ORGANISING LEADERSHIP, SCHOOLS, WORKPLACES AND GOVERNMENT IN AUSTRALIA

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Abstract: *This article explores the relationships between management, leadership and organisation during a period of structural renewal in schools, workplaces and government. It assesses 'assumptions of appropriateness' in attempting to transpose management practices between schools, workplaces and governance, and reports on the application of similar strategies within these different contexts. The project thus tested the underlying assumptions of various renewal strategies to identify the common ground shared by the solutions attempted so as to formulate improved understanding of the practice and theory of management, leadership and change. The conclusions point to practical applications of power as it applies to organising leadership through a process called Pragmatic Organisation Development.*

Introduction

For the last five years and more, workers in all levels of education in Australia were told that they needed to change management practices and organisational structures in line with 'best practices' in industry in order to make better use of dwindling government funds and to create a more flexible and creative workplace. The story is, of course, much more complex than that but, in a nutshell, these are the basic parameters of most the reports and reforms to the administration of public education in Australia in recent history.

So far so good. There was a crisis of confidence in public education in the 1980s which political parties of both persuasions exploited, and still do, for their own specific -- rarely educational -- interests (Crump, 1993a). There was (and remains) a concurrent crisis in the Australian economy, particularly over its cost effectiveness and international competitiveness (Marshall, 1987, p. 5). Schools bore much of the blame for the latter. A plethora of national reports followed aiming to vocationalise the curriculum of the compulsory years of schooling as well as that of the tertiary sector. What I want to explore in this article are the 'assumptions of appropriateness' that are made in all these developments for public sector public service institutions such as education taking on the features and values of management and organisational structures in industry.

The line of argument in this article is based on a position that seeks the common ground between education and the economic arenas of society. Indeed, it is hard to conceive of them as opposed or separate given that mass education was part of the development of industrial capitalism (Silver, 1990, p. 66). Part of the working hypothesis for this project was that renewal strategies in schools and industry could have a particular effect which translates across public and private sectors which reflect common interests and strategies for achieving efficient and participatory management practices. The basis for an hypothesis of this nature is a theoretical position based on Pragmatism (Crump, 1990; 1991; 1992a,b,c; 1993a,b; 1994a,b; 1995).

The argument also is sympathetic to the perception held by many educational workers in the 1980s and 1990s that the massive state public service and industrial union bureaucracies that

control careers and personal lives are in essence dysfunctional and miseducative (Crump 1993c; Glenn, 1993, p. 7). Reforms to the way classrooms, schools, regions and the nation as a whole conducted schooling were inevitable and desirable outcomes from the turmoil of the 1970s and 1980s. However, it is worth investigating what was *assumed* as appropriate when business management best practices were presented as the panacea for education's ills.

Management and Reform

Australia's top managers themselves warn us that management has been too negligent in taking greater responsibility for poor performance and profits, too reticent to establish a leadership that is educative for the company and its employees, and too unwilling to undertake genuine long-term production, technology and/or staff training strategies that might lift the company to world class competitiveness. In the late 1980s, many Australian managers attempted to pay for these failures through large-scale staff sacking, playing 'management macho games', in order to achieve short-term cost savings but keeping the company uncompetitive. As David Murray, head of the Commonwealth Bank in Australia argued, it is destructive to be,

> one of those people who thinks success in business is sacking people. Are we going to manage Australia by someone having a bigger number of staff cuts than someone else? I am concerned about that approach ... To lock into one particular number is a very negative way of managing. It's what the analysts want for their reports but it's a short term approach. ... the companies which maintained stability and the highest possible morale during that period [recession] would be able to change and grow at the same time (whereas) you don't help anybody by switching the whole organisation off (Boalch 1993, p. 19).

Similarly, Dr Michael Deeley, Managing Director of ICI Australia, viewed the constructive actions of management as the key to improving competitiveness. Deeley called for a radical reform to the way managers view their own organisation and its employees, suppliers and clients. He argued that to be successful:

> a company's policies and actions must reflect a change of attitude of management to its employees ... We need to move from seeing employees as an undesirable and variable cost to seeing them as an important investment; as the key to improving performance through fully utilising their talents (Deeley, 1991, p.2).

Deeley was convinced that the process for change begins with management including a clear and unequivocal commitment of management to change. The other key factor is the question of management technique over management styles. While these may be clearly distinguished in research analysis they are rarely distinguished in practice. Conceptually, they are not dualistic but part of an interactive whole. That is, in exploring why a management style may be autocratic or democratic, or whatever, it is impossible to ignore management techniques and even more erroneous to explore these as if they were context-free; abstracted from a context that shapes and limits what managers/management does.

The other point is that understanding management requires more than looking at style and technique. As Porter (1990, p.75) warned us, "change is an unnatural act, particularly in

successful companies; powerful forces are at work to avoid and defeat it". When discussing the role of senior management in achieving world class competitiveness, Brammar (1989) suggests Australian companies are not World Class because they fail to harness the creativity and intellectual resources of their employees. Brammar cites a Japanese car cost advantage of $2,200 [for 1982] consisting of 30% employee involvement compared to 35% for wages and only 3% for technology.

The conclusion, reached and implemented at Commonwealth Industrial Gases Ltd [CIG] in Australia was startling and in contradiction to the belief that Japan's advantage is leading edge technology. CIG demonstrated how, by involving employees, an organisation can improve productivity, quality, profit and staff satisfaction by as much as 100% without introducing new technology, at the same time as improving the return on funds from 6% to 30%. According to Deeley (1991), ICI Australia Pty Ltd, at the Botany operations in Sydney, achieved similar financial results at the same time as reducing industrial stoppages and absenteeism and eliminating overtime.

It needs to be stressed, however, that these gains were made through dogged hard work, painstakingly piecing together a jigsaw without all the pieces in view. There is no quick fix or instantly transportable solution, even though Australia's national government encourages intervisitation between successful and struggling companies. Semler comments on the search by companies big and small, Asian and Western, for panaceas for sagging productivity such as introducing quality circles in work place production problem-solving, Just-In-Time delivery systems, *Kanban* production, networking, total quality management and so on:

> In their desperation for quick fixes, too many executives are too quick to jump on the latest managerial fads and fashions (but) transporting Asian values to, say, Smyrna, Tennessee, is like wearing a kimono to a Tupperware party (Semler 1993, p. 226)

However, even faithful implementation of 'best practice' strategies may not in itself guarantee the types and levels of outcomes expected. Many best practice strategies are used to blame workers rather than management for poor productivity and profitability. They often require less protection for jobs and pay and they continue to disadvantage women employees. Further, by focusing solely on the micro-level, these strategies tend to ignore national and global explanations.

Why Renew?

It has been argued that Australian industry 'dug a hole for itself' throughout this century through relying on a selection of government subsidies, protective trade barriers, bureaucratic organisation structures, unsustainable employment benefits and centralised wage fixing procedures which rarely touched the genuinely disadvantaged workers (Lansbury, 1991). Fordist factory systems, based on standardised products, special purpose machinery, de-skilled tasks and flowline assembly built the industrial wealth of the twentieth century (Gittins 1993, p. 34). But, as Murray (1989, p. 40) argues, we are now in a post-Fordist phase for which mass production and its entourage (conflictual industrial unions, distorted agricultural production, *etcetera*) are similarly under threat.

One reason for the increasing irrelevance of this form of industrial production is the resistance and contestation of workers at all levels who, in the later twentieth century, resent Taylorist and Fordist systems. These systems are defined by Murray (1989, pp. 40-41) as "fiercely hierarchical, with links between the divisions and departments being made through the centre rather than at the base" expressing an economic culture marked by "authoritarian relations, centralised planning, and a rigid organisation built around exclusive job descriptions". As Venframin, one of Semco's Brazilian workers, told management after a world tour of workplace practice:

> There is no way to treat employees as responsible and honest adults unless you let them know and influence what is going on around them. (Otherwise) at some point the workers notice that they are never consulted about the really important decisions. (Semler 1993, p. 94)

This view is supported by Witte's (1980, p. 168) research into workers' participation in an American corporation. He argued that the promise of industrial democracy must be "translated into meaningful participation by individuals in critical decisions that control their lives". However, Witte saw this as difficult to achieve within the American culture of meritocracy without a different and more powerful theory of democratic representation.

Glenn (1993, p. 7) recognised that many of these dispositions in the workplace culture are taught. He noted (p. 7) that "school people learn to behave cautiously, teaching and disciplining defensively, out of a reasonable fear that something they do or say will incur the disapproval of a parent or of someone above them in the system, state or federal". The next section, will provide a case study of an Australian company attempting renewal.

Applying Industry Reforms to Renewal in Education

For the purposes of this article, it can be argued that a Fordist economic culture which extends beyond the factory complex into parts of the state apparatus is particularly destructive for education. As Glenn (1993, p. 2) stated:

> Listless following of rules and policies imposed through hierarchical lines of authority, routinisation of activities, evasion of accountability, emphasis upon working conditions rather than the work itself, refusal to take initiative, a "we/they" attitude towards clients ... these are damaging in any organisation, but absolutely inimical to the educational process.

One powerful influence for change in the 1980s was that of management reforms. Total Quality Management [TQM] is but one manifestation of the types of reforms popularised in the 1980s. Deming's 14 principles for business were seen by many as readily adaptable for an educational context, even though TQM moved beyond Deming's work. Some adaptations of Deming's work to education were unrealistic, naive, simplistic and self-contradictory. For example, Langford revised Deming's Point 6 as "Improve constantly and forever the system of student improvement and service to improve quality and productivity". Langford's Point 9, "Drive out fear so that everyone may work effectively for the system", contradicts Point 11 which starts "Drive out slogans, exhortations and targets ..." being a slogan in itself.

Siu-Runyan and Heart (1992) similarly argue that Deming's 14 principles can form the basis for restructuring the education workplace as they have for Japanese companies. Their work is a little more sophisticated and detailed than Langford's. However, Siu-Runyan and Heart fail to justify or explain the extent to which the application of Deming's 14 principles might become a controlling mechanism. While the control will be inside the school, rather than imposed from without, and will apparently have the concurrence of the participants, there is very little room for dissident or alternative voices. As Hague (1992, p.13) noted for Mitsubishi Australia Ltd., "the corporation certainly doesn't want anyone who will challenge negatively what is going on".

Even for those who argue that TQM does not equal Deming, Ball (1990) pointed out that the language of systems such as TQM are an 'imperialistic discourse' and act as a moral technology. Ball (1990, p. 165) argued that management through local practices displays the 'micro-physics of power' that touch every aspect of organisational life for which "the primary instrument is a hierarchy of continuous and functional surveillance". The "logistics of industrial production and market competition" creates, according to Ball (1990, p. 153), a workplace where teachers work is transformed so that:

> Teachers are increasingly subject to systems of administrative rationality that exclude them from an effective say in the kind of substantive decision-making that could equally well be determined collectively.

Pallas & Neumann (1993) concur that we may have been blinded by the light in attempting to apply TQM to educational organisations. Specifically, they document how the fundamental principles of TQM are largely incompatible with images of educational organisations as loosely-coupled systems and as complex cultures. This is an important point in that destroying loose-coupling through the application of TQM may mean abandoning:

> a structural feature that enables educational organisations to persist even when stakeholders' goals, preferences, interests, and sensemaking patterns are highly divisive ... Just as importantly (if not more so), TQM risks dissipating recognition of differences in people's views, beliefs, and orientations, thereby limiting thinking to prevailing norms and acceptable routines, and thwarting critique, experimentation, learning and thoughtful change ... What will happen to schools, colleges, and especially to teaching and learning, when institutions' structural and cultural capacities for accommodating differences are threatened? (1993, pp. 2, 38).

Pragmatic Organisation Development

One of the major problems facing individuals, as outlined above, in deciding where they fit in to an institution-work nexus, is identifying the limits and possibilities of their action. Identifying problems and seeking solutions can be represented as a worthwhile scientific endeavour, associated with pragmatic policy, teaching and business leadership. In using the term 'pragmatic' I am referring to the philosophy of pragmatism rather than to its generally understood attribute of opportunistic and hard-nosed action. Pragmatism is currently

enjoying a revival in interest in the 1990s. There is a particular resurgence of interest in the educational philosophy of John Dewey.

Pragmatism began as, and remains, a mediating philosophy. Dewey viewed education as continual growth. The function of schooling is to "enable individuals to develop in power and awareness" that is, to allow individuals to develop critical methods of thought (Scheffler 1986, pp. 240-4). For Dewey, the primary goal of the school is its long-range transformation of society through seeking solutions to the problems of the larger culture, a society illuminated by critical intelligence. Thus, pragmatism offers workers a very powerful tool for dealing with policy related to professional development and organisational management. It attempts to construe these under the conditions of increased powers, so that control may be vested in those whom the policy affects. As such, Pragmatic Organisation Development (POD) moves ahead of earlier work in Organisation Development and, more importantly, is quite epistemologically distinct.

To follow the pragmatist procedure, one needs to confront competing perspectives about the organisation, and identify problems by specifying points of agreement and conflict. Also, one needs to decide which of these points share common ground, that is, which provide a platform upon which the merits of the competing views can be assessed and solutions attempted. This procedure is a 'searching out' of common interests in order to adopt strategies which may satisfy common interests held by the various participants, opposing interests and entrenched power blocks in the management process. Clearly, this process is not an internal procedure, inward-looking and micro-perspective, but one impossible without the involvement and participation of as many stakeholders as possible. It is a procedure which works well at a discrete educational site, as well as between and within micro, meso and macro levels (Crump, 1993).

In the POD procedure, the organisation is identifiable as the managers and managed standing side by side facing a task or problem situation, in much the same way Dewey conceived classroom dynamics (Young 1990, p. 479). This is what makes a pragmatist model of organisation development so rich in possibilities. At present, far too much is made of working towards common goals and monopolistic ideals and traditions with little practical gain. Table 2 summarises the principles of POD.

1)	Pragmatic Organisation Development explores individual and group conditions.
2)	POD tests lived problems and competing solutions.
3)	POD sets no political, bureaucratic and professional divisions.
4)	POD allows for more equal sharing of power.
5)	POD negotiates power over different contexts and problems.
6)	POD shares as many perspectives as is possible.
7)	POD engenders democratic and productive procedures.
8)	POD takes into account micro-political aspects of decisions.
9)	POD expects a unity between formal goals and practical action.
10)	POD develops positive careers for educational workers.

TABLE 2: Principles of Pragmatic Organisation Development (POD).

The pragmatist perspective emphasises the coherent and mutually beneficial problem-solving and learning capabilities of individuals, groups and the organisation itself. It is grounded on experience, and a reflection of practice which is an alternative to the failure of the dominant policy implementation and management models. As Ball (1987, p. 5) argued:

> Theories of organisation actually become ideologies, legitimations for certain forms of organisation. They deploy arguments in terms of rationality and efficiency to provide control. The limits that they impose upon the conception of organisations actually close down the possibility of considering alternative forms of organisation. This is nowhere more clearly evident than in the current application of management theories to schools. Such theories marginalise empirical studies of school practice and dismiss the 'folk-knowledge' of teachers as irrelevant. They are as significant for what they exclude as for what they include.

POD principles suggest that a school should concentrate in the first place on shared problems which can be resolved far more readily even in the face of conflicting ideals, aims and needs. If a school must plan a mission, it is more likely to be effectively implemented if the mission statement has grown out of shared experiences and negotiated commitment to the organisation. School organisation should open up options for action which commit the school community to improved social practice or, put the other way around, which avoid debilitating conflict and division without constraining all members to the one common end.

What this tells us about educational administration is what POD tells us: it is not appropriate to transfer business management models to the public sector without modification. Nor is it effective to impose restructuring from the top of an educational system. Some aspects of business organisation may well become standard features in schools by the end of the 1990s but, if they are to last, they will have to emerge from the situation as a shared democratic solution to actual local problems. When reforms are imposed from above, the participants must understand whose survival the reforms are meant to ensure.

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