties creates both challenges and opportunities...

*It has been our repeated experience that business uncertainty is inevitably accompanied by opportunity. The Asian situation should be no exception: it should provide us with a unique opportunity to make the strategic moves that will increase our presence and our participation in what we know will be one of the world's great markets of the 21st Century."*

Compare this approach to:

*Whatever else has occurred in Asia, it is very much a massive failure in corporate governance. (Company Director, June, 1998)*

*In the case of GE "The path to greatness in Asia is irreversible, and GE will be there".*

There is no doubt that Corporate Governance is very important and *must* be a 'given'. Yet time and time again it commands headlines and articles in business journals and business educational courseware. Indeed the June, 1998 cover of 'Company Director' reads 'Global Governance'. It is almost as though entrepreneurialism is now on the 'out' list and we need to be wary of those who practice it. Corporate Governance is much easier to talk about than belief and faith and innovation because of our rational cognitive educational upbringing. It is certainly a lot easier to teach, because of this. And it is certainly very important but nowhere near the importance of innovation and leadership in the creation of

organisational profitability, security, sustainability and wealth.

Yet corporate governance receives far greater coverage in Australia than does innovation and leadership and its proponents are given far greater status than entrepreneurs despite the effectiveness of their organisations.

### **New Opportunities for Learning, Leadership and Profitability**

Today a new era of common interest links organisations and the community. The interests of business, unions and politicians are now vitally linked, as never before. The reason: our economy is in the midst of a revolution. From the industrial economy of the past two centuries, a new, knowledge-driven economy is being born.

The old economy was founded on hunting and gathering of physical resources, then extracting value from them. Its institutions were big, centralised, generic, conformist, and hierarchical. They were shaped to help funnel resources quickly through the economy, providing rapid, short-lived wealth through the depletion of natural assets.

The new economy is founded on discovery of knowledge and its application to physical resources. To fully tap the wealth of nations, its institutions are diverse and decentralised. Its authority structure is horizontal. Its products are small and smart. It emphasises creativity and ingenuity to stimulate enduring wealth, substituting mass with knowledge and expanding global assets.

Everybody in Australia gains from improved leadership and better management knowledge and skills. Better leaders and managers make us more internationally competitive. They create growing and profitable enterprises with interesting and fulfilling work for individuals, and more jobs and improved living standards for citizens.

But development of the so-called “soft skills” is essential. Leadership is about mastering the soft skills, yet Australians are not taught the soft skills. We tend to focus on the so-called hard skills - perhaps, ironically, because they are easier to master, but more probably because of our cultural background.

This is not to say hard skills are not necessary. They are extremely important. But used only on their own, they tend to make poor performing organisations that are unimaginative and lacking in vision and innovation.

Charles Hampden-Turner and Fons Trompennars observed that:

*In business today we face world competition. We trade internationally, work with overseas partners and employ people of different nationalities. There is a mutual interdependence. But how do we understand each other's cultures and attitudes to business? Are we trapped by our prejudices and unable to learn important lessons from people who follow different beliefs to our own?*

### **Values and the Corporation - Geocentric versus Ethnocentric**

To achieve the expected results, my action research indicated that success is a matter of adopting 'geocentric' behaviour rather than the traditional 'ethnocentric' behaviour.

Stenning (1979:280) describes this behaviour as:

Ethnocentrism is a tendency to view people unconsciously by using our own customs as the standard for all judgements...in contrast to the principle of cultural relativism expounded by anthropologists.....ethnocentrism implies evaluating the behaviour and customs of some outcrop according to our standards rather than theirs.

Stenning further argues that although the tendency towards ethnocentrism has been shown to vary between cultures, the

overall proneness of people to ethnocentric behaviour must create the potential for problems in inter-cultural relations since the differences at this level are conceivably very great.

He and others hypothesised that at the institutional level there are three general orientations which may be adopted by a multinational corporation, each of which may be seen to have particular consequences at the individual level. The three basic orientations are ethnocentrism (*a home-country orientation on the part of the parent company*), polycentrism (*a host-country orientation*) and geocentrism (*a world orientation*). With respect to personnel policies, a geocentric orientation would imply that ultimately a multinational corporation's employees would be as described- multinational- and that local employees would not be discriminated against.

The Australian cultural imperative can be characterised briefly as follows:

- The Individual before the Team.
- The Larrikin anti-establishment heritage.
- The "put-down" of "heroes".

Our Anglo-Celt early historical background basically formed this cultural imperative.

In Australia, culture is about establishing individual identity and not about identification with a group or organisation. Contrast this to the cultures of Germany and Japan, the masters of TQM, where the organisation, not the individual, is put first. However, the cultural imperative of Australia is moving from the Anglo-Celt to a more homogeneous culture based on the influx of European and Asian cultures.

The Australian Commonwealth Government's cultural policy statement, *Creative Nation*, (1994) recognises that by the Year 2000, 25% of all Australian Students will be Asian. Thinking logically about this, it becomes reasonably certain to predict that within the next 100 years Australia will be a bi-lingual nation and our second language will be Chinese.

This strong cultural diversity from what Australia is now will have an impact on how Australia rates as a world trader. Observation of the cultural shift of the USA to a bi-lingual nation provides the basis to make this prediction.

Equally, the need for nations to rediscover their cultural roots is also a strong reflection, from the observation of the Australian indigenous people and from that of other nations who were subjected to European cultural intervention.

The globalisation of the economy is creating occasions for the clashing of cultures. From manners and ways of making friends to attitudes toward the environment, different cultures espouse different values. Over the long haul, these values-and their differences-may prove as important as new technologies in determining the future.

This transition from a country built on British values after the almost total destruction of the culture of Australia's indigenous people, to an Anglo-Celt-European culture to a Anglo-Celt-European-Asian culture will mean a total rewriting of the corporation's cultural values for Australian organisations.

Ethnocentric behaviour will not be tolerated in this new emerging cultural paradigm. Those companies still practising ethnocentrism, will have to rapidly rethink their behaviour to a more geocentric form if they are to sustain competitiveness and even survival in the new emerging global market place.

### **The Leadership Imperative**

The most significant task facing organisations today is to create collaborative environments, which promote synthesis - relationships between suppliers, employees, customers and the community at large that add value for the organisation and for all the stakeholders.

Professional roles are about critical analysis and decision making; Supervision, Management, General Management and Leadership are increasingly about achieving organisational effectiveness through synthesis.

### **Change through Action Learning**

The basic principle of action learning is that we learn more by applying and reflecting on our learning, whereas the academic paradigm is that knowledge is acquired by programmed study.

Programmed study does not necessarily mean that people have learnt the meaning of what they have 'learnt':

*"They work to pass and not to know, alas they pass and do not know!" - Bertrand Russell*

There is, therefore, a personal learning outcome of action learning. And the graduate entering the new millennium must be a life long student of action learning to be able to adapt with the speed and integrity that will be needed if they are to excel.

For this to be of consequence to an organisation means the organisation, itself, must be prepared to adopt action learning principles throughout the entire organisation. This is because through action learning there is the opportunity to be empowered. As an organisational leader it stands to reason that only from your own empowerment is there an opportunity to influence an organisation to become empowered.

I would argue, from this perspective, that the concept of empowerment is self-empowerment. Many people in organisations view empowerment as a 'gift' being offered to subordinates by their superiors. Indeed, many superiors, in my experience, believe this concept as well.

My belief is, therefore, not only about the creation of wealth for organisations through the facilitation of empowerment

using the principles of action learning but, more importantly for the graduate entering the new millennium, the continuation of their personal journey towards 'self-actualisation', towards 'meaning'.

Coincidental to this concept is a strong belief that, as an organisational leader, self-actualisation and your coexistence with your organisation and the wider community is one and the same thing. That is to say that if you are in a position of 'power' and on a life journey, then you cannot achieve this in isolation from your organisation. This is because the two, for a leader, are synonymous. An organisation can provide the means for an individual to take this journey. The rewards for the organisation are what outcomes that individual achieves for the organisation. This is usually seen in the form of innovation leading to competitive advantage. GE excels in this.

Innovation is unusual in an organisation that is not empowered. These organisations are those usually dominated by an authoritarian leader. An authoritarian leader does not usually welcome initiative, but rather action to his or her instructions. Innovation, therefore, is an unwelcome attribute in this environment.

It requires no skill on the part of management to "let people go". This is purely an act of attrition based on the inability of organisations to focus their attention on what is required to create and sustain a viable future. It is much simpler for management to 'rationalise' existing operations than to regenerate and 'rebirth' new methods that changing circumstances require. This view is supported by Hamel and Prahalad (1994:21) who write:

No company can escape the need to reskill its people, reshape its product portfolio, redesign its processes, and redirect resources. Organisation transformation is an imperative for every enterprise. The real issue is whether transformation happens belatedly-in a crisis atmosphere-or with foresight-in a calm and considered atmosphere;

whether the transformation agenda is set by more prescient competitors or derives from one's own point of view about the future; whether transformation is spasmodic and brutal or continuous and peaceful. Palace coups and bloodletting make great press copy, but the real objective is a bloodless revolution."

What is required is for management is to show leadership skills and create a learning environment so that the people, themselves, will create a viable future by tapping their ability and commitment to that future. The failure of a lot of companies, according to Senge (1992:4), " *is because they fail to discover how to tap their people's commitment and capacity to learn at every level in the company.*"

Ideas are much stronger than anything else and merging cultures is far harder than merging assets. There is a great need to regain enthusiasm in the aftermath of merging organisations from different cultural imperatives which will be a growing trend in the future, and that cannot be achieved by a committee.

The argument that is evolving is clearly that by adopting the use of words, like 'Empowerment' is not enough. To achieve it means an adoption of the 'philosophy of empowerment' by the leader and workforce in its entity. That philosophy means that the leader must practice it and, equally as important, that others in the team must be prepared to want it and use it. It won't happen if it does not become part of the leader's everyday activity. It's not what the leader says that is important, but what the leader does that will determine the degree of trust that will be placed in empowerment.

'Empowerment,' therefore, is like 'added value' - how do you measure it? If it can't be measured, it's not there. Empowerment like added value must, be something that when you take it away somebody notices. However, in the case of 'empowerment', for it to have been successful, the taking away of it would have taken the organisation from

`structured chaos' to `destructive chaos', which could inevitably lead to loss of the corporations life. Argyris (1990) argued that:

*Morale, satisfaction and loyalty have been the guideposts for building and maintaining the human side of organisations...because of defences that exist in most organisations (private or public), these guideposts can become self-defeating and can actually inhibit organisational performance....We are realising that in order to achieve organisational excellence, learning, competence, and justice are a much more realistic foundation than are morale, satisfaction, and loyalty.*

Taubert (1997) observed that the new economy can mean growth that nurtures the environment, jobs that cultivate creativity, opportunities that harness the untapped potential of people of great diversity, and social attitudes that not only tolerate diversity, but celebrate it. But the growth of the new, more sustainable economy is hampered by a complex matrix of policies and attitudes designed for a bygone era.

*We, humankind, are sentient tool-users. We must break the grip of conceptual rule-makers.*

*Today, 600 million of the Earth's inhabitants in Europe, Japan, and the United States enjoy the material benefits of industrialism. In the near future, 2.5 billion more in China, India, the former Soviet republics will join us and after them, the final 3 billion will seek the same. They will demand and deserve to share in the benefits, which we enjoy. The challenge is to provide this demand without destroying the Planet - to provide affluence without effluence. This new era will also demand a change in how we conduct business; all our businesses will undergo dramatic change.*

To excel in this new era we will need to develop a long-range plan, which will form the foundation for an ecologically

viable community, which will actively seek out industries for the 21st century.

The pace of change, however, is extremely fast. To succeed, we must be Creative, Responsive and Agile. And that requires that we operate our businesses in bold new ways. In the “old days” (yesterday!), we operated our businesses like they were machines. Our economic model treated people as a cost burden. But machines are not agile. They are not creative. Machines and machine-like people do not respond well to change. In the future, we need to operate our businesses according to a different model.

### **Co-operating in the Learning Community**

Organisations will need to become a Learning Community that is intimately interrelated and interdependent.

Our businesses will become Learning Organisations that adapt to change like a living system - an Industrial Ecosystem. In the future, companies will have to design products and processes that do not violate the principles of sustainability in nature. To succeed in the new economy, we must operate by natural design principles. We must change.

How can we redesign, reinvent our businesses, so that they fully harness the human mind and spirit? How can we transform our top-down hierarchies, our conformist monoculture, to engage the magical creative qualities we have? We need to learn to cooperate.

Today competitiveness is seen as the key to business success. This thinking is out of date. In the old economy, when we were all the same, we competed with much the same products and market segment. We could not coexist peacefully in the same community. In the end, only one company could survive. Today, as we grow different, we learn that none of us is a complete global player. We need each other to fill in our gaps. Instead, we must now be

engaging in co-operative joint ventures with many others. Each company retains its independence, its speciality and core competence. Together we benefit from our diversity.

Often what holds us back is our beliefs:

Most of us hold one of two contradictory beliefs that limit our ability to create what we really want. The more common is belief in our powerlessness - our inability to bring into being all the things we really care about. The other belief centres on unworthiness - that we do not deserve to have what we truly desire.

### **Senge (1992:156)**

#### Why Leadership and Why Change?

In a recent visit to Australia Professor Richard Lester from MIT's Industrial Performance Centre reported that;

There is no evidence that corporate downsizing has made a significant contribution to overall productivity performance in the US.

There is no evidence that TQM, re-engineering, and other strategies for operational effectiveness have yielded significant overall productivity gains.

Even for individual firms, the benefits delivered by the techniques for improving operational effectiveness have often fallen short of expectations.

The most successful firms understand 'best practice' not as a collection of independent techniques but rather as a coherent system of mutually reinforcing processes and strategies.

Durably successful companies are characterised by strong core values.

For both firms and aggregate economies, a strategy of improving operational effectiveness isn't enough to sustain productivity growth in the long run.

During periods of rapid change, investment in intangible assets – knowledge, ideas, skills, organisational capabilities – takes on special importance.

## **Conclusion**

Organisational competitiveness requires merging strategy, people and technology.

For the leader understanding and being proficient in the non-rational skills as well as the rational skills has to be a 'given'. Experiential Leadership Development Programmes must be given a significantly higher priority in our educational agenda but only those who understand its principles must deliver them:

*It is my belief that while leadership and the human element of organisations have long been written about, most of the attempts to inculcate more of the leadership elements or non-rational elements into organisations have actually been done in a rational way. It is for this reason in my view that success rates in many quarters have been very low.*

*In a way it is not surprising that we have used a rational approach to the non-rational. As managers many of us have been educated in science, engineering or the professions. All of these provide predominantly a rational view of the world. All implicitly eschew the non-rational as arty-crafty or touchy-feely. These labels are often non-rational defences. They in no way represent the challenges leadership as I have defined it poses. What is popularly referred to as the 'soft stuff' is in reality the 'hard stuff' which may be why so few people seem to be good at it. (Davies, 1997)*

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# Learning for leadership and sustainable profitability

Ron Passfield

## Abstract

This article represents a keynote paper presented at the 'ATICCA 98' Conference held on 23 July at Surfers Paradise, Queensland, Australia. The theme of "Managing for Profitability" was the focus of this conference conducted by the Australasian Tertiary Institutions Commercial Companies Association.

The article identifies "ecological literacy" and "heroic leadership" as essential pathways for the development of sustainable organisations. These perspectives have in common recognition of the systemic principles of interdependence, relationships, flexibility, diversity and feedback systems. They represent the "road less travelled" and challenge the leader to achieve "inside-out" learning through processes of personal consciousness raising.

Action learning with its systemic perspective; its values of integrity, mutual respect and diversity; and its focus on improvement, provides a vehicle or mechanism for leaders to achieve "inside-out" learning and simultaneously contribute to personal and organisational transformation.

## Introduction

I have structured this paper around three key propositions:

1. Leaders need to develop “ecological literacy” if they are to achieve sustainable profitability.
2. The learning involved requires heroic leadership through the development of a rich inner life.
3. Action learning is one approach to achieving heroic leadership and sustainable profitability.

The emergence of the new physics challenges the prevailing wisdom about the nature of organisations, the role of leaders and the basis for achieving sustainable profitability. The growing awareness of the nature of eco-systems puts the emphasis on principles such as interdependence, relationships, flexibility, diversity and feedback systems. This places the onus on leaders to become literate in terms of social ecology and its implications for organisations and society and in particular to develop a comprehension of the interdependence between social welfare and profit in the long term. This requires a new mindset on the part of leaders that challenges the tendency to view people and organisations in terms of economics and rationality.

Learning for leadership and sustainable profitability cannot be achieved through a change in mindset or external means alone - it requires "inside-out" learning. This life-long learning involves the development of a rich inner life that draws on the intuitive and imaginative power of the human spirit. It is only through this deep learning that we can intuit the interconnectedness of everything and the role of relationships in manifesting this connectedness in the form of prosperity. The new skills for leaders in the emerging millennium are reflection, meditation, and a growing consciousness of ourselves as leaders and an awareness of our people as human beings with a rich store of energy, human spirit, and creativity. Leaders need to develop a deep understanding of the nature of human energy and

motivation, the conditions for developing human capability and personal insight to intuit directions that capture the imagination and commitment.

Action learning with its systemic perspective; its values of integrity, mutual respect and diversity; and its focus on improvement, provides a vehicle or mechanism for leaders to achieve “inside-out” learning and simultaneously contribute to personal and organisational transformation. It has the capacity to create a dynamic synergy that leads to sustained innovation, profitability and productivity. It requires of the leader a high degree of robust self-esteem, the insight to value relationships and diversity and the willingness to take risks and explore the unknown. Its outcome is sustainable, creative capability. A prerequisite, however, is the development of "ecological literacy".

### **1. The Challenge of “Ecological Literacy”**

Fritjof Capra (1997:289) defines “ecological literacy” in the following terms:

*Being ecologically literate, or “ecoliterate”, means understanding the principles of organization of ecological communities (i.e. ecosystems) and using those principles for creating sustainable human communities.*

The new physics challenges our mindsets about the nature of organisations, profitability and sustainability. The lessons from social ecology and eco-systems which reflect millions of years of sustainability challenge our ways of thinking and highlight principles that are in stark contrast to the economic rationalism that pervades our organisations today.

*The prevalence of economic rationalism*

Australian organisations, and I particularly refer to Australian tertiary institutions, are bereft of leadership that is cognisant of the principles of ecology. The “Hanson

Phenomenon” attests to the fact that we have many “followers” who accept scapegoating and simplistic solutions but very few “leaders” who are prepared to stand up and subject the prevailing wisdom and rationalisations to in-depth critique.

As we look down from the balconies of our citadels of bricks and mortar, we chastise the uneducated populace for following blindly in the footsteps of a “false prophet”. And then we turn away to resume our ruthless pursuit of “cut and burn” (downsize and rightsize) and scapegoating staff for the lack of productivity. We proclaim “all should be one” and set about implementing processes to “standardise”, “make more efficient”, “reduce duplication” and “overcome slack”. We cut the heart out of our organisations, produce corporate anaemia and anorexia, and rationalise all this in terms of the prevailing wisdom of economic rationalism. We systematically destroy relationships and impede their development and lose sight of their role in promoting synergy and creativity. We reward mediocrity and conformism in the name of control and accountability and wonder why profitability tumbles.

We fail to see that, by pursuing downsizing and restructuring, we ignore the accountability that we as leaders have to society and to the environments (both organisational and natural) entrusted to our care. We still see profitability and the bottom-line as realities divorced from connection to nature and society. We fail to see that the real bottom-line is “you, me and our environment”. We shake our heads and lament “Where are the volunteers?”; “ Why do we not have collaboration anymore?” .

We continue to follow the American way long after the “gurus” have abandoned their “deficit” mentality and apologised to their clients for destroying the spirit of their organisations. De Carpentier (1997:19) reports the following in relation to downsizing “gurus”:

*After some years of company retrenchments throughout many countries, Stephen Roach, "regarded as the guru of downsizing" (Brenchley 1996) admits that he's "now having second thoughts" about "extolling the virtues of America's productivity-led recovery". In a note addressed to clients he "effectively apologised for a decade's fervent advocacy of downsizing". He says: "If you compete by building, you have a future, if you compete by cutting, you don't" (Maiden 1996). "Maybe I went too far," he told clients and he says in his complete turnaround that "open-ended downsizing is a recipe for extinction" (Brenchley 1996).*

Downsizing, and its underpinning philosophy of economic rationalism, ignores the fundamental principles of eco-systems. It fails to acknowledge interdependencies, the centrality of relationships, the impact of negative feedback loops on morale and spirit, the need for diversity and the capacity to recycle human creativity into more productive pursuits. Economic rationalism is based on a deficit mentality that leads to the ascendancy of reason (without social critique); obsession with certainty, haste and efficiency; fixation with specialist knowledge, control, structures and quantification; and a denial of history and essential human qualities (refer Lambkin,1998).

Lambkin (1998:6) also asserts that rationalism (divorced from social critique) leads to "individual passivity and conformity", and:

*The marginalisation of other human qualities - spirit, common sense, doubt, perception, faith, emotion, intuition, experience; and a denial of our most important instincts - the democratic, the practical, the imaginative.*

We have focused on the cost side of the profitability equation to the exclusion of the capability and the revenue side. We have become obsessed with cost cutting (and in the process increased the organisational and social costs) to the total exclusion of capability development - the source of sustainable profit and sustainable competitive advantage.

To use a human analogy, we have become focused on the elimination system at the expense of the nutrients required to sustain life.

At a time when we need to learn faster than ever before, we constrain learning and feedback for the sake of maintaining control; at a time when we need flexibility and responsiveness, we choke our systems with rules in the name of accountability; at a time when we need creativity and innovation, we remove slack (an essential ingredient for creativity) and introduce conformity (which chokes innovation); at a time when we need to critically evaluate our basic assumptions, we slavishly follow the dictates of economic rationalism.

This narrow perspective ignores the lessons of ecological communities and develops human communities that are engaged in the pursuit of non-sustainable profitability. The challenge for leaders today is to develop an ecological perspective that will lead to sustainable profitability.

*The eco-system perspective*

Capra (1997:289) argues that:

*We need to revitalize our communities - including our educational communities, business communities, and political communities - so that the principles of ecology become manifest in them as principles of education, management, and politics.*

He goes on to define a set of key principles that lead to sustainability in ecosystems and that can be applied to achieve sustainable profitability:

*interdependence* - the interconnection and mutual dependence of all members of an ecological community (the success of the individual and the whole are interdependent)

*relationships* - the web of life involves a vast and intricate set of relationships (nourishing the community means nourishing those relationships)

*multiple, non-linear feedback loops* - disturbance is amplified by multiple, interdependent feedback loops (the effects of a small positive intervention can be amplified by the feedback loops as can those of a negative intervention)

*cyclical nature* - nutrients are continually recycled as the waste of one species is food for another (there is no waste or rejects in nature)

*diversity* - essential for the survival of the eco-system (diversity produces richness and sustainability)

Cairnes (1998:19-24) provides an illustration of "ecological literacy" in action. She describes the life of David Judd, an operations manager of the Portland Aluminium Smelter in Victoria. Despite the terror of a life-threatening cancer, David Judd "used the experience to find within himself a depth of humanity, creativity and strength that stretched his previous limits and allowed him to lead a whole township [of 10,000 people] to new possibilities" (p.19). She continues her story (p.22):

*Before he died David had overseen the participation of the majority of the township of Portland in a personal development program. He had sponsored the creation of a gym, creche, and medical centre for use by smelter staff and their families. His people had developed one of the most successful rehabilitation programs for street kids run in Australia. The smelter had sponsored one of Australia's leading jazz musicians, Don Burrows, flying him regularly to Portland to work with local children. Managers from the smelter were on boards of local schools, hospital and clubs. The smelter ran the Portland Speakers Circuit, which saw world-class speakers such as David Suzuki fly into town and lecture to local residents thus broadening their horizons. Smelter staff had also regenerated a natural (later award-winning) wetlands around the plant.*

Portland Aluminium Smelter became recognised as the best in the world in terms of innovation and productivity through a culture that focused on the needs of the individual.

Some of the frontiers for learning within the ecological framework include - different metaphors as the basis for organisation structures such as the network or spider plant (Morgan, 1997); the concept of partnering (learning partnerships between client and supplier); developing career resilience; strategic alliances between competitors; producing "workplace development agreements" between union and management (Ford, 1998); building a genuine commitment to local economic and social development; cross-sector staff exchanges; implementing genuine "family friendly" approaches; building ecological partnerships between schools, universities and industries; identifying and limiting negative social consequences of organisational decisions; active participation in community development.

### **Developing Heroic Leadership through "Inside-Out" Learning**

The new environment of global competitiveness challenges us to move away from the "warrior" mentality towards heroic leadership and "inside-out" learning. We cannot ignore the reality of global interdependence, the centrality of relationships, the need for diversity, the fluctuations in organisations and society resulting from multiple feedback loops and the need for recycling nutrients for sustaining the human spirit.

Cairnes (1998:27) describes the impact of this environment at the workplace:

*People in today's organisations are now being asked to be self-starters, creative and entrepreneurial, working in semi-autonomous teams on complex and rapidly changing issues and projects. People in corporate life are now implored to run*

*business as if it is their own, to think outside the rules and boxes, and to manage a highly complex web of relationships, both locally and globally.*

The first challenge for the leader in the emergent global environment is to overcome the warrior mentality that we have inherited from economic rationalism which was born in a different era and based on an outdated view of the world - the world of Newtonian physics.

*The “warrior” mentality*

Cairnes (1998:26) differentiates the skills of the warrior manager from those of the heroic leader:

WARRIOR SKILLS	SKILLS OF THE HEROIC LEADER
imitate, administer, maintain	innovate, originate, develop
focus on structure	focus on people
rely on control	inspire trust
have a short-range view	have a long-range view
accept the status quo	challenge the status quo
be classic good soldiers	ask what and why

The warrior style manager was appropriate in a time when organisations and their environments were stable and things were predictable with limited knowledge and information available. In today’s world of complexity, chaos, uncertainty, unlimited information and paradox, the skills of the heroic leader are more appropriate.

The warrior myth is based on the military metaphor that pervades our organisations and is reflected in our language of *kill the competition, win the battle, strategy, tactical advantage, get ahead, marketing campaign* and *fight* for market share.

Behind the myth is an emphasis on maleness, toughness, strength, force, guile, and an “instrumental view of relationships”. The warrior is renowned for their capacity to follow battle plans, focus on achievements that have external value, and dismiss anything that smacks of weakness or vulnerability. Cairnes (1998:25) concludes that “warriors live largely on the surface of life, concentrating on image rather than the intrinsic value of heart and soul”.

Their lifestyle is focused on power and control as core values. Their impact on the themselves and the worker who is trying to keep pace with downsizing and short-term profit-making, while maintaining relationships, is devastating:

*The way we are working is causing an epidemic of depression, exhaustion, alienation, soullessness and relationship rupturing, and a plethora of accompanying stress-related diseases. Moreover, the restructuring of the job market has heightened complexity, meaning that some people are exhausted from overwork, while others are exhausted from looking for work or having to please many masters. (Cairnes, 1998:29)*

Myss (1997:43) asserts that the resultant sense of powerlessness is injurious to personal energy and well-being:

*Power is essential for healing and maintaining health. Attitudes that generate a feeling of powerlessness not only lead to low self-esteem, but also deplete the physical body of energy and weaken overall health.*

Warriors are the real impediment to sustainable growth, productivity and profit. The warriors, with their myopic vision and lack of internal strength, stand between learning and sustainable profitability. Not only do they fail to learn themselves by clinging to their outdated mindsets, but they also impede the learning of others who could otherwise contribute substantially to organisational productivity and profit.

Each of us who reside, however loosely, in the commercial fringe of educational institutions would be well aware of the limited mindsets, and structural and procedural constraints that impede our learning and effectiveness. How much more difficult is it for people who reside in the core or at the point of service delivery of educational services?

### **Heroic Leadership and "Inside-Out" Learning**

As we stand buffeted by the winds of change, are we able to hang onto the anchor of a job title or status to save us from being set adrift? Where are we going to find our grounding if not from within?

Cairnes (1998:31) argues that these turbulent times create the demand for leaders who demonstrate the characteristics of heroes:

*Heroes have a strong sense of self. They know who they are and that for which they stand. They are their own people and are undaunted by the apparent obstacles presented by rigid systems and rules, and the irrational behaviour of others. Heroes decide where they are going, and then find a way of getting there that is socially and culturally nurturing. Their integrity, deep sense of who they are and commitment to their vision make heroes true stayers.*

The heroic leader is able to stand apart and at the same time engage in productive relationships. They are what Limerick and Cunnington (1993) describe as the "collaborative individual". They recognise the interconnectedness of everything, understand the power of passion and energy, work creatively and flexibly, admire and respect diversity, and manage their relationships as an art form.

Heroic leaders value reflection, meditation and sound as sources of inner strength, self-understanding, dynamic energy and healing (cf. Campbell, 1997). They build their resources by first looking within, for it is through solitude that we develop the capacity for intimacy and productive

relationships (Dowrick, 1997). Unlike the warrior, they are in touch with their own feelings and own them. Through their personal journey of self-transformation, they discover the power of their own voice, their own creative capacity and their own intuition. They come to an intensely deep understanding of their relationship with nature, their work environment and their own personal relationships.

Cairnes (1998:37) discusses what is needed for development of the heroic leader:

*Heroic development is based in reality and on character. Heroes work with the reality of their thoughts, feelings and environment, going at their own pace on a journey of self-discovery, developing their inner self, growing in their courage to take risks, and building supportive relationships. This is often an uncomfortable and energy-intensive process.*

How often is the solution to our problem before us or nearby in the form of a person we know? It is by getting in touch with our own intuitive self and our imagination that we are able to see creative solutions. Einstein's biographers, while recognising his child-like simplicity and deep love of nature, often allude to the power of his imagination and intuition. Before he developed the theory of relativity, he often imagined himself riding on a beam of light (Brian, 1996). It took mathematicians many years to substantiate the theories that he developed through his imaginative and intuitive capacity.

As leaders in these times, we have to develop a new consciousness and awareness about ourselves, our impact on others and the things that inspire us (Bawden, 1998). Cotton (1996:27) suggests that reflection is the key to this self-knowledge:

*Making time to reflect, to turn inwards and discover what we really feel, and think and want - and to get to know that intuitive self which has been buried for years beneath piles of obligations and rationalisations - is a crucial prerequisite for self-knowledge and insight.*

David Judd, mentioned earlier, achieved his heroic journey through:

- deep self-reflection
- putting energy into better understanding himself and developing his own humanity
- connecting more fully with nature through his love of photography
- putting time and emotional energy into enriching his relationships with his partner, his friends, his colleagues, his bosses and his staff (Cairnes, 1998:22).

Margot Cairnes has worked around the world with leaders from many sectors and helped them to get in touch with their own feelings and beliefs. She sees her work as enabling leaders to approach the corporate heart and achieve real breakthroughs in terms of personal and organisational success. Her conclusion after many years of this work is that:

*...the energy of the heart and soul is a sorely neglected key to effective action. Not only does it provide healthy sustenance for action and thought, but it also allows us to be strong, stand our ground, persist and deal effectively with the toughest opposition. Unlike the force of the warrior, however, emotional and spiritual energy, if used with skill and awareness, are immensely flexible and especially effective in relationships. (1998:38)*

Each of us as leaders need to ask ourselves three key questions:

- What stops me from learning to become a heroic leader?
- What do I do to impede the learning and heroic journey of others?
- When I take away my title, who am I?

### 3. Action Learning for Leadership and Sustainable Profitability

Action learning is an approach that leads to deep personal insights and releases the creative energy of others to achieve sustainable profitability.

Action learning involves groups of people working together to improve a situation by pooling their knowledge, skill and resources. The development of productive relationships is a key facet and is achieved through norms that promote peer support and encourage challenge to the basic assumptions of members of the group. Reflection is an integral part of the action learning process that involves learning-in-context.

Reg Revans, the originator of the concept of action learning, stressed the role of action learning in developing self-knowledge. He suggests that action learning involves doing "something effective about something imperative" while submitting our actions to the constructive scrutiny of persistent but supportive colleagues (Revans, 1991:10). He argues that in this way we get in touch with why we say the things we say, do the things we do and value the things we value. In other words, through action learning, we come into contact with *Who We Are* - we engage in deep, lifelong learning.

Action learning draws on both programmed knowledge (eg. insights gained through books and listening to presentations) and "questioning insight" - the capacity to ask fresh questions. It is based on the premise that our past actions are no longer an adequate precedent for the future.

Action learning is very much a paradigm for our times as it is based on assumptions, values and norms that are congruent with the emerging eco-system perspective (Passfield, 1996a). Revans, in 1969, stressed the importance of taking a system perspective and, in fact, was one of the earliest to talk about the "learning enterprise" or the learning

organisation. He saw the need to develop organisations as "autonomous learning systems" in which:

*outstanding persons should be encouraged to develop themselves to the limits of their capacities and ought not to be restricted entirely by ingenious mechanistic programmes devised by quickwitted experts trained not to ask questions outside their fields. (Revans, 1982:285)*

He was particularly critical of management educators who failed to take a system perspective on the development of individual managers:

*...teachers of managers should study the improvement of organisations as living (self-modifying) systems more deeply than they have been studying them in the past; a traditional concentration on the individual as the object of educational endeavour has prevented us from seeing more clearly the inefficiencies with which he (sic) is confronted...(Revans, 1982:238)*

My own research over five years at the University of Queensland highlights the capacity of action learning to achieve sustainable organisational improvement and profitability. In my role as consultant-researcher I was able to observe the personal and organisational outcomes from the Queensland University Action Learning Program. At the personal level, I observed that participants on the program developed a new sense of who they were and what they were capable of and a strong sense of connectedness to others and the organisation. The organisational outcomes included waste reduction, improved productivity, development of creative teaching and learning strategies, improved safety, synergy and the development of leverage for change.

The leadership characteristics required in the context of action learning are very much those of the heroic leader - the capacity to envision a better future, ability to take risks, to support the vision of innovators and to value relationships and diversity. The rewards from developing an "action

learning organisation" are sustainable profitability and productivity, improved quality of life and a deeper sense of self and connectedness.

Through my research I concluded that an "action learning organisation" exists "where members of the organisation at all levels consciously collaborate through action and reflection in the process of personal and organisational transformation" (Passfield, 1996b:296).

### **Conclusion : The Challenge for Commercial Companies in Tertiary Institutions**

The foregoing discussion presents many challenges for leaders in commercial companies in tertiary institutions. These challenges span issues of survival, perspective, personal learning, relationship building, provision of services, social awareness and contribution.

The very survival of commercial companies is dependent on the demise of economic rationalism in tertiary institutions. As long as the rationalistic perspective pervades, commercial companies will be impeded in the pursuit of sustainable profitability. Leaders in these organisations need to challenge the prevailing ethos of economic rationalism and identify its impact on the sustainability of their enterprise.

This will require the development of "ecological literacy" and the pursuit of a personal "heroic journey" with its attendant "inside-out" learning. Central to this life-long learning is the question, "What do I do to impede my own learning and that of my staff?" Part of this exploration will be the rediscovery of our own intuitive and imaginative capacities.

A core learning will be understanding human energy and its channelling into creative and productive pursuits. This will require the capacity to build mutually enhancing relationships with staff, clients and competitors. Action

learning is one approach that can be used to achieve these outcomes.

A key skill will be the capacity to develop enhanced consciousness and awareness of our own impact as a leader. This will lead to the questions, "What am I doing to contribute to society through my organisation? What interdependencies are there that I should be acting on for the benefit of my organisation and my local community?"

One area of contribution could be the provision of educational services that support the development of heroic leaders in educational institutions, business enterprises, government and the community.

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### **About the author**

Dr. Ron Passfield is a lecturer in Human Resource Management and Organisational Behaviour at Griffith University, Brisbane and Associate Professor in Organisational Learning with the International Management Centres: Pacific Region.

Ron has a long standing commitment to the advancement of collaborative growth and development through action learning and action research. He is currently pursuing his own "heroic journey".

*We invite people to submit reports of work-in-progress or information about completed projects - so that we can all become aware of the wide variety of options available to us.*

# People

## ALARPM Management Committee

The AGM held on 12 July 1998 saw some significant changes to the make up of the management committee. Ron Passfield - President and Kay Dickie - Secretary retired after many years of high level contribution to ALARPM Association Inc. Their contributions have been greatly appreciated over the years and our thanks are extended to them. Ron Passfield will continue to provide invaluable support as Past-President. Iain Govan was elected President and there were three additional management committee members elected in Joan Bulcock, Lyn Cundy and Di Seekers. The current management committee is made up as follows:

Iain Govan	President (SA)
Ron Passfield	Past-President (Qld)
Anne-Marie Carroll	Vice-President - National (Qld)
Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt	Vice-President - International (Qld)
Joan Bulcock	Treasurer (Qld)
Lyn Cundy	Secretary (Qld)
Pamela Kruse	(Qld)
Robert Burke	(NSW)
Susan Goff	(NSW)
Anthony Nolan	(NSW)
Di Seekers	(Vic)
Richard Watson	(Vic)
Eileen Piggot-Irvine	(New Zealand)

## **Iain Govan**

**President, ALARPM Association Inc.**

Iain Govan is the incoming President of ALARPM Association Inc. Iain is one of Australia's more experienced practitioners using best practice approaches to improve management systems. Based in South Australia, he has worked with The Australian Quality Council and the New Zealand Quality Foundation in assisting private and public sector organisations to implement self-assessment as a trigger for sustainable continuous improvement. This work has included interpretation of the results of the self-assessment process and the development of action planning and performance measurement. Organisations then use these as the basis of continuous improvement programs and benchmarks for improved performance.

Iain's background is in management development where he has been involved as a consultant in change management, organisational learning, quality management systems and the implementation of best management practice. His career includes time spent in the Insurance and Oil Industries, where, as a senior executive he had responsibility for operations, marketing and the development of many small to medium enterprises.

Since developing a relationship with the Australian Quality Council in 1994, Iain has been responsible for the design and development of high level approaches to self-assessment that are ideally suited to large and diverse organisations. Iain's approach is focused on transferring internal improvement capabilities to his clients and their organisations using action learning as a key methodology.

## Noticeboard

In "Noticeboard" we bring you information about impending activities or resources, such as conferences, courses and journals. We welcome member contributions to "Noticeboard".

### **Futures Studies: Methods, Emerging Issues and Civilisational Visions - A Multimedia Reader** Sohail Inayatullah and Paul Wildman

What is the long term future of humanity? of Gaia?

Will civilisations violently clash or are we on the verge of planetary governance?

What is the future of world capitalism?

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Should we consciously create the future or is the future best left to market forces?

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These and other crucial questions are explored in this exciting new CD-ROM. Packed with insights about our futures, this CD-ROM in itself is a future technology. By

opening up to a futures listserve, you can email the authors and other readers, even co-author future editions.

Futures Studies brings together leading thinkers and activists in the futures field:

- Ashis Nandy on dissent and the shaman
- Johan Galtung on peace and global governance
- James Dator on governing evolution and the end of the natural
- Elise Boulding on imagining a world without weapons
- Riane Eisler on gender and the partnership society
- Allen Tough on the crucial questions facing future generations
- Rick Slaughter on foundational futures concepts
- Wallerstein on civilisation and capitalism
- Ivana Milojevic on feminism and futures studies
- Eleonora Masini on the philosophy of futures studies
- Sohail Inayatullah on critical futures studies; macrohistory; postdevelopment visions; and Sarkar's spiritual-technological futures
- Wendy Schultz on visioning workshops
- Zia Sardar on Asia in-between programmed and desired futures and on decolonising futures studies
- Godwin Sogolo on the futures of Africa
- Tony Judge on the aesthetics of governance
- Phil McNally on the rights and tao of robots
- Tony Stevenson and June Lennie on communication futures
- Chris Jones on the futures of Gaia

- Rudreshananda on the Microvita Science and Spirituality revolution
- Clem Bezold on scenario development and health futures
- Tom Beer on fractals, forecasting and climate change
- Paul Wildman on ways of knowing and the pedagogies of the future as well as with Bilyana Blomeley on Aboriginal dreamtime futures, and much more.

The first section presents methods futurists use to forecast and interpret the future; the second speculates on emerging issues that have the potential to dramatically alter how we work, love, live and learn; and the third section explores how different civilisations imagine the future. An annotated bibliography of the Futures field is also included. A Futures galleria presents futures-oriented artworks that visually represent authors' texts and a section on fractals explores the frontiers of science, art and learning. Rosaleen Love, award winning feminist science fiction writer, presents her latest short story, *The Seven Futures of Septimus Smith*.

Each chapter includes an introduction by Inayatullah and Wildman as well as study-guide questions. Authors' profiles and interviews - their life stories, passions, forecasting methods and visions of the future - illuminate the text.

These profiles include:

1. Clem Bezold, *Helping Others Choose More Wisely*
2. Elise Boulding, *The Cultures and Futures of Peace*
3. Jim Dator, *A Fish In and Out of Water*
4. Riane Eisler, *Creating Partnership Futures*
5. Johan Galtung, *Peace, Vision and the Future*
6. Jenny Gidley, *Creating Futures for Holistic Education*
7. Hazel Henderson, *Fighting Economism*

8. Francis Hutchinson, *Future Generations, Education and Alternatives to Violence*
9. Sohail Inayatullah, *Macrohistory, Islam, Tantra and Planetary Civilisation*
10. Chris Jones, *Conundrum and Vision, Professing on the Hinge of History*
11. Tony Judge, *Richer Metaphors for Our Future Survival*
12. Rosaleen Love, *The History of Wrong Ideas, and their Future*
13. Eleonora Masini, *A Future with Dignity*
14. Ivana Milojevic, *Journey to Feminist Futures*
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21. Paul Wildman, *Work Futures and Future Pedagogies.*

Interviews include: Elise Boulding (*Women, Civil Society and the Image of the Future*), Jim Dator (*From Medieval Philosophy to Space Futures*), Riane Eisler (*Ending 5000 Years of Domination*), Johan Galtung (*Basic Human Needs and Ecological Balance*), Hazel Henderson (*Taming the World Economy*), Sohail Inayatullah (*Metaphors and the Future*), Eleonora Masini (*The Right to Have a Future*), Ashis Nandy (*The Defiance of Defiance and the Liberation of the Victims of History*), Zia Sardar (*There's No Free Meal on the Internet*), Rick Slaughter (*Hope, God and Nano-technology*) and Immanuel Wallerstein (*Contradictions of World Capitalism*).

But more than eclectic content, this CD-ROM is unique in that it opens up to a futures listserve, thus allowing you to engage in interactive conversations with other readers as well as the editors and selected authors. Further, over 100 future-oriented World Wide Web addresses are included. This hybrid design creates a new level of interactivity, even to the point of encouraging readers to help write future editions.

The Multimedia Reader can also be used for credit towards a Masters in Science (Futures and Foresight) through the International Management Centres - a privately recognised and accredited University. Futures Studies CD-Rom will be of invaluable use to planners, educators, policymakers, academics, activists and students of futures research.

The CD - Futures Studies: Methods, Emerging Issues and Civilisational Visions (Isbn: 1 875 603 13 1) is available from the Pacific Centre for Futures Innovation and Prosperity Press, Brisbane.

Cost: US\$50 (\$80Aust) for individuals and US\$150 (\$240Aust) for institutions (both inclusive of postage and handling). Discounts available for students, unemployed and others. Licensing as courseware is also possible.

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**World Congress 5 on Action Learning, Action  
Research and Process Management -  
Ballarat, Victoria, Australia  
10-13 September, 2000**

The Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management Association (ALARPM) is pleased to announce the return to Australia of its World Congress series, following the highly successful Fourth World Congress in Cartagena, Colombia. Whereas World Congresses 1 and 2 were both held in Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland, the venue for World Congress 5 is a city in country Victoria, near Melbourne. The city of Ballarat started in the Victorian gold rush in the 1850s, and has a unique place in Australian history as the site of the Eureka Stockade, Australia's only armed rebellion against civil authority. This venue we take to symbolise conflict in society, and the need for mechanisms to reconcile differences without recourse to violence.

The theme of World Congress 5 has been chosen as *Reconciliation and Renewal*.

*Reconciliation* refers to the process of healing dysfunctional divisions between groups of people and is not restricted to racial disharmony.

*Renewal* refers to the process by which groups move forward together following reconciliation.

In choosing this theme, the organisers were asserting their belief that action research/learning is an approach well suited to bringing about improvement in practical problems in which human values are paramount and in which the nature of the improvements sought must, at least in part, be determined by a process of dialogue.

The timing for World Congress 5 has been deliberately chosen to be close to the Sydney Olympic Games (16

September - 1 October 2000) to allow international delegates to attend the Olympics. The theme of Reconciliation and Renewal is sufficiently broad to encompass contributions from many fields of work and many countries. In the particular field of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, it is hoped that international perspectives may be contributed in Australia's centenary year, when Australians are debating the need for a document of reconciliation for its indigenous people.

The venue for World Congress 5 is the University of Ballarat's Mount Helen campus, a beautiful setting in the hills on the southern outskirts of the city. A congress committee has been meeting during 1998, and expressions of interest in the Congress are now being sought. They may be submitted through the web site at:

<http://members.xoom.com/ESmith/alarpm/>

***"Success" in a Complex and Uncertain World -  
Call for Workshop and Poster Proposals  
ALARPM National Conference - Brisbane, 1999***

***How do we define and achieve success - as individuals or in our organisations and communities as we approach the next century?***

The following is a call for workshop and poster proposals to be presented at the ALARPM professional development conference Sunday 4 and Monday 5 July 1999 in Brisbane.

You are invited to express your interest in presenting a workshop or displaying a poster (or providing some other relevant and creative offering) at the 1999 Brisbane ALARPM professional development conference. We invite you not to interpret the title too tightly. We welcome contributions from any discipline or background, from people who use

innovative processes to pursue learning and change simultaneously.

The organising committee will meet in late February to compile the program. Proposals will be considered in terms of all of the following:

- their potential contribution to the theme of “Success” in a complex and uncertain world
- their practical and theoretical relevance to action learning, action research and/or process management
- the opportunity offered to participants to be involved and acquire relevant skills and understanding and apply the session contents to the projects or problems in their professional, academic or student lives
- their likely appeal to a multidisciplinary group of participants with diverse skills, experience and background
- their contribution to the balance and variety of the program
- the quality of their process and content and their likely appeal to participants

Presenters should assume that participants will bring with them some project or problem which they would like to resolve. Preference will be given to proposals which includes some time and opportunity for participants to reflect on the application of the session contents to their project or problem.

In your proposal please provide the following information:

- A title for your workshop or poster or other medium (make sure you indicate which medium you are proposing)
- 70-word abstract which briefly explains (the first 70 words will be used in the conference program):

- how your proposal contributes to the conference theme
- the theoretical and practical relevance to action learning, action research and/or process management
- for a poster, how you intend to achieve relevance for participants
- for a workshop, how you plan to offer participants a chance to be involved, acquire relevant skills and understanding, and apply their learning to their “back-home” situations
- for a workshop, please also indicate the approximate percentage of the following components Activity Discussion Input Debrief/application.

A draft program will be announced in early March.  
 Registration details will also be provided at that time.  
 Proposals may be mailed, faxed or emailed to:

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*We welcome profiles of people engaged in action learning or action research. You could submit your own or offer to write one on behalf of someone you know.*

# Guidelines for contributors

## Contributions to this journal

Through the ALAR Journal, we aim to promote the study and practice of action learning and action research and to develop personal networking on a global basis.

We welcome contributions in the form of:

- articles (up to 10 A4 pages, double spaced)
- letters to the editor
- profiles of people (including yourself) engaged in action research or action learning
- project descriptions, including work in progress (maximum 1000 words)
- information about a local action research/action learning network
- items of interest (including conferences, seminars and new publications)
- book reviews
- report on a study or research trip
- comments on previous contributions

You are invited to base your writing style and approach on the material in this copy of the journal, and to keep all contributions brief. The journal is not a refereed publication, though submissions are subject to editorial review.

## Contributed case study monographs

Contributions are welcomed to the Action Research Case Study (ARCS) monograph series. The case studies in this refereed series contribute to a theoretical and practical understanding of action research and action learning in applied settings. Typical length is in the range 8,000 to 12,000 words: about 40 typed A4 pages, double spaced.

Types of case studies include (but are not limited to):

- completed cases, successful and unsuccessful
- partial successes and failures
- work in progress
- within a single monograph, multiple case studies which illustrate important issues
- problematic issues in current cases

We are keen to develop a review and refereeing process which maintains quality. At the same time we wish to avoid the adversarial relationship that often occurs between intending contributors and referees. Our plan is for a series where contributors, editors, and referees enter into a collaborative process of mutual education.

We strongly encourage dual or multiple authorship. This may involve a combination of experienced and inexperienced practitioners, theoreticians, clients, and authors from different sectors or disciplines. Joint authors who disagree about some theoretical or practical point are urged to disclose their differences in their report. We would be pleased to see informed debate within a report.

You may have interesting case material but may be uncertain of its theoretical underpinnings. If so, approach us. We may

offer joint authorship with an experienced collaborator to assist with the reflective phase of the report.

Another option is to submit a project report initially for the ALAR Journal (1000 words) with a view to developing the report into a full case study.

Detailed guidelines for case studies are available from the editor, ALAR Journal. The first case study in the series, by Vikki Uhlmann, is about the use of action research to develop a community consultation protocol.

The cost of *Consulting on a consultation protocol* is listed in the following Catalogue order form.

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ALARPM membership also provides you with discounts on other publications (refer to attached Catalogue order form) special interest email networks, discounts on conference/seminar registrations, and a membership directory. The directory gives details of members in over twenty countries with information about interests and projects as well as contact details. The ALARPM membership application form is enclosed.

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\$95 AUD Full membership for people with mailing address *outside* Australia

### Concessional membership within or outside Australia

\$45 AUD Concessional membership for people with a mailing address *within* or *outside* Australia. The concessional membership is intended to assist people, who for financial reasons, would be unable to afford the full membership rate (eg. full-time students, unwaged and underemployed people).

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Cheques, bank drafts or money orders can be made payable to ALARPM Association Inc. in Australian dollars. Please return application with payment details to:

ALARPM Association Inc.

PO Box 1748

Toowong Qld 4066 Australia

**Phone:** (61-7) 3870 0812

**Fax:** (61-7) 3870 4013

**Email:** [alarpm@uq.net.au](mailto:alarpm@uq.net.au)

**Home Page:** <http://www.elogue.gil.com.au/ali-leaf.htm>

## ALAR JOURNAL SUBSCRIPTION

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