COMMUNITY SERVICES AS AN INDUSTRY?

SOME TRAINING DILEMMAS

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I have been asked to speak on the subject: community services as an industry
and I want to concentrate on Training Issues. To do this, I would like to
alter the title by asking you to add a question mark in your mind, so that the
title is posed as a question, for debate. I plan to first outline the results
of an as yet unpublished consultative exercise undertaken by Charles
Livingstone at the Brotherhood, entitled "Training Structures and Strategies
for Victoria's Social and Community Services". To do this I will draw heavily
on a summary prepared by Fiona Smith, the Co-ordinator of the Affirmative
Employment Unit at the BSL.

~First,   I will discuss some background issues pertinent to the non-government
welfare organisations (NGWO). Second, I will discuss some of the pros and
cons regarding training for Social and Community Services (SACS) as an
industrial matter.

There has been a phenomenal growth in employment in SACS. In Victoria for
instance, ABS figures indicate a 92% growth in employment between 1978 and
1984 in the welfare and religious sector, a sub group of the Community
Services Sector. However, the way this employment is distributed, between the
three tiers of government and the non-government sector is unknown. What is
the relative distribution of workers between institutional and community care?
What is the relative distribution from field to field, for example, the fields
of ageing compared to mental health or children? We know next to nothing
~about   the parameters of the Social and Community Services Sector (SACS).

We do, however have some information about the role of gender in the SACS
sector. To use BSL as an example; there are 527 employees of whom there are
412 women (78%). 9.3% of part-timers and 97% of casual employees are women
and only 56% full-time staff are women. Thus women are over represented in
part-time and casual staff and under represented in full-time staff.
How typical the BSL pattern is, we do not know. Very few NGWO have profiles
of their staff.

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To examine the training issue as it affected the growth of the SACS sector the Victorian Department of Labour commissioned a study which was to:

1.   determine the parameters and size of SACS;

2.   examine the systems and strategies adopted by other industries;

3.   undertake case studies of a small number of representative occupational sub-groups in order to illuminate issues pertinent to the training needs of the industry as a whole;

4.   to consider the relevance of TAFE and the educational sector to the industry;

5.   consider the training needs of disadvantaged workers and potential workers as a priority; and

6.   suggest strategies and systems capable of addressing the detailed training needs of the industry and its sub-sectors, with particular reference to disadvantaged workers.

I will now quote from the report:

> Case studies of a "small number of representative occupational or industry sUb-groups" involved consultation with a small sample of workers, in occupations with little training or related support. Occupations chosen represented "growth" areas. Unpaid/volunteer workers were also included on the basis that many workers use unpaid experience as a point of entry to the SACS *field.*

Occupations chosen for the study were:

Residential Care Workers (Institutional and Non-Institutional)

Youth Workers (youth housing, youth development, CYSS)

Family Day Care workers

Disability Attendants

Self-Help Workers

Unpaid/Volunteer workers.

It was hoped this approach would help lay the foundation for building something solid in the future for particularly disadvantaged workers and unemployed people in the SACS field.

Second, although the project only applied to Victoria, it may be worth summarising the issues.

1. SACS has a large secondary labour market component (i.e. many workers are employed in low status, low paid jobs on a casual, temporary or part-time basis, with limited training opportunities, limited tenure, little if any prospect of promotion or advancement, and low levels of unionisation). Many such employees are women.

    The consequence of this is to entrench the disadvantage of many workers, especially women, and to undermine the standard of services.

2. A "caste" barrier operates in many areas of SACS denying professionally unqualified workers the opportunity for job mobility.

    This distorts the efficient use of the skills of the SACS workforce, to entrench disadvantage.

    The barrier was perceived as being aligned with the possession of formal professional qualifications, and to take little cognisance of the experience of workers.

3. The sector is characterised by a lack of "career ladders" for many
    occupations. This may be a function of the lack of training <u>within</u> the
    sector, which tends to entrench a lack of career mobility for those who
    are from a disadvantaged background.

    SACS in common with much other Australian industry (though perhaps to a
    greater extent than most) does not take very much responsibility for the
    provision of training. This *is* generally left to individuals to arrange
    for themselves. Such a system further entrenches disadvantage.

4. The lack of training in SACS may be connected to the financial
    arrangements which prevail. Traditionally these have failed to take
    account of the real costs entailed in,providing services. Such costs
    include adequate training to workers at an appropriate level.

    Non-government welfare organisations funded by government, operate at
    the absolute margin of their funding and can find neither the staff time
    nor the resources to provide adequate, realistic or appropriate training
    to staff, who are also often under great pressure. This *is* also true
    (to varying extents) of other agencies, including government.

5. Low levels of unionisation were seen to have contributed to the
    marginalised nature of much of the work and thereby to have contributed
    to the training-related problems perceived by this study.

6. Workers consulted considered that training should be located at the
    work-site and should be pitched, at least in the short term, at a level
    of practical utility, related directly to the daily needs of (often
    largely) untrained workers. However, workers who <u>had</u> undertaken
    training were not interviewed.

7. The focus and emphasis of training for workers in the self-help movement
    differs, from workers in more traditional areas. For many, self-help
    involvement with a group is itself a substantial contribution to

learning, and this must be taken into account when assessing the type of training.

Similarly, for the self-help movement, the question of control is paramount. It is a tenet of the movement that control should be in the hands of those affected most by a situation; in the case of training, this translates into a great deal of input into course-development by those who hope to learn from courses.

8. Workers in rural areas are noted as having particularly pressing training needs.

   Not only are such workers likely to by isolated from personal contact, to be unable to attend training courses, seminars and so forth, and to be largely neglected by educational institutions, but the difficulty of recruiting experienced or qualified workers in the rural environment leads to relatively inexperienced and unqualified workers filling such positions.

9. It is conceivable that many problems confronting SACS arise out of a lack of managerial, organisational and supervisory expertise within the industry.

These issues are complex and interwoven. To quote,

> ...the barriers to promotion which are presented by a failure to provide career paths lead to a segmentation of the SACS labour market, with professionally qualified workers clustered in relatively high status positions and unqualified clustered in the secondary stream. The latter have little opportunity to either develop additional expertise and skills or to utilise their often considerable experience.

The Consultative Group suggested that in the long term that a social and community services training committee be established, to provide a focus for industry training. Recognising that this was not something which could be done immediately, it was suggested that VCOSS or the VCCSD (Victorian Consultative Council of Social Development) should convene such an Interim Industry Training Group, with support from the Department of Labour and DEIR. The priority of the ITG would be to develop funding policies which reflected a commitment to training with particular emphasis on young people, disadvantaged workers and the training needs of the self-help movement. This training should be developed within a skills centre, which would concentrate on the development of de-centralised, flexible and accessible training for workers currently without access to training.

Discussion There is little doubt that there is a major problem in the Social and Community Services Sector concerning training. Numerous Australian reports such as that written by Eva Learner for the Australian Government in the seventies and my own report on welfare services in Western Australia, published by the Western Australian Government in 1984, draw attention to the gaps as well as the disorganised and fragmented state of play. It would be generally agreed almost without exception that all SACS employers have neglected the training and development needs of their employees. This applies to government as well as non-government employers. Getting the expertise required to carry out a task has been viewed historically as the responsibility of the worker, not the employer.

I will assume for the purposes of the discussion which follows that staff development is an employer responsibility, whilst assuming that basic education/training is not necessarily so. The problems seem to be: how to negotiate training which allows for substantial involvement from the field and which public sector should undertake this role? I will also assume that in a time of constraint on resources, it is less likely that new training bodies with large resources will be set up and it is more likely that the training responsibilities of present organisations will be readapted. Thus, I will

frame the discussion which follows within the limits of our present
governmental structures.

It is also indisputable, as the report to which I have referred argues, that,
as the High Court has determined it is legally and industrially appropriate to
call the Social and Community Services Sector an industry. However, because
an occupation has some of the features of an industry, it does not follow that
its training has to be organised as an industry. For the sector also has
sociological features other than the industrial and legal. For example, there
are certain occupations within the sector which may technically be called
professional (and if this is disputed, they could certainly be called semi-
professional). Thus psychologists, social workers, some youth workers and
some social administrators would accept the ,label of professional. Thus,
since the salient issue is how to impose control for the purposes of creating
and extending training opportunities, it might be argued that training
opportunities could also be initiated and co-ordinated by the educational
rather the industrial sector, by means of certificated training courses, which
may lend themselves to eventual upgrading. To suggest this, of course is
nothing new.

rfuat could be the likely implications of pursuing the recommended option of
industrial training strategies for the Social and Community Services Sector?
One concern would be that it may reinforce, not remove, the two caste system.
Far from enfranchising disadvantaged workers, it may alienate them further, by
imposing an impermeable barrier between "on-the-job" trained workers and those
who are trained through the tertiary education sector. The health sector is a
good example of this, where the distance between many health professionals in
terms of training, and therefore rewards and status, is now so vast that
demarcation disputes concerning the task cannot be resolved without conflict.
The hospital hierarchy is a very long one, with occupations ranked in order,
from the medical profession at the top to the ward orderly at the bottom.
Those towards the bottom of the hospital hierarchy have their work closely
supervised and the division of labour is rigid. By contrast, the present
community services work sector, is less hierarchically organised than health

work, with less division of labour and less discrete tasks. Imposing industry based training could tilt this vagueness and uncertainty in the direction of the rigidities of the institutional model.

However a more fundamental concern is that it is difficult to recommend training structures whilst we are still unclear about: first, the parameters of the sector; second, the task - who does what, when and why. Until then, in my view, efforts to establish industry training could be premature. How can one possibly introduce training without clear understanding of the nature of the work?

If one examines the history of certain occupations over time, there is the tendency for occupations to upgrade themselves by extended periods of training, and in the process, leaving certain jobs on one side for others to do. Those jobs left aside in turn eventually seek training for what is then regarded as a "new" occupation. An example is general practitioners, who, historically, were barbers, who over time have shed many functions, first to the nursing profession, then to other health groups. Then Social Workers started existence as hospital assessors, became almoners, then sought university training and eventually became social workers, leaving many of .their earlier practical tasks for others to do. So over time, there is a tendency for occupations to upgrade themselves. The key issue is the provision of a ladder from one occupation to the training of the next, so that occupation can upgrade. ~

Our position on training ~ill then depend on our starting point. If we take a task centred view of work, we,will probably want to respond to training by continuing to establish new forms of training specific to the task by training within the education sector. (This would not exclude on the job training too, of course.) New forms of training will be seen as a way of negotiating changes to the task, and eventually to upgrading the occupation, allowing for new occupations to come in to carryon where the old occupation left off. The key question will be, ~lhat is special about this task? However, if we start with an industry based rather then a task based view of work, our responses

may be to make arrangements for the <u>occupation,</u> ahead of an analysis of the task. The type of task will be considered secondary to the traditional industrial concerns of wages, conditions and benefits. This approach will be not nwhat is special about our work?, but, nwhat do we have in common with other workers in other industries?n

The question is, in which direction should we be going? Some would want to argue that since the work of the Social and Community Services Sector is largely concerned with "people work" with tasks that are 'one-off', often ill defined and ambiguous and which rely on individual judgement and refined degrees of co-operation to get through the work, that it is inappropriate to develop industry-based models of training, since these have been based originally on production-type work. It may be appropriate to use an analogy of craft rather than production on the basis that the task is often 'one off' rather than standardised, is related to process as much as to outcome and relies on unmeasurable attributes such as empathy and judgement to get through the work. Nor does it lend itself to close supervision, and quality control of the product is difficult.

So do we *in* the SACS sector want our work organised similarly to production workers *in* other sectors of industry? Or should we see ourselves as craftspeople ahead of industry workers? If the intrinsic rewards, (the job satisfaction, the client contact and the opportunity to express a commitment) are more important than the extrinsic rewards (the pay and the conditions), the craft route will be the approach for some to consider. If the pay and conditions are the priorities, another choice will be made and the training choices will reflect this.

There are no easy answers to this question, and I have argued that we need a clearer view of the consequences of the choices involved. First, however, we need more information about the parameters of the sector and the nature of the task.

References:

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