

# ODSPOT

Centre for Organisation Development *Newsletter*

Winter 2002

## CEOs Consider **Peer Support Program**

**Councils are constantly being asked to do more with less. The impact of more systemic approaches to initiatives like strategic governance, risk management, OH&S, triple bottom line, community consultation and organisation development are beginning to raise questions about the energy and resources required to maintain them on an ongoing basis.**

CfOD held a discussion forum for Local Government CEOs on 17 April 2002 to consider a leadership issue of increasing concern: How do we keep our people committed and engaged?

Ten CEOs from Councils throughout Melbourne gathered to discuss a proposal developed by CfOD to introduce a local government-focused

Mentoring could be an answer for staff members who ask themselves, 'How much more can I give without burning out?' Kay Rundle from Maribyrnong commented that 'Mentoring exists because people need help. Everyone has someone they talk to about their problems.'

**Who is responsible for motivation and career development – the individual, the organisation, or both?**

Sven Kling of Moonee Valley summarised the situation: 'The post-amalgamation culture has been setting boundaries around cost, quality and performance. This has created an increasing level of dependency because Councils are involved in several state and federal programs. Staff are also loaded up with so much that they feel they do not achieve at all. Dependency and overload are reducing motivation.'

It was generally acknowledged that this is a leadership issue and that a sector-wide approach is needed. Mike Allen from CfOD acknowledged there are 'stars' in organisations who will always be developed and supported in their careers. This program is more about generating broader access for all people to develop their capability and career path management within the industry.

Other issues raised in the discussion were: Who is responsible for motivation and career development – the individual, the organisation or both? How do we ensure that we do not set up a pseudo management structure in the form of mentors and coaches? How do we ensure that mentors and coaches are appropriately qualified and follow a process that has some rigour and accountability? What procedures will be followed to match potential mentors and mentees? How do we promote mentoring as a positive development option and not just another initiative?

The group agreed with the point made by David Spokes of Port Phillip that keeping up with new opportunities can result in over-reaching so that we, in fact, set up for failure. 'It's no good having 100 empowered people and then asking, what do we do with them?' (cont page 2)



City of Kingston CEO Rob Skinner in discussion with Mike Allen & Margaret Devlin of CfOD

and supported coaching and mentoring program. As expected, the discussion reached the heart of the issue quickly and frankly with CEOs raising possible advantages and disadvantages with such a solution.

**How do we keep our people committed and engaged?**

Generally, CEOs agreed that their people are suffering from too many new initiatives. There is a need to maintain momentum with initiatives already in place, so that more new initiatives aren't needed to stimulate interest and engagement. Phil Shanahan of Darebin said that this is 'a perennial problem' for organisations, with more being added while nothing is taken away.

**Council CEOs in attendance at the forum were: John Bennie, Manningham; Michael Kennedy, Mornington; Sven Kling, Moonee Valley; Ken McNamara, Hobson's Bay; Maria Mercurio,**

**Moreland; Kay Rundle, Maribyrnong; Phil Shanahan, Darebin; Rob Skinner, Kingston; David Spokes, Port Phillip; Don Welsh, Cardinia.**

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## CEOs Consider **Peer Support Program** cont.

Other CEOs commented on issues involved in the mentoring process itself. Rob Skinner of Kingston asked, 'How do you support the mentor?'

Maria Mercurio of Moreland thought it was important to 'look for mentors for individuals' either 'inside or outside (the organisation) if that is where the right person is'.

The group also agreed that promotion is not the only way of recognising achievement; that some staff are quite happy where they are; that not everyone has to be a leader; and that we need good followers as well. This is where peer support fits in. It consolidates approaches and supports people at their preferred level. At the same time it encourages them to extend their professional skills to reach greater job satisfaction at that level.

**Peer support consolidates approaches and supports people at their preferred level, while encouraging them to extend their professional skills to reach greater job satisfaction at that level**

In response to these issues, the Centre for Organisation Development proposed a sector-wide program that it would coordinate called, The Local Government Peer Support Program. Margaret Devlin said that 'The concept inherently values the development and support of people in local government and their ability to support and develop each other.' Member councils would have access to a pool of potential mentors and coaches in the same discipline or role. The program would be voluntary and people would have to be appropriately trained and supported before becoming a coach or mentor.

In conclusion, the CEOs found common ground on the issue of mentoring and agreed to remain involved to provide feedback and comment as CfOD continues its research and development of a Peer Support Program for local government. The next step will be a presentation to the CEOs of a draft model based on the discussion at the forum.

## **ATTRACTING & RETAINING STAFF IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA**

Many Councils face fierce competition in attracting and retaining key staff in Town Planning/Statutory Planning, Engineering, Environmental Health and Information Technology. This is particularly the case for regional Councils. Following a grant from the Federal Government's Local Government Incentive Program (2000/01), seven Gippsland Councils (Bass Coast, Baw Baw, Cardinia, East Gippsland, Latrobe, South Gippsland and Wellington) sponsored a Study in 2001 to find ways of increasing the applicant pool and raising the retention rates of existing staff. Cardinia's Manager Organisation Development, Steve Swiderski,

*15 recommendations provide practical solutions for improved service delivery including several models and applications for implementation*

managed the study on behalf of the Councils. Its findings indicate that a wide range of steps are available, with many relevant to all Councils. The Study makes 15 recommendations to provide practical solutions for improved service delivery including several models and applications for implementation. It addresses three common HR questions:

### **Why do staff leave?**

The key findings of the Study found that people leave regional Councils for three main reasons: (a) more money, (b) better career opportunities, and (c) work that is more interesting. Other reasons are heavy workload and lack of recognition in their current position. The Study makes recommendations to address this constant drain on Council resources.

*Cardinia Council has already adopted one strategy from the Study with its initiative to launch local government's first planning traineeship*



CEO Don Welsh & Study Co-ordinator, Steve Swiderski, both of Cardinia.

Cardinia Council has already adopted one strategy from the Study with its initiative to launch local government's first planning traineeship. The Council is developing a training arrangement with Swinburne University that will lead to a nationally accredited qualification. According to Steve Swiderski, 'The key objective is to provide an additional source of recruits for planning work and enable a redesign of processes to reduce the amount of time planners spend on activities that

could be undertaken by less qualified staff'. He said a briefing on the initiative attracted interest from a number of Councils. Cardinia expects to appoint its first trainee in May/June 2002.

### **Why is it difficult to recruit staff in regional Councils?**

The obvious reason is distance from main urban centres. However, the Study found that some people are attracted to regional areas not only for lifestyle, but also because a community has specific



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## *Local government is marketing itself better, but needs to research and focus those marketing efforts*

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characteristics that attract them. The Study therefore recommends that regional Councils find out how their region is perceived, what types of people are attracted to it and then prepare a strategy to market the region to people who potentially could be interested in relocating. The Study shows how such targeted recruitment efforts, together with other strategies, would yield a bigger pool of better-qualified applicants.

The Study looks at the state-wide shortage of Planners, the reasons why and ways to be more competitive in attracting candidates. Engineers are often difficult to recruit and, as with Planners, the local government work environment has been recognised as a contributing factor. Salary issues at the senior level affect the ability of Councils to attract and retain Engineers. All Councils have difficulty in recruiting and retaining Environmental Health professionals at the same time that this area is gaining greater community interest.

The shortage of Information Technology professionals in local government is likely to be ongoing, as it is elsewhere. The demand in this area is huge and staff shortages affect both government and corporate sectors. Salary issues, in particular, affect local government's ability to attract and retain senior Information Technology people in a highly competitive environment.

Large companies are often marketed at universities, but there is no activity from local government representatives. Local government is marketing itself better, but needs to research and focus those marketing efforts.

### ***How do regional Councils reduce turnover and retain staff?***

The Study makes a number of recommendations, particularly that Councils give priority to career path development and partnerships with tertiary institutions and industry.

### ***Classification & Remuneration Manual***

A further significant outcome of the Study is the development of a comprehensive Classification Guide. The Manual contains job descriptors for each work level within the employment groups discussed in the Study and is particularly useful for job design, recruitment and selection, career development and remuneration decisions.

The Study is recommended reading for all senior local government managers and will be available from June 2002 from Cardinia's web site. A discussion on the Study was included in a one-day conference (interactive forum) organised by LGPro/Department of Infrastructure on 28 May 2002 – 'The People Challenge: Staff Recruitment & Retention'.

If you would like more information on the Study, please contact Steve Swiderski on (03) 5945 4203.

# Open Space Technology

OD Group Member, Belinda Coghlan, arranged for her colleague, Viv McWaters, to demonstrate how Open Space Technology works in practice to the March 2002 OD Group Meeting. Attendees became participants in an Open Space Technology group. Viv showed us that it is a simple, spontaneous facilitation process that doesn't need a plan or agenda, yet achieves remarkable success in addressing key issues and opportunities. There is little preparation and few limitations. For instance, OST can be used with 5 people or 1000 people. If you want to know more, Harrison Owen is the originator and he explains all in *Open Space Technology, A User's Guide*, 2nd edition, 1997.

The four principles of Open Space are:

- 1 Whoever comes are the right people
- 2 Whatever happens is the only thing that could have
- 3 Whenever it starts is the right time
- 4 When it's over, it's over – be prepared to close and move on.



Participants gathering for an Open Space session must have a real business issue to resolve, such as providing a service, increasing the number of customers, or finding ways to cut costs. It does not work so well with concepts such as team building or empowerment. This is because Open Space runs on passion and responsibility. Passion means interest amongst the participants will be high; responsibility means that

outcomes will be practical and can be implemented. There will be changes in systems only if people take responsibility for things they are passionate about.

Open Space Technology allows all sorts of behaviours to take place and may create uncertainty and anxiety amongst participants. Viv reassured the group that this is part of the process, as out of chaos will surface some kind of order or system. In Viv's session, we were amazed at what the group produced and the creativity potential of the process.



# WHAT GIVES LIFE TO YOUR ORGANISATION

by Margaret Devlin Managing Director Centre for Organisation Development

Over the last 25 years of working in both public and private sectors, my experience has been that people are usually more willing to talk about what's wrong in an organisation rather than what's right. However the more they talk about what's wrong, the more they are likely to spiral into negativity and low morale. In 1980, David Cooperrider reviewed research on the connection between image and action using research from medicine, education and psychology. He developed Appreciative Inquiry (AI) – the idea that there is a connection between the images we hold of what is possible and the questions we ask about our past and present. Currently AI is a widely used Organisation Development approach in the USA, Europe and now Australia.

The AI approach to change can be applied to your family, your team, or your organisation. We have found in our recent application of the approach that AI is like a journey that engages people in creating the sort of team or community to which they want to belong. It focuses people on what

**Appreciative Inquiry is a widely used Organisation Development approach in the USA, Europe and now Australia**

happens when things are at their best. AI is a useful approach to strategic thinking, unlike traditional strategic planning, which seems mostly to be an extrapolation of the past.

The rationale in AI is twofold: (1) When you focus on the positive, it becomes a springboard or energiser for the future; and (2) It generates

exceptionally useful information about what to enhance and build on as you move into the future together. Very briefly, the phases of an AI-based

change process are to: initiate a meeting of the stakeholders; inquire by finding out what contributes to 'moments of greatness' so these can be expanded into the future; imagine collectively what could be and how it would be if moments of greatness were the norm; and innovate so that what we imagine can happen will happen.

**People are pleasantly surprised by the simplicity of the approach and the affirming, gentle way that shared values and vision emerge**

In recent facilitations of the AI process in several organisations, we have observed that people are pleasantly surprised by the simplicity of the approach and the affirming, gentle way that shared values and vision emerge. The positive core of the team and/or the organisation becomes the focus by surfacing and leveraging ideas, resources and positive possibilities to create a better future.

CfOD has commenced discussions with Marilyn Blair, editor of *OD Practitioner* and teacher of AI, in order to promote the awareness of Appreciative Inquiry in Australian OD practice. If you are interested in learning more about AI, we look forward to inviting you to participate in a future professional development opportunity.

***There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.***

***No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it. We must learn to see the world anew.***

Albert Einstein

## OD Group Membership

Confirm your commitment to Organisation Development by becoming a member of the OD Group.

Upcoming Meetings:

- 22 May 2002
- 26 June 2002
- 31 July 2002

Contact our office on 9867 2455 for membership details.

## OD Moves & News

### **Australian OD goes International!**

The 2002 Conference Program Committee of Organization Development Network, Canada, has selected Margaret Devlin to facilitate a session in October this year. The title of the session is 'Enabling an adaptive system in local government – An Australian Perspective'. We're thrilled to be invited to Montreal against fierce competition from all over the world. The theme of this year's conference is 'Cultivating Adaptive Systems: the Nature of Organization Development'. We would like to encourage as many Australians as possible to attend this Conference to establish an Australian presence on the international OD scene. As mentioned in our last newsletter, Organisation Development in Australia is up-to-date, if not ahead, of work in other countries.

### **The 6th Biennial Conference of the Australian Association for Psychological Type Inc.**

This Congress will be held at Manly Pacific Park Royal, 55 North Steyne, Manly, NSW from 19-22 September 2002. Keynote speakers are: Linda Berens INTIP (USA), 'Temperament – Source of Energy, Source of Psychological Health'; Marci Segal ISTP (Canada), 'A Psychological Understanding of Innovation'; and David Russell (Australia), 'Faith and Experience in Jungian Thought'. At this stage there will be around 18 Conference Presenters. Registration before 1 July is \$396 for members and \$473 for non-members.