

Debating the future of learning

Exploring online learning in the culture of correctional services organisations

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ISBN 1 920906 35 5 web edition

*An initiative within the Australian Flexible Learning Framework for the National Vocational
Education and Training System 2000-2004*

*Managed by the Flexible Learning Advisory Group on behalf of the Commonwealth, all States and
Territories in conjunction with ANTA*



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Executive summary

Introduction

Correctional services organisations, public and private, invest heavily in the training of staff, especially in preparing recruits for work readiness. While vocational training in Australia over the past decade has developed new strategies to make training more accessible and more flexible for users, there has been little change in the training strategies in correctional services. Training in Australia has seen the introduction of national industry standards and qualifications, the diversifying of a competitive training market, and the re-legitimisation of workplace learning. In many ways, the reforms have brought training in corrections into a wider VET system, together with other industry-based training. However, the reforms in the VET system have brought little change to the methods of training in corrections to reflect the rhetoric of flexibility, accessibility and continuous learning. This is, in the main, because corrections, in common with many industry training cultures, has never moved very far from the workplace for the skills development of staff.

Recently, the expanding investment in information technologies has delivered a new challenge to training practices in correctional organisations. The opportunities available from delivering training through readily accessible desk top computers and corporate Intranets offers the potential to extend training resources beyond what has been possible before. This promises to introduce the prospect of continuous learning throughout the work culture, providing a direct relationship between corporate objectives and confident workplace practice and refocusing on the connection between structured training and informal workplace experience. In the analysis of computer based learning, there are those who see it as a useful delivery technique to add to the standard training repertoire; visualising training manuals on screen. But new technology has a long history of having an irreversible impact on its surroundings. With this in mind, there are those who see that the technology has the potential to permeate deeply into organisational assumptions, values and practices, and to transform the relationship between learning and practice. If computer based learning is to be more than an alternative vehicle for transmission of content; if it can be an instrument of broad cultural change, it will require a strategic process of change management to generate organisation-wide support for targeted objectives. If connecting learning with the speed and immediacy of new technology can make learning more interesting and more available, and if in doing this it can confront the negative aspects of the workplace culture, it will be a genuine asset to management and to the continuous improvement of workforce skills and service effectiveness.

In his “online” address to the NET Working Conference in October 2003, Tom Bentley, Director of Demos, one of Britain’s leading independent Think Tanks, summarised the current idealisation of flexible learning. He described its promises as:

- multiple learning avenues and pathways,

- individual choice,
- a wealth and diversity of supply and options,
- instant access, and
- a dream of personalised content and method.

Most importantly, flexible learning is defined by its capacity to:

- raise the skill level and competency of both individuals and enterprises,
- foster knowledge creation in industry associated with the continuous improvement of services and practice quality;
- increase learning opportunities to provide for the present and needs throughout industry and the community.

However, this “idealised” prospect is tempered by the observation that such a vision is “heavily promoted by the rhetoric of information technologies”. Tom Bentley warned the conference of the impact of these idealised demands on established educational infrastructure struggling with the weight of popular and system expectations. At a time when we have lost the stable industry structures which supported the apprenticeship model of skills development, we run the risk of leaving influence in the hands of the information technocrats. To ensure that flexible learning is real learning rather than a technical gimmick, it requires the strong backing and influence of leadership in training, in the community and in industry.

Characteristics of the correctional workplace

Correctional services are traditionally large public sector organisations which have recently devolving some of their services through contracts with private corporations. This ideological shift in public sector governance has raised community awareness of many issues in the management of correctional facilities and has focused political attention on the service as a public investment in socially beneficial outcomes. One aspect of this change is the adoption of a more professional service culture, yet continuing to operate with demands which are very different from other public services. As a work environment, it is quite distinct from a hospital or a childcare centre, and this distinction is reflected in enduring features of the work culture of the service.

The work environment in corrections carries a significant duty of care for employers in their responsibility for their staff and for clients of the service. It shares its dual responsibility of safety and care with allied occupations in the human services and justice system responsible for the management of a high-risk service. In the management of a high-risk workplace delivering services for clients with complex needs, the skills and confidence of staff are the principal assets in determining the quality of service outcomes.

Because of unique features of the service and work environment, correctional organisations take responsibility for their staff training, with little involvement of the public VET sector. They have established a national industry advisory system, developed a Training Package, and they recruit through traineeships. Although the impact of these factors on industry training is variable, the big gain has been in access to national performance standards and national qualifications. The adoption of national standards provides the potential for collaboration across organisations in the high costs areas of design and training product development, but to date, there has been greater influence from the differences in services, with no incentive or benefit in the past for building common ground through training partnerships across organisations, or nationally.

Corrections RTOs comply with the Australian Quality Training Framework and have adopted the rhetoric of flexible and transferable learning. Despite the pressure on training resources; wide geographic dispersal, the constraints of tightly rostered work duties, constant shortages and high turnover of operational staff and the level of mandatory accreditation in specialist risk management areas, training has made only limited use of flexible options. Some organisations have developed distance learning resources, but these have all the disadvantages of fixed content and unappealing presentation. In the main, training in corrections relies on an academy model of classroom training, which is very costly, and workplace learning, which receives very little of the training budget.

Classroom training is very costly because staff, including trainees, are on full salary during their training, and rostered staff have to be backfilled, costing a double salary for each day of training. As a result, for all but the largest organisations, the resources of training stretch only to the provision of compulsory induction training for recruits, and to those skills which require mandatory accreditation. This is a particular burden for medium to small organisations where structured training has limited economy of scale, where work demands are inflexible and where releasing staff for training is often impossible because of insufficient replacement staff. In these organisations, it is essential that the work environment is able to provide the unstructured learning needed for the development of local knowledge, core skills, advanced practice and management competencies. To do this, learners need a work environment, which optimises positive opportunities for learning. It is essential that there is a collaborative relationship between staff responsible for the design and coordination of training and workplace supervisors whose role is to coach learners and model workplace practice.

The current Australian debate on the future of vocational education and training continues to assert the primacy of work-based experience in the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes:

Learning through work is what most workers nominate as the most important contribution to their learning. Indeed, the new worker-learner has emerged as a major focus of research. However, work is often not organised in ways conducive to learning. Creating the conditions for learning-conducive work is a

major challenge for both business and education and training sectors.” (ANTA: High Level Review of Training Packages Phase 1. Report, 2003 p.iv).

Just as VET institutions such as TAFE struggle with maintaining the relevance of their training through work allocations for real employment experience, so industry struggles with the impact of increased responsibility for employee learning on its capacity to service clients and maintain its ‘core business’. For most industries, training will be seen as a positive investment but it cannot use the resources needed to maintain the viability of the business.

Recent and accelerating developments in information systems in correctional organisations have triggered interest in how these systems can be used for a broad range of services to the organisation. The investment in intranet services has opened the way for access by all staff to immediate and interactive communication. This provides the opportunity for shared knowledge generation, access to current industry information and learning features which classroom training cannot readily provide. At an idealistic level, uniformly accessible communication throughout the widespread operations of organisations has opened the potential for greater sharing of knowledge, more dynamic construction of knowledge and practice, and more democratic problem solving and decision making. Most importantly, it has the potential to shift authority and control from hierarchical relationships to a new focus on individual responsibility and on accountability based on effective outcomes rather than rigid compliance with processes and procedures.

Until now, the approach to training has closely mirrored and reinforced the hierarchical relationships of command and authority, through the authority of instructors, the emphasis on operational procedures and the understandable priority given to security functions and disciplinary roles. While this is essential preparation for the management of a hazardous work environment, it leaves the development of more complex skills in client management to more arbitrary and unstructured influences. For structural and resource reasons, the continuous development of staff performance, especially in the emerging change agent roles, is dependent on existing workplace experiences and a work culture which is suspicious of change. A few adventurous individuals in training and IT have taken some small steps towards installing a modest range of online training courses on their intranets, not to signal a challenge to organisational culture, but to address the demand for basic computer skills amongst staff who, almost without exception, are expected to use computers in their routine duties. But there is growing recognition that this is only the beginning, and speculative voices in senior management are expressing interest in how the investment in IT may also become an investment in performance management and organisational development through a technology driven emphasis on a culture of learning.

The purpose of the research

The timing of this research is critical to the purpose of the research. When leading correctional organisations are on the cusp of investing in expensive developments in

online training resources, there are many important aspects of the management of such a process which will benefit from a new approach to debate, experimentation and collaboration. The main objectives of this research are:

- promoting discussion about online learning with interested parties and key decision makers in correctional organisations as an awareness raising exercise and to provide an opportunity to encourage broad and informed involvement in the beginning of a planning process for leadership in change;
- documenting the observations and experiences of key stakeholders in correctional organisations and the concerns and issues raised by them in considering the implications of experimenting in online learning;
- establishing a benchmark of contemporary practice and training experiences in anticipation of the need to monitor and review future developments in using new technologies in workplace learning, especially in the area of impact on organisational culture.

The project explored factors influencing complex organisations in their response to internal pressures to adopt external models of change. This includes varying reactions of stakeholders to innovation when it is associated with new demands on their roles, practices, environment and values. At heart, the dilemmas experienced throughout the project reflect the universal challenge of organisational change management, identified by Kaye Schofield: *"little is known about the thinking which lies behind the decision to adopt or not to adopt e-learning solutions, or how the corporate context affects that decision."*(Guthrie, 2003 p.163)

This project has allowed this question to be asked through the experiences of a sample of medium to small organisations, which are at different stages in approaching key decisions about the future design of workplace learning. These decisions involve using their investment in information technology to address current discrepancies between corporate expectations, current training effort and commitment of future resources. It is important to stress that the project did not undertake a definitive evaluation of online learning, nor did it set out to provide a balanced feasibility study for investing in online learning. The main purpose in using an action research approach was the dynamic interactions of investigation, speculation and application. Each case study organisation was explored through the experiences of key agents who are not the decision makers of the organisation but who are closest to the direct impact of new strategies for organisational learning. The intention of the project has not been to provide correctional organisations with the arguments for and against introducing online learning (they will undertake this analysis themselves), but to stimulate debate and generate resources amongst the potential champions of learning innovation.

The research questions

The research proposal used the broader concept of flexible learning in attempting to scope the influence of workplace culture in adopting flexible workplace learning. The questions asked:

- What does current research in online learning show about the role played by supervisors and middle management in supporting and promoting the workplace learning of staff through innovative strategies and technologies?
- What is the perception of a sample of supervisors/middle management of the legitimacy and effectiveness of a range of flexible learning methods?
- What is the perception of supervisors/middle management of their role in promoting and supporting workplace learning and their confidence in and familiarity with a range of flexible learning methods?
- What factors in the work environment and culture influence the attitude in and capacity of supervisors/middle management to support and promote flexible learning methods?
- What support is required by supervisors/middle management to maintain a positive culture of flexible learning in highly structured, hierarchical organisations?

Initially, the research activities kept an open view on what might constitute 'flexible learning' but the focus of interest soon concentrated on computer-based learning and online learning. Workplace experience is the primary method of learning in correctional organisations, and this is inherently flexible. Participants in the project were more interested in examining how computer technology might add value to the existing flexible workplace resources.

The project examined the different terminology applied in flexible learning. Computer based learning is understood to refer to the outcomes of training designed to be delivered on a computer, either by CD-ROM or installed on the computer hard drive. Online learning is understood to refer to the outcomes of training designed to be delivered through the Internet or an Intranet. Ultimately the distinctions were shorthanded to 'online learning' and the technological differences were regarded as incidental to the general principles of using a computer for learning.

The project teams found that the research questions are all slightly different ways of asking much the same question and found it more useful to identify issues from the experiences of other organisation and track these issues through their organisations. The big general question generated by this approach was:

- What does the experience of online learning in other organisations tell us about what we might expect to find in our own environments that will have either positive or negative impact on innovation in learning?

Research Methods

The project used a combination of surveys and an action research process in volunteer organisations to attract targeted participants, generate discussion and to experiment with examples of computer based and online learning. The overall aim was to analyse the implications of using a new approach to learning in the workplace and its potential impact on workplace trainers and their surroundings. The project used presentations to staff groups, training teams and senior management to get endorsement for the project from key stakeholders and to promote the project to interested participants. The project has relied entirely on qualitative information gathering; the surveys were not designed to provide numerical data, but to introduce the discussion on online learning to a wide and hopefully representative group of subjects and to invite respondents to become members of action teams or to contribute their experiences and observations through interviews. Senior management were canvassed through surveys with the intention of drawing them into local discussions to represent the issues of decision makers. The average age of survey respondents is 46 years; the youngest is 28 years and the oldest is 61 years. Survey respondents came from executive, senior management, workplace supervisors, workplace trainers, training managers, central office program managers, specialist trainers and senior staff.

Action teams were recruited through surveys which were distributed by email to a range of staff involved in training, but particularly senior management, supervisors, training staff and workplace trainers. The surveys were used to identify the extent of individual experience with online learning and the perceptions of respondents to the implications of adopting online learning in their work environments. Surveys were sent as attachments to emails to all RTOs, through the training managers, who used their discretion about distribution. All but one organisation contributed responses, though returns were much greater from case studies organisations. As a result of the fifty-seven responses from eleven organisations, fourteen volunteers from outside the case studies were interviewed, in person where possible and by telephone where not. The purpose of the interviews was to check that the case study organisations were generating information comparable across the industry.

In the case study organisations, senior managers nominated the appropriate participants for the action teams on the basis of their roles in supervision and training. Those nominated were invited to introductory presentations on the project and action groups were constructed from volunteers. Action group numbers fluctuated over the time of the project, and in two case studies, the original group evolved into a new group. In the three main case study locations, a representative core team of trainers persevered; keen to be involved in any post-project developments. The maximum number of participants in action groups was eight, eleven, and nine, respectively.

Action groups mapped out their areas of interest and their activities were designed to provide a diverse range of investigation, speculation and application. Each group nominated the timeframe for their participation and the support needed from the research team. This included:

- Internet information gathering on the experiences of other industries;
- visits to organisations currently developing and using online learning;
- provision of web design templates for experimentation with designing pilot programs;
- attendance at seminars and conferences for online learning;
- interviews with key decision makers;
- inclusion of key decision makers in information about online learning;
- access to examples of generic online programs such as Toolboxes;
- analysis of organisational features such as job descriptions, policies, procedures, consultation processes and intranet design;
- instruction in using some learning design software.

Activities included group discussions about training issues, review of training policies and resources, review of literature on flexible learning, attendance at VET network seminars and conferences, interviews with trainers in other industries developing online learning, and critiques of a limited range of available online learning products. Ultimately, action groups spent most of the research time on wide-ranging discussions and on designing some locally produced examples of online learning to test the demands on themselves and the reactions in their colleagues. The project had initially intended to use existing online products. However, the available examples are not sufficiently relevant to the practice context and therefore could not create a realistic and authentic experience for the purpose of analysis. As well, action group members were less interested in analysing existing products and more interested in testing their ability to develop their own products.

Planning the design of an online course was a very useful mechanism for pulling together all the varied factors to be considered. This included:

- identifying skills areas suitable for the medium,
- reviewing the features of professionally developed products,
- questioning people using online learning,

- analysing the work culture for supportive resources and for potential obstacles, and
- playing around with existing training content in a web-based template.

In one case study organisation, a serendipitous combination of interests at senior management level turned the simulation into a real exercise with the full backing of senior decision-makers and the involvement of the training unit. In the introductory stages of this project, senior management took the opportunity to channel the interests of the project into the real planning, design and development of an online course. The progress of this online course has been a principle source of information for the research project and an invaluable case study of what can really happen when the catalysts for innovation all come together.

Neither the real, nor the simulated development projects are complete at the time of writing this report, but action groups have maintained their interest in what they see as inevitable. Their action has generated a momentum of interest and a spreading net of engagement in the issues, throughout the organisations. Spontaneous email exchanges take place between staff from very different operational areas, who have discovered a common interest in online learning. Relationships have been established across operational and strategic sections with commitments to unconventional shared ownership of ideas and resources. In at least one organisation, the sensitivity of staff to their roles and relationships became an issue to be respected and approached sensitively. For some action group members, the experiments became uncomfortably real, especially where they were seen to precipitate decisions which were yet to be made, and for which there has been no official endorsement.

The participating organisations were very patient and tolerant of the intrusion of the project on their demanding work routine. Raising debate about new technologies and new ways of packaging existing concepts can unintentionally imply criticism of, or a judgement of inadequacy in the current practices. The project did arouse the kinds of anxieties, and detraction expected in real organisational change, and provided evidence of the vital importance of a comprehensive (rather than piecemeal) approach to change management. At the completion of the project, the action groups are optimistic that new learning technology will be implemented successfully at some time in the future (most participants predict longer term, rather than imminent). Organisational change strategies are now a familiar process for action groups, and for many participants it was a very new experience to be part of the collaborative construction of innovation, giving them insight into being on the driver side of organisational change.

General observations

The introduction of online learning has the potential to challenge and to extend established training practices by providing greater access to corporate information and expectations, transparent training content and learning processes, and more

reliable assessment and record keeping. The project identified general support for the advantages online learning provides in using available technology to overcome distance, provide immediate access to information, link individuals and whole organisations through digital communication, and employ database software to automatically generate reports and maintain records. These factors alone are seen to justify investing in online learning for many organisations in correctional services.

However, new technology brings the promise of more fundamental reforms in its capacity to sweep away the obstacles of the past. Often things have been done in the only way that they could be done. The research project looked at the factors which are influencing decisions about adopting online learning, and it saw a potentially new way of managing organisational learning. Through the alignment of individual learning with organisational development, the potential in online learning takes on a new dimension. The relationship between training and organisational development requires a consistency of focus and commitment throughout the organisational culture. In a report on the role of workplace training, the authors observe: "Work and learning are inextricably interlinked, and shape each other in a dynamic inter-relationship: for example, when trainers structure and manipulate work processes to accommodate employee learning" (Harris et al 2000:vi). Concepts such as 'the learning organisation' propose interdependence between organisational and personal development, associated with the continuous construction of skills, knowledge and values in a collective and corporate context. The language of organisational culture change suggests a dialectic process between those directing change in practice and values and those undergoing change (Tennant, 2000: 54; Viljoen & Dann 2000: 496).

From the research documenting the experiences of institutional VET providers, the project confirmed the importance of four key requirements, which need to be addressed in any successful preparation for online learning. Essentially these define the commitment of the organisation to supporting and building the confidence of trainers and learners in their involvement with learning technology. This includes:

- specific professional development for trainers who are involved in online delivery in both design and facilitation skills;
- allocation of dedicated IT and training staff to support online learners so they can depend on rapid response to enquiries and help on technology problems;
- establishing policies and guidelines for online learning and for trainers, workplace supervisors and learners;
- establishing the roles and responsibilities of learners, trainers, workplace supervisors, managers and assessors.

The most obvious advantage that online learning has is its capacity to provide a structure to the learning that happens in the workplace. This is in contrast to classroom training, which can comment on, but cannot actively construct workplace practice. It is also different from routine work experience, which is unstructured and

which may or may not result in positive learning and which has limited context in which to challenge existing practices and construct future practice. Through the action research projects, it has been attractive to speculate on how online learning might be directed at reforming workplace culture. Is it realistic to expect that online learning can build self-directed learners and thereby foster a strong sense of personal responsibility in staff; can it encourage staff to take more risks, experiment with different ways of working and develop new awareness from reflection on experiences; and can it create commitment to the inevitability that continuous improvement in practice requires continuous change? Or is online learning, as some more cynical participants observed, simply another use of training to resolve management's problems.

The project concluded that there is already a strong expectation in correctional organisations that online learning is on its way. Of the fifty-seven survey returns, forty nine predicted that online learning would come 'in the longer term'. While there are many features of correctional organisations that will provide a good foundation for online learning, there are still significant obstacles which will have to be addressed. Trainers and supervisors identified the factors they believed are likely to influence both the corporate decision to introduce online learning and the potential for its acceptance and its effectiveness. At a broad level these factors include the attitude toward learning in the culture of the organisation, the attitude to change of practice and values, and the investment in technology. Other influential factors include investment cost, support resources, quality of learning, learner support, and technology. The personal issues of those involved in training included consideration of their roles and responsibilities, their professional development, the demands of course development and maintenance, and technology. Everyone was concerned about technology. The project tried to limit its involvement in matters of technology, with singular lack of success. It may help to first recognise that the shortfalls in technology were the most cited issue of concern throughout all the project activities.

Summary of conclusions

- There is a high level of support and enthusiasm for the introduction of online learning and for the advantages of accessible and more flexible provision of training for staff.
- The viability of online learning requires a commitment from organisations to invest in the technology needed to run the programs and on policies, which ensure appropriate access for learning and collaborative work agreements between specialists in training and IT.
- The current government strategies to promote and inform flexible learning in VET have limited appeal and influence in many industries, and especially in those industries which have no traditional relationship with public training provision.

- There is support for online learning developed within a blended model and integrating a continuum of learning strategies and resources based on learning effectiveness and corporate priorities.
- Online learning will redefine the roles and skills of training staff and will require investment in the development of existing training staff into new roles and new job descriptions for training staff and in new concepts of learning culture.
- Training staff will benefit from encouragement to participate in wider VET networks promoting and supporting flexible learning models, and drawing on more advanced experiences and resources.
- The extension of structured training into work locations will require a formalisation of the roles of workplace supervisors in providing support to learners and in manipulating the work environment for the coordination of online learning activities with workplace experiences.
- Training resources will benefit from advocacy alliances and peer support networks of trainers in partnerships with allied industries.
- The development of online learning programs provides organisational decision makers with the opportunity to ensure that corporate standards and expectations, and the culture needed to implement new work practices are clearly reflected in the design and content of the materials.
- The development of online learning programs and materials is more cost effective for the industry and more feasible for medium to small correctional organisations when undertaken in collaboration across jurisdictions. Such an approach will require high-level agreement on common practice, copyright and intellectual property. The design of online learning programs should optimise the commonality of practice across services and allow ease of local customisation.

Recommendations

The action research project has enabled the participating organisations to dwell more deeply on the issues surrounding online learning and its likely impact on their organisations and workplace cultures. The research teams have endeavoured to identify and analyse the positive elements of the work environment, and the barriers likely to be encountered. Clearly, this work will be of value to the industry and to those responsible for promoting the efficiency of workplace learning and the tools which will foster this, if the findings of this research can be used to anticipate and address the barriers. A great deal of the tasks ahead lie with correctional organisations, while support for their efforts can come from a more industry training focus in the Flexible Learning Framework and in the strategic objectives of government and support for industry initiatives and effectiveness.

For Correctional organisations

If correctional organisations are to invest in online learning for staff development they will need to address the technical, environmental and cultural barriers which impede access and acceptance.

Technology

Correctional organisations must invest in information technology systems able to support and deliver interactive and multimedia programs. Operational staff need to have fair access to computers, printers, e-mail, the Internet, CD-ROM, sound and video and support systems comparable to that available to central office staff. The investment in online learning will be frustrated and counterproductive without the technology to support it.

Relationships

Correctional organisations need to seriously address the adversarial nature of the relationships between staff and management and between operational facilities and central office and focus attention on culture change management, the development of positive relationships of mutual benefit and trust and the development of a professional work culture.

Leadership

Correctional organisations need to recognise the change management process required to influence the culture of the correctional work environment and the importance of sponsoring leadership positions aimed at providing credibility, support and role modelling for colleagues in using diverse workplace learning and moving the workplace to a learning environment.

Policy

Correctional organisations need to develop corporate policy with two purposes; to engage staff in the formulation of principles and practice, and to provide a guide to ongoing practice through expressions of corporate objectives, commitment and resources.

Support

Correctional organisations need to support the new demands of online learning through:

- professional development of training staff,
- allocation of online study time in staff rosters,
- programs which encourage and acknowledge diversity and innovation in practice and in the learning environment,
- encouraging training staff to build their knowledge and confidence through participation in wider networks of VET professionals,
- defining the roles and responsibilities of supervisors, trainers and assessors in linking learning with the work environment, and
- recognising the outcomes of online learning in career progress.

Continuous improvement

Correctional organisation need to consider the benefits of promoting continuous learning by ensuring that all training includes a component which is available online and which is designed to provide underpinning knowledge, learning resources, preparation for learning, self assessment exercises, simulations and assessment reports. Online programs should be accessible for primary skills development and for continuous reference, refreshment and advancement of knowledge and practice. Learning strategies need to reflect the dynamic nature of organisational development and the relationship between on-going individual learning and service quality and improvement.

Collaboration

Correctional organisations need to consider the benefits of working collaboratively across jurisdictions to share the high cost of design and development of online learning and to optimise the cost effective demand for and use of resources. This can be achieved through:

- agreement on a common design platform,
- division of responsibilities for development,
- shared intellectual property,
- supporting close collaboration and sharing resources amongst RTOs, including work exchanges and cross jurisdictional professional development,
- recognition of the different needs and resources of jurisdictions,
- pooled resources for project management, coordination and resources development,
- industry-wide partnerships for funding contracts with national promotional programs.

For the Flexible Learning Framework

Networks

Flexible Learning initiatives for the promotion and implementation of online learning need to set targets and invest resources in the extension of learning technology and programs throughout industry, where the majority of vocational learning takes place. Industry RTOs need to be able to provide their learners with the same quality of accessible and flexible learning resources as those available through TAFE institutes. This can be achieved through:

- actively promoting and funding innovative leadership positions in key industries and in industry partnerships through dedicated programs which take account of the specific conditions of workplace learning and the differences between workplace learning and public learning;
- establishing industry exemplars of online learning with resources for wider mentoring, case studies and role modelling;

- commissioning inexpensive and user-friendly online learning platforms and templates available for organisations whose RTO work is not their core business and who do not have dedicated experts in learning technology;
- dedicating resources and priorities to industries' need for professional development programs and for resources to address the limitations of technology systems, especially in promoting the new units on online learning in the Workplace Training and Assessment Training Package;
- providing incentives to promote collaborative partnerships between allied industries and industry market and supply chains to encourage cost effective development and supply of online learning programs and resources;
- providing incentives for the publicly funded experts in online learning to share their skills through the development of expert practitioners on industry;
- targeting industry RTOs in promotional programs and for conferences, showcasing and innovation awards;
- if toolbox development is to continue it should introduce criteria which reflects workplace learning conditions, industry determined needs, and the promotion of online learning design and maintenance skills in industry RTOs.

For Government Training Departments and Authorities

In developing policies and strategies to promote and expand flexible learning, consultation processes should ensure that there is a healthy representation from industry RTOs and should make use of inclusive language and rhetoric which recognises that industries themselves are significant providers of training. Formal policies and promotional material should guard against perpetuating the assumption that the training provider is TAFE (or a commercial RTO) and that industry is the consumer of training. The rhetoric of reports and promotional material maintains a dichotomy between VET providers and industry, rather than representing industry as a serious VET provider in its own right. Governments need to ensure that policies and strategies for flexible learning flow through to generic VET policies and strategies, especially in the measures of learning activities and outcomes and in the calculation of resources.

Implementation Guides for Training Package qualifications should consider allowing RTOs to identify the components of training which are suitable for online learning and allocate resources for the initial development of programs, replacing delivery formula based on student contact hours. User Choice funding for traineeships should factor in the development of online learning resources based on state targets and priorities for converting student contact training to suitable online material. The incentive payments from the Commonwealth Department should provide incentives to transfer suitable learning materials to online delivery. Governments have to seriously tackle the contradiction in using student contact hours as a measure of the cost of competency based learning and RTOs should be given incentives to improve the productivity of learning investment through creative approaches to technology and workplace experience.

Government should consider extending its programs to provide broadband access for public training providers to industry training providers.

The research experience

The choice of an action research method for this project was appropriate for the purpose and the context of investigation. The planning of the action resulted in three distinct components of information gathering; investigation, speculation and application. From the focus on these strategies, the research evolved into the following components; learning from the experiences of other, understanding the workplace culture, locating leadership, stakeholder expectations, technology, design of learning, partnerships and network.

What we learned from the experiences of others

The first observation that needs to be made about research literature on online learning is that there is an awful lot of it. This is recognition of the institutional fascination with the vast and new opportunities created by the Internet and digital communication technology, especially in extending the market for structured learning and the capacity of the technology to overcome the geographic strictures in catering for regional Australia and in responding to the lure of the international training market. It is also recognition of the extent of concern raised by this particular medium and the many issues that training providers (individual and institutional) find themselves grappling with. Part of this concern is the inevitable and human response to cultural change, in this case in education and training culture, and the fear that change will equate to compromise of quality and deterioration in standards. It has also been suggested that there are many academics breaking into this new field who are keen to publish their research and experiences in academic and journal publications and through government sponsored research programs.

The second comment on the research literature is the dominance of the institutional perspective and the limited examples drawn from implementing corporate or industry developed online learning in workplaces. There are factors inherent in delivering training to a widely dispersed and effectively anonymous and unconnected cohort from the community, which takes a different perspective when training is directed at well-known individuals closely connected to the training provider and readily connected to each other for real discussions and to real mentors. For those enrolled in institutional courses there is artificiality in the timeframe, and the need for simulations of real work practice. For workplace learners, the learning reality is routine workplace practice and the learning resources are a secondary means to consolidate those real experiences. For learners enrolled in institutional programs, the online course may be the only learning direction and resource available to them; for workplace learners, their daily environment and routine experiences will continue to be their principal source of learning, and online resources may only serve to supplement and focus their individualised experiential learning.

Because of the very limited experience of online learning in corrections, it was important to gather information on the experiences drawn from other industries and training providers to stimulate discussion in the project teams. The review of reports from contemporary research and evaluations provided discussion points in action groups and in interviews. In many ways, the findings of previous research played a

more important role than that of providing a research context. These research findings provided windows through which the action groups and those interviewed could see the potential and reflect on the likelihood of the experiences of others being reproduced inside their own organisation.

In examining the findings of contemporary research on online learning, the project concentrated its search to those papers produced after 2000. While we cast a wide search initially, the most relevant information came from recent studies of workplace learning, learning cultures and organisational change. The NCVER publications, in particular *Online learning; Research readings* (Guthrie 2003) provided a very comprehensive collection of contemporary research findings which, while they still draw heavily on data from institutional learning, have refocused emphasis on a broader view of VET with conclusions that are certainly valuable for any industry approaching an investment in online learning.

The papers prepared by ANTA for its *High Level Review of Training Packages* (ANTA 2003) have also been very valuable in providing a contemporary context for the VET system as a whole, especially its relationship with industry. These reports provide an excellent synthesis of the current influences on vocational training and learning and on the drivers likely to influence the future delivery of VET. Interestingly, and worth noting is the complete absence of any reference to online learning and the implications of learning technologies in this analysis. Remarkably, the key stakeholders consulted in the gathering of information for these reports did not consider issues of new technology in learning relevant to this review. This may be of concern if it indicates a gulf between the online learning market and industry standards and outcomes.

In the debate about what influences effectiveness in online learning the major focus of research has been on institutional delivery systems. TAFE and university provision of VET dominates the analysis of measures of quality and effectiveness in adopting online delivery of courses. This suggests that the major investment in online learning has been in the publicly funded system. Meanwhile, evidence from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates that more than two thirds of training is informal workplace learning. Amongst the provision of structured training, TAFE institutes account for 36% of vocational training and universities provide for 14%, leaving a range of industry specific providers catering for the majority of structured training (NCVER, 2003). While some aspects of the research based on institutional provision are relevant to workplace learning, there are many important aspects which do not apply and which are important for the information needed by industry to understand the implications of investment in new learning technology.

The adoption of online learning by industry as a strategy in the totality of workplace learning will benefit from the experiences of the institutional providers but further research in industry experiences will progress the models available by adapting institutional experiences to accommodate a different environment and context.

Workplace trainers are not only the vehicles for content and current practice but will be an important resource to senior management in giving direction to more effective training strategies and making efficient use of external experiences and resources. Industry trainers derived great benefit from connections with outside networks, providing them with professional development and advice from the experience of others in innovative training. Innovation and change needs to be fed from outside to build confidence to challenge internal assumptions and entrenched values. The contact with innovators demonstrated that reviewing and developing training strategies in collaboration with allied industries and experts in new technologies can foster new ways of seeing through problems and blockages. The project groups acknowledged that if supervisors and workplace trainers are to support innovation and change they need to be exposed to challenge to their experiences and their roles. This includes recognition of the importance of their roles and a positive approach to review of practices, including a willingness to abandon assumptions based on how things have always been done. Participants looked for useful literature from the Internet and developed a directory of useful websites for future reference and for the benefit of other corrections organisations.

Impact of flexible learning

Workplace learning is manifestly experiential and flexible. The term ‘flexible learning’ is a construction of training institutions and tends to mean learning, which derives from methods and resources used outside classroom delivery. Some industries have been promoters of the flexible learning provided by institutions to supplement their workplace learning. The proposition that industries might develop their own versions of flexible learning for their own internal use has swung the focus of ‘flexible’ to the learning that can be delivered through the computer on the desk used as a routine work tool, and the Intranet, which is increasingly the vehicle of organisational communication.

In the paper *Preparing for flexible delivery: learners and their workplaces*, the research identified areas which could create barriers to successful implementation on models of online learning in the workplace.

Learners:

may not always be ready for the self-directed forms of learning that underpin successful flexible delivery. There is evidence that learner preferences are predominantly for instructor-led programs of instruction engaged with in social environments. There is also evidence that the detailed strategies of self-directed learning may not be well developed in these learners.

Enterprises

are not necessarily clear about the sorts of processes and policies they need to have in place to support effective flexible delivery. There are issues associated with the value placed on flexible learning within enterprises—its

competition with production imperatives and the accessibility of human, physical and learning resources needed to support flexible learning.

Trainers and supervisors

will need new skills to develop and support flexible learners.

This research was designed to identify strategies that may be available to support learner development and workplace development, that are feasible for implementation in operating workplaces faced with different sets of competing priorities. (Smith, Wakefield & Robertson, 2002)

It is impossible to overlook the importance given to issues of technology in research on successful implementation and organisational acceptance of online learning. However, research provides valuable evidence that the technology is only the beginning of embracing new methods and processes for learning. The papers in the NCVET collection *Online Learning: Research readings* (Guthrie, 2003) and the NCVET report *What makes for good workplace learning?* (NCVET, 2003) shows that organisations which have developed an effective training environment for flexible learning are characterised by a number of features essential for introducing a technological and multi-media approach to training and staff development. These include:

A planned approach

Successful implementation requires a well articulated training plan and policies which emphasise the value of continuous learning to both the organisation's practice and the satisfaction and career development of staff. Most importantly, the training plan will clearly articulate with the organisation's strategic objectives and will express its outcomes in terms of the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for the organisation to deliver its services and products. Training plans and policies allow management to endorse the features of online learning which distinguish it from the limitations of the training room. The plan will identify the key stakeholders inside and outside the organisation and will ensure their active endorsement of plans and policies.

Structured resources

Successful implementation requires training and human resource structures which allow for access to learning in the production schedules or rosters. Service industries need to argue for investment in resources to support learning on the grounds of measurable forms of improved productivity through improved quality. This is particularly so in the public sector and where outcomes are complicated by a political context and by a vertical chain of fiscal control.

Training Values

Successful implementation requires an explicit emphasis on skilling training teams to understand and support:

- development and management of self directed learning;
- continuous development of skills and knowledge;
- networking and team interaction to ensure that learning is consistent with best practice;
- availability of learning resources – human, physical, courseware.

Challenging practice

Workplace learning causes tension around expectations – “On the one hand (enterprises) believed that trainees should ask questions, but that they needed to accept the supervisor’s answer. On the other hand, they believed that trainees should be challenging the current practice” (Smith, Wakefield, Robertson, 2002; p 22). Workplaces need to adopt mechanisms to support risk taking and to use the experiences (including mistakes) of learners to review and to propose changes to practices as a routine team responsibility.

The value of research on flexible learning

Having said that the investigation process was very useful, it was actually the least interesting and the most difficult to sustain for most participants, particularly in the very early activities where action teams were uncertain what they were going to get out of the project. It was very clear that searching literature and research papers for useful information is not the preferred source of advice for industry trainers.

Action groups found that VET seminars and promotional events for flexible learning provided some practical and relevant information to workplace trainers. To some extent, the value of this depended on how personally committed participants were to the project, how comfortable they were with ‘VET-speak’, and how active they were in the design of the pilot programs. Some felt that information based on TAFE and university courses was only marginally relevant and some felt that the presentations from other industries suggested that corrections is well in advance of the field, a strange conclusion given its limited experience compared to these other industries.

Project groups found that the most practical and constructive information came from direct contact with key people in allied industries with experience in developing or using online learning programs. The project teams drew on the experiences (both positive and negative) of the one correctional organisation using a comprehensive online program, some examples from commercial programs installed on Intranets, examples of very early stages of feasibility studies in two correctional organisations, as well as Police, Emergency Services and some examples of occupational health and safety online training. The experience of other organisations was valued in direct proportion to the status of the other organisation and the degree of operational overlap. The project appreciated the spirit of collaboration and informal mentoring which evolved through the generosity of pioneers championing their passion.

Towards the end of the project, teams began to explore the benefits to the industry from fostering and promoting key staff as champions of learning to work in different organisations facilitating collaboration and shared resources, and linking key people in a range of allied industries and amongst the wider sector of VET providers.

The culture of learning - positive drivers for online learning

While in many respects, correctional organisations are cautious and conservative in their response to external influences promoting reform, they have been tentatively receptive to trends in corporate governance, and management theory connecting learning with continuous improvement, performance management, and organisational development. They are less receptive to the influences of productivity, competition and market advantage. The strategic objectives of correctional organisations include expectations of organisational development and change, grappling with the principle that “constant change is part of what makes an organisation good and the only way in which constant change becomes constant improvement is when the mission is clear and present in the minds of its people, when the operational values are being adhered to and when the organisation is comfortable with a relatively high pace of change” (Ingstrup 2002: 11). The emergence of online learning, with its aura of innovation and its promise of spreading learning opportunities throughout the organisation has the potential to deliver the ‘learning culture’ which has so far been elusive in correctional organisations. The project teams used literature on organisational culture and the observations of work locations to identify the components of a learning culture.

Defining a learning culture

The action groups identified the following components of a learning culture:

- individual responsibility for continuous improvement of client services and team practice;
- routine review of team objectives and outcomes against clear, readily accessible corporate standards for practice;
- relationships of trust able to challenge embedded values and practices and to take safe risks;
- learning on the basis of need rather than competition for resources;
- quick response to identified learning needs of individuals and teams;
- strategic relationships between learning and performance development especially access to learning for new practice requirements;

- learning directly and immediately related to routine work activities and practice needs;
- access for everyone to up-dated organisational information including new workplace requirements;
- learning content and materials developed collaboratively reflecting corporate values and standards of practice;
- partnerships between trainers and practice experts to promote continuous improvement of practice;
- everyone sees themselves as both trainers and learners.

Barriers to online learning

Research on the experiences in case studies of corporate organisations identify barriers to the successful implementation of online learning in the workplace (NCVER, 2003; Cashion & Palmieri, 2002; Brennan, 2002; Candy, 2002; Smith et al 2002). Some of these barriers are, predictably, the flip side of the factors which contribute to success listed above. They are:

Learner characteristics

Employees are expected to use self-directed learning without knowing whether they have the skills to do it or a positive attitude towards it. Employees have been conditioned to value instruction led programs over individual discovery learning. This value is reinforced in traditional models of training with their exclusive reliance on trainer directed learning and a task prescriptive approach to workplace learning. There is an enduring suspicion that flexible models of learning are a second best option, one necessitated by cost reductions or by the increasing dominance of technology. Staff can be easily persuaded that online learning is the home brand option, especially in an adversarial industrial climate, which values effort in terms of how much it costs management. As well, there are well-founded assumptions that self-directed learning, in particular, online learning is more difficult than the conventional training room method. For many staff, a positive learning experience is associated with the social dynamics of group interaction, including a need for reassurance from favourable comparisons with others in the group, and sometimes with the trainer. For staff who are sceptical or indifferent about their learning needs, the training room is easier. It gives them a break from work, it can be seen as a 'day off', and for some it gives them a rare opportunity to challenge management's position and demands on them for new skills or work practice.

Demands of the job

Workplaces don't have policies and processes in place to support flexible workplace learning. Learning has to compete with rosters and work commitments and with the

variable attitudes of supervisors and trainers. Managers are under pressure to work with inadequate resources where non-core activities are a luxury without the explicit commitment and support of senior management and training units. Training units can see the introduction of new technology as an additional demand on their time and resources and can be compelled by the risk that current training programs (and values) will be undermined by new requirements. The need for different skills amongst trainers causes tension about requiring trainers to undertake training themselves and the potential shift in control from those with traditional training skills to those with the technological skills.

Online learning in a learning culture

Current research on workplace learning, particularly in the context of flexible learning, is notable for addressing the distinction between training and learning, between delivery methods and learning styles, between input and outcomes. Implicit in these distinctions is the invitation to employers to examine their values about delivery of a training product and to recognise the holistic experience of learning through the experiences of the workplace. The debate about the capacity of work environments to develop a culture of learning is not new and is not specific to the issues associated with online learning. (Schofield 2002: Cashion & Palmieri, 2002)

The inherent challenge to existing practices created by a radically new model of delivery has revitalised the old debates. By its unique delivery mode and its accessibility, online learning in the workplace is indivisible from analysis of the culture of the workplace and its role is fostering learning. Part of this is the pragmatic argument that costly investment in computer based learning resources will be wasted if organisations are unwilling or unable to provide the supporting resources needed for effective use of the new accessibility. At the same time, employers should not allow themselves to be seduced by claims and assumptions that workplace learning is cheaper than the academy or classroom version (Curtain, 2002). The role of training staff in promoting a learning culture is not guaranteed. Trainers need to be pragmatic about their resources and their limitations and a responsibility for effective training may not include any responsibility for the wider environment in which the learner operates. Indeed, this may be a clear demarcation between the training role and the management role.

Features of a learning culture

Research on workplace learning has provided us with valuable analyses of the characteristic features that distinguish a positive workplace learning culture. These research findings have been summarised in the NCVER report "What makes for good workplace learning?" In essence, a learning culture is created when "training and learning are part of doing business and are included as an integral part of the strategic planning cycle" and where the organisation recognised the value gained from "aligning human resource development plans with the strategy of an organisation, and business units within the organisation" (NCVER 2003:4) In her study of four Australian companies, Kaye Schofield concluded that a learning culture

depends on a high performance strategy in organisational planning and staff in human resource management who fully embrace and integrate continuous and accessible learning throughout all facets of the organisation (Schofield 2003).

The features of a learning culture are characteristic of an explicit expectation of high performance through changing practice, teamwork and commitment to training.

The NCVET report, "What makes for good workplace learning" (NCVER 2003) summarises these features as:

Communication

This was found to be an essential ingredient in fostering a learning culture. It includes opportunities and recognition of the value of staff being able to share their experiences of learning with their team members, and to use that communication to influence the practice of the whole team. It also includes the development of communication skills to foster the value of networks and to make an active contribution to decision making.

Innovative systems/structures

These include the endorsement of practice standards, and the implementation of performance assessment systems such as competency based assessment and performance management. It also includes performance review and organisational restructuring and evidence from reports and data to support the value of learning.

The role of workplace trainers

Workplace trainers are recognised for the broad and complex role they play in initiating, monitoring and supporting informal learning. They are an important link between corporate expectations and skills development and between industry practice standards and individual and team performance.

The role of informal learning

Informal learning is visible and recognised and is structured into work practices and supervision. It is not accidental or ad hoc, but is incorporated into routine work through rotation of tasks and by arranging work to maximise learning opportunities. Active supervision is essential for good role modelling of practice standards, mentoring and providing immediate and constructive feedback and to ensure that risk taking is protected and productive of learning.

Fostering generic skills

The organisation supports not only specialist service based skills but also generic skills which assist staff in the transferability of their skills to other services in the organisation and in career pathways. These skills are also important as learning

enablers and for advancement. They include communication, problem solving, teamwork, information technology and continuous learning.

.As well, workplace learning is fostered by characteristics such as awareness of stakeholders and strategic partners, awareness of the internal and external context (political, economic, social and cultural), change management process, individual responsibility and respect for diversity.

Support for online learning

Interviews with survey respondents indicated that decisions to adopt online learning could be influenced by the proposition that online learning contributes to the development of a 'learning culture'. Management support for online learning will depend on evidence that it can contribute more than is possible from current training effort and methods. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that there are already significant assets in the organisations which will favour a decision to introduce online learning as a strategy for promoting a learning culture. The project teams used information from research and observation of their own work environments to identify those features of their work environments already in place to support and promote on-line learning for staff. They found: that some of the influences come from inside the organisation and some reflect pressures from outside.

Inside influences

The features of existing workplace culture fostered inside the organisation which can be considered assets in the introduction of online learning include:

- high level support for universal access to training from senior management and unions, and a growing cohort of middle level staff who have experience and confidence in online learning;
- stable and predictable work routines and conditions, and substantial support infrastructure;
- existing culture of workplace training and experiential learning and ready access to practice experts;
- sophisticated information and communication systems, albeit with some significant limitations, and dedicated IT support teams;

External influences

The main influence acting on public sector service organisations is the commitment of governments to improving productivity and efficiency aimed at reducing government spending. Associated with this is the emphasis in government on

improving client services and reducing the costs of administration. The features of correctional organisations, which are driven by external influences are:

- performance management and organisational development systems linked to continuous performance development and individualised career development processes;
- expansion of workplace technology and increasing skills bank in computer applications;
- limitations in current training methods and resources to equip and address the diversity of skills required in the future, and in particular the demands of both recruit training and the development of advanced skills and new practices for experienced staff;
- partnerships with other agencies as a whole of government model or in recognition of opportunities for collaborative resource sharing through an active national network of RTOs;
- increasing corporate accountability for service standards and compliance.

From this list, the project teams concentrated on three of the most important assets of their organisations. These were the location of leadership, management expectations and individual expectations.

Leadership

Previous research has identified that “it requires vision and leadership to successfully implement online learning. This also requires some fundamental changes to policies, as well as practices and funding approaches” (Guthrie, 2003 p.10). Project teams proposed that there are two leadership roles in implementing online learning. The first is leadership from innovators within the ranks of the organisation. These leaders don’t come from the top of the organisation, particularly where any innovation occurring in practice are not the core business of the organisation. This leadership comes from people in the organisation who are open to influences from other practices (including in IT) and from the pursuit of specialist and personal interest. Amongst the action groups, leadership came from operational staff who discovered, through the project, a new and unexpected excitement in their work. The debate about online learning has been initiated and promoted in case study organisations by specialists in IT and by trainers with an interest in developing skills in a specialist practice field not able to be catered for through the resources of training units through either group training or unstructured workplace experience.

Leadership at this level has also come from the support of staff who have had a positive experience as a student in an online course. The key to this level of leadership seems to be the capacity of staff to conceptualise the training in the online

medium and to have confidence that the problems raised by others can be addressed (if not completely resolved). The majority of participants in the project teams came to consider themselves, if not leaders, then at least champions of online learning. The project provided participants with the opportunities to research the experiences of other training providers, to critique existing models of online courses and to experiment with designing and producing some examples of their own. This was an approach they had not experienced before. In a short time the level of expertise and confidence in groups expanded noticeably and formed into naturally constructed 'communities of practice'. These champions quickly established their expertise in matters of online learning and became advocates both up and down the organisational hierarchy.

The project teams identified a number of issues related to leadership, particularly the temptation to control ownership of the knowledge and decision making, and, conversely, the need to develop a critical mass of advocacy so that discussions about online learning became routine workplace experience. The observations of the project teams confirmed the conclusions of the NCVET report "What makes for good workplace learning? which found that a learning culture is created when "training and learning are part of doing business and are included as an integral part of the strategic planning cycle" and where the organisation recognised the value gained from "aligning human resource development plans with the strategy of an organisation, and business units within the organisation" (NCVER 2003:4). This alignment of corporate plans with training and human resource management recognises the importance of high-level decision makers as advocates and promoters of new forms of learning. In her study of four Australian companies, Kaye Schofield concluded that a learning culture depends on a high performance strategy in organisational planning and staff in human resource management who fully embrace and integrate continuous and accessible learning throughout all facets of the organisation (Schofield 2003).

Support from high-level decision makers is important in any proposal to implement reform, including implementing online learning. In theory, online learning products can be developed within the current mandate of training units. However, the development and installation of online learning will inevitably require collaboration between different sections of the organisation; training, IT and operation management of workplace trainers and supervisors, if it is to be managed effectively. This is particularly so if the development of online learning has implications for resources and staff roles and responsibilities. Online learning will also depend on high-level leadership for the review of existing policies and the development of new policies, which both define the organisation's commitment to multiple strategies for learning, and anticipate the benefits and the incentives for continuing innovation. Ultimately, even with the best planned and most confidently strategic approach to online learning, it takes high level support for what will take training on a great leap in the dark.

Leadership Networks

In some cases, project teams identified agents outside the organisation who might provide leadership support. The two most obvious areas are in cross government agreements, where innovation in learning may be driven by a macro policy decision, and from training specialist in other industries who are contracted to provide training services (such as fire and emergency services). An example of the former influence was provided by a training manager:

There is particular emphasis in this state on whole of government action in the delivery of services. This has been incorporated into the department's strategic plan in its vision: "Leaders in corrections: partners in criminal and social justice". Accordingly, much energy is exerted to participate in various whole of government activities, including online learning.

While the project exposed action groups to examples of research in a range of online learning models and developed a knowledge base from the experiences of training providers in other industries, this contact with the wider VET sector is not common practice in correctional organisations. Workplace trainers tend to be more readily aligned to their content specialisation than they are to training as a practice. Action teams participated in a range of professional development and promotional events around flexible learning and online learning for the first time, and would not normally have been aware of the value of such activities in developing their interests in online learning. Action team members varied in the value they placed on contact with leaders and innovators in other industry training. The project had a few examples of outstanding benefits from networking with experts from other sectors, and it also had opportunity to acknowledge that networking is not everyone's choice for professional development. One training manager excused herself from a major flexible learning seminar on the grounds that she would be bored; a reasonable judgement given the impenetrability of jargon and TAFE culture in these events.

Senior management in correctional services might consider examining the advantages of collaborating at a strategic level with other related industries to develop joint training resources, professional development opportunities and advocacy within the VET system for the extension of flexible learning resources to benefit workplace learning and model learning-friendly work environments. The national campaign to promote flexible learning has not extended far into industry training, particularly in industries not affiliated to public training services. The strategies to change the culture of training in TAFE institutions have been very successful in creating a more innovative and dynamic approach to client services and industry relationships. Parallel strategies are needed to resource a comparable outcome for the culture of training in industry workplaces. Programs to support innovation in learning don't yet seem to recognise that workplace learning has very different requirements and assumptions from courses designed for public access. One important difference is that industry cannot suspend its current training effort while it diverts resources to develop and trial new techniques and materials. The here and now realities of work need incentives to take risks for the future.

Management expectations

The principle focus of staff training in correctional services is to equip recruits with the skills, knowledge and confidence to operate effectively in the procedures and practices established in the workplace culture and values. The role of trainers is to interpret corporate expectations and practice standards and to present them in a format which stimulates learning. Inevitably, training tends to work with the requirements of current practice and is less confident in anticipating future knowledge and skills needs, unless there is an unavoidable corporate imperative. Nor is current training seen to be explicitly responsible for cultivating continuous improvement and the on-going adaptation of skills to new practices.

At an early stage in planning the activities of action groups, participants examined key documents of their organisations to assess what guidance they give about management's expectations that might lead to innovations in training, in particular, online learning. Information from organisations using online learning suggests that the most common trigger for investing in online learning is a review of organisational training, presumably, although not stated, because of perceived inadequacies in the capacity of the training to meet the organisation's skill needs. This will happen when the organisation is under external pressure to address industry or contract standards, or where there is internal pressure created by the introduction of new services, programs or accountability, combined with a question of confidence in the capacity of existing training to deliver the change. The attitude of some training staff confirmed other research which concluded that "many providers of online training are developing and managing their products based on traditional delivery paradigms" and reflected the concerns felt by staff that "providers need to develop systems that allow them to be learning managers – facilitating and supporting a blend of delivery modes that suit the needs of employers and individual learners" (Peters & Lloyd, 2003:11).

Surveys and interviews targeted senior management, and a follow-up questionnaire was sent to the managers of industry RTOs to gather any evidence of management's interest in online learning directed by strategic objectives. In one case study organisation, senior managers endorsed the development of an online course because of the need to maintain skills accreditation over a long period of time in a very specialised area of application. This was combined with a concern that the conventional training responses were inadequate for the high priority given to the introduction of new practice. A similar example came from a training manager in another organisation:

the department has a major project running for the last few years dedicated to the establishment of an Integrated Offender Management Framework...this will be supported by a new electronic system. The project plan includes the purchasing of an electronic training system - which will include online learning.

Other examples confirmed that management is attracted to the online learning format when training is needed for a completely new area of practice, generally in advanced

expertise, where the roll-out of the new practice is expected over a long period, and where computer use is an inherent function in the new practice.

Surveys and interviews with senior managers and decision makers recognised the problems of stretching limited training resources over wide geographic distances and different skill levels, and within the constraints of tightly rostered work patterns, constant staff shortages, high turnover of staff requiring almost constant recruit training, and the demands of mandatory training required by external quality and contract audits. Asked what management could expect from online learning, managers gave the following responses:

- the opportunity for all staff to have the skills they need because of greater access and flexibility for learners, especially for staff in remote regions;
- the consolidation of learning outcomes from off-the-job training;
- long term savings in recurrent training where all staff have to retain mandatory accreditation;
- providing staff with directions on how to implement new procedures;
- confirming that staff have the competencies to be assigned to a particular duty not covered in induction training, or where the duty has changed since induction training
- developing advanced skills and management skills where currently staff have to enrol in generic courses delivered by other training providers at considerable cost;
- providing an accessible resource for underpinning knowledge which can be universally accessible and readily updated;
- providing induction training to non-operational staff, and staff in community corrections;
- encouraging staff motivated to fast track and maintaining morale through new opportunities for promotion;
- making constructive use of down-times such as on night-shift, during scheduled lock-downs, when clients are in other services and during allocated training times;
- providing core training such as suicide prevention, cultural awareness, occupational health and safety, report writing and using the offender information database.

Some managers gave tentative support to the possibility of collaborating across jurisdictions, especially if there is confidence that the content can be generic and can be customised for locations if necessary.

Management also have concerns about online learning, particularly about the cost of development and the increased cost in computer use and communication, as well as the limitations of technology. There was general concern about the potential for inappropriate use of computers, especially in using the Internet. Examples were given of problems in the past with distributing pornography and other offensive material, introducing viruses, sending abusive emails, breach of copyright, playing computer games (although this seems to be generally accepted when it's in free time) and generally being distracted from legitimate duties. Most of those interviewed were confident that these problems could be overcome but that introducing online learning would be difficult until they are. On the matter of access to the Internet, which currently is very restricted and in some operational locations, unavailable, some managers were optimistic that advances in computer system security would free up access, some felt that it would encourage more time wasting, and still others believed that it will continue to be too great a risk to security and breaches of conduct.

As a general observation, all managers agreed that if the resources were available and the problems could be overcome, they would support the introduction of online learning in those areas where it is cost effective and has advantages over other forms of training.

Learner expectations

The project did not target information from recruits, except where they could provide information about cultural differences in learning (from women recruits and Indigenous recruits) and where they represented serious anxiety about using computers. Observations about learner expectations are drawn from survey responses and project team members identifying themselves as learners, and from their observations of the staff they supervise and train. Learners have issues, both positive and negative with three main areas of expectation; technology, (technology, technology and technology), demands on time and self-management, and course quality. The issues related to technology are reported separately because they became all consuming in some case studies. The general view of learners is reflected in the comments provided by a senior prison officer in a regional centre:

Online training offers many advantages for those who are prepared to do the hard work. Then it allows those who don't work hard to leach off those who have without fear. I have personally found online training a great benefit if it is coupled with other training (also homework) to be used as follow up assessment after a prac session. From a correctional point, staff don't have access to resources ie, time to do this type of training generally! And management won't allow staff to get time off or pay them to do the training in time or off line. PS: I have plenty of input but not enough time at the moment.

The perceived reluctance of management to provide support for staff to undertake online learning was a common complaint in survey responses and in project team discussions. The time required to do courses and the relief from duties during this time was the next most cited issue after technology. Project teams, in discussing the support needed for online learning, were concerned that senior management develop procedures for access and support so that individual learners are not disadvantaged or suffer discrimination by individual managers. While it is very important to set some time frame for staff to have relief from duties, it is also important to make sure that everyone is treated fairly and consistently. In saying this, participants were also aware that fairness and consistency may be interpreted as treating everyone the same, which would disadvantage some learners and would conflict with concepts of flexibility and individual learning style and needs. There was no resolution to this dilemma, but management ruling on this was necessary to prevent committed learners from the exploitations of those who 'leach'.

Learners expected that overall training quality would be assured through blended methods with no respondent proposing that any competencies could be addressed exclusively through online delivery.

I do not see online learning as the only option or as a complete take over of classroom or other forms of training/learning. My opinion is that there is a place for both and online learning will be flexible and useful for some, however others will utilise other methods.

In another comment:

Having used online learning, at the time I found it convenient given my location – some 200+ kms from Adelaide, however in a location with various options, I believe a combination also has benefits for the learner. I would not like to see the debate be one of one system being better and therefore exclusive of others – all have their place and are valuable.

In discussions about online learning, it was common for participants to consider their learning styles and analyse the forms of learning which would suit them in different contexts. One senior manager observed:

My view of e learning is that it suits some people & suits some situations. It is not good for me as I am not a very disciplined person & I learn more from interaction & listening (strange because in lots of ways I am a very visual person).

The expectations which stood out in learners' comments include:

- the need for management to develop procedures which specify what support learners will have;

- procedures need to have a commitment to fair access and time allocated from duties (suggested two hours per week, and negotiated time during duties without client supervision);
- procedures need to specify what training can be done at work and what can be done at home;
- staff should be expected to do some work (homework) in their own time;
- staff should be trusted to have greater access to the internet and email;
- online learning should not exclude participation in other forms of learning;
- online learning should be interesting, interactive and relevant to the skill level and work location;
- online learning should be recognised in assessment;
- staff should have access to external online courses as well as internal;
- computers and communication systems should be able to deliver the training.

A workplace trainer in a regional centre described the problems he has encountered:

If online training is carried out at workplace time is not available and interruptions are regular. Other staff (and friends) who have carried out on line learning (Uni etc) have also told me they found it far more difficult than other learning for reasons similar to those mentioned above.

In follow up discussions with learners, there were two slightly different interpretations of online provision; one group felt that online learning will concentrate on limited specialist areas around high priority procedures; while others believed that there should be a wide variety of offerings to maintain learner interest. In the correctional organisation using online learning, respondents observed that two factors had slowed the momentum in staff take-up of course. One is the flat and static design of the courses and the other is the limited range available. Both these issues are being addressed as a result of a review of the training and courses will soon have added interactions and will report on assessment activities, and more courses are being added to the program.

Trainer expectations

The report *More than meets the eye; Rethinking the role of workplace trainer*, provides valuable observations on the relationship between structured and unstructured learning and the demands placed on trainers and supervisors to “structure and manipulate work processes to accommodate employee learning” and

the inconsistencies encountered in coordinating structured training with workplace learning. (Harris et al 2000 p.iv). In this study of 18 enterprises, the research concluded that “juggling the twin tasks of working and assisting others to learn” was an issue for the majority of respondents. Strategies used in this balancing act included: working longer hours, planning and prioritising more carefully, supervising ‘at a distance’, continual judging of abilities and competence of workers ... matched with requirements of the task at hand, and using other workers to supervise or delegating training tasks” (Harris et al 2000:p.iv).

The report also records examples of strategies used to develop workplace training skills, including; revision of training curriculum, less formal training opportunities, making training materials available in the workplace, experiential opportunities in work settings with space for discussion with others, and recommendations for creating conducive work environments and policies (Harris et al 2000:p.iv).

The construction of the local work network determines trainer roles and experiences. “Work shapes the learning and the learning network shapes the role of the workplace trainer. In some cases, the workplace trainer has a key role to play in the learning network, as in the case of a trainer who is part of a human resource department in an enterprise. In other instances, the workplace trainer is a worker and the work structures, processes and content shape and limit the time and energy he/she can devote to facilitating learning. The findings of this study challenge the notion of ‘one size fits all’, as trainers in different enterprises develop different ways of working” (Harris et al 2000:p.vii).

The report emphasises what has been extensively explored in overseas research in network learning theory which seeks to reconcile:

- “the tensions inherent in attempting to balance the needs of the workplace with the needs of workers in their dual roles of employee and learner
- the co-terminus nature of learning and work and the manner in which one shapes the other
- the various methods of learning that can take place in a work environment and the relationships between these different modes and the institutional structures that support them” (Harris et al 2000:p.7)

The findings of this research focused on two key areas of interest; the quality of training provision and building a training/learning culture. Both issues were seen as interdependent and indivisible. The proposed model of networks was very useful in analysing the cross-influences of the work network and the learning network and the potential for a more integrated and connective role for workplace trainers and for supervisors and how this might be even more valuable in connecting the self directed activities of online learners with other learning opportunities in training programs and workplace experiences.

Workplace supervisors and workplace trainers in the case study organisations were actively involved throughout the research project and were particularly resourceful in the critique of policies and current training practice and in the planning and development of examples of online material. However they were not so confident about what would change in their roles if online learning was to be introduced. They played the role of expert practitioners in designing and building online programs, and enjoyed interacting with the software, but reserved their speculation about what implications the use of this training would have on their supervision responsibilities. They did recognise that management would have to make decisions about job descriptions and the impact of new demands on their current duties.

Workplace trainers emerged as the strong advocates for retaining a mixed range of training methods. This commitment reflects the findings of a range of research (Brennan in Guthrie 2002; Cashion & Palmieri in Guthrie 2003). However it was uncertain whether the online delivery was to be used to complement existing techniques, or whether it was to signal a restructuring of the training system. Some of the group activities revealed that workplace trainers are not informed by the wider debates on VET and flexible learning. Even those who had personal experience with completing an online course, were incurious about the significance of this in the wider world of vocational training. The network activities and resources associated with research projects and government funded promotional programs are not the networks of preference for many industry trainers. The trainers in the project groups tended to see their role as the provider of professional development, rather than innovators or reflectors on innovation to incorporate in their training practice.

The important role of trainers in the continuous review and innovation in training needs to be recognised and fostered through access to professional development, which includes flexible and innovative models of learning. The trainers in correctional services need to be given incentives to make use of the professional trainer networks.

General conclusions from training staff discussions include:

- industry trainers have limited contact with the experiences and resources of the wider VET practitioners, and especially, innovators and their new technologies;
- industry trainers and management have no reason to refer to the research findings of government promotional programs and find it difficult to relate to the experiences of either large, high tech industries driven by competitive productivity, or public VET providers;
- industry trainers and workplace supervisors are not assured that changes to training won't simply mean more work and greater demands on their skills and resources or result in "de-professionalising" their role;

- industry resources, focused as they are on client services, are not flexible if it involves abandoning what needs to be done now for what benefit might come tomorrow;
- trainers get personal satisfaction from their interaction with and influence with learners and endorse that learning, in the main, is most successful through personal influence and group interactions;
- trainers are receptive to new learning strategies, especially online learning where it can demonstrate that it contributes to an integrated and equitable training program.

As mentioned earlier, training has always been managed internally in correctional organisations and training staff are generally drawn from practice experts. Industry trainers elect to leave operational practice to become a trainer, or take on training as an addition to their routine duties because they get a great deal of personal satisfaction from the relationship they have with learners and the potential they have to influence the learning outcomes. In some areas of practice, becoming a trainer is important recognition of status in specialist practice. This commitment from individuals can become the foundation of a more formalised role for workplace coaches, mentors and role models linked to the processes of online material. For staff working in training units, the potential in online learning is seen as a mixed blessing. On the one hand, online learning has the capacity to meet training targets in ways which are impossible through conventional classroom training. For example; a training manager in a large state explained his pragmatic perspective on online learning:

Given the decentralised nature of this jurisdiction, the development of online learning is essential for the delivery of quality training to all staff. Distance is a constant problem for training delivery and it is particularly difficult to properly service the remoter centres and regions of the state. Online learning will provide the means to overcome some of the difficulties encountered in delivering training across such a large state.

However, online learning has the potential to have quite a radical impact on trainers roles in training, and senior management expectations from training. The concerns raised by trainers gave no indication that they saw learning as part of the dynamic which constructs knowledge and practice. In their report *Quality in online learning*, Cashion and Palmieri note the importance given by educators to the “potential for constructivist learning and peer learning using the online medium” where “(I)n a constructivist approach learning is seen as being an active process with learners constructing new ideas and concepts based on their current or past knowledge” (Cashion & Palmieri in Guthrie 2003:77). There was no such awareness amongst the workplace trainers in the project teams. Trainers’ concerns were lodged firmly in pragmatic consideration of content and resources for delivery. It may be that their lack of exposure to developments in learning theories and new training practice has

limited their interest to more tangible and immediate aspects of online learning. These included:

- the changing role of trainers and the implications of having to interact with learners 'online';
- the need to develop new skills in technologies which are not familiar nor, perhaps, attractive to them;
- maintaining the quality of training found in good group training;
- maintaining their influence with learners (particularly recruits);
- ensuring that learners continue to have support;
- concern that costly new models of training will be introduced at the expense of their existing training effort and that scarce resources might be diverted from their training.

Trainers had clear messages about the conditions for online learning in general considerations about the need to maintain resources; for example:

The perception that on-line learning is easier or more cost effective is a fallacy. It provides training opportunities that should only be implemented together with adequate support to learners.

Specialist trainers were able to differentiate those aspects of their training which would accommodate online learning and those which wouldn't:

My personal view on this subject reflects the views that a large percentage of the skills that I teach to custodial officers are and have to remain partially HANDS ON. On line training could become useful for pre-lesson knowledge ie, Firearms Legislation and Nomenclature or revisiting and updating current legislation BUT you cannot teach skills like D/Ts (defensive techniques), Firearms re-qualification {target, safety, handling} and OC/CS (capsicum spray) gas on line.

In a more general observation, a staff development manager commented:

I like on-line learning as an additional tool. It should never replace any other form of training, the same as other forms of training should also be considered to provide the optimum method to achieve results.

Workplace trainers and supervisors, while very positive about being involved in designing and developing online material, were less sure about the additional demands it may place on their capacity to support learners, without guarantees from

management that these additional responsibilities will be recognised in their duties. Workplace supervisors are still negotiating to have recognition of workplace assessment into their duties and realistic consideration of the extra burden on their time. They certainly confirm the research findings concerning the task of juggling the roles of work, training and assessment (Harris et al 2000: vi). One large group of potential participants in the action research withdrew in a block at the first information session because of the additional load to their current training duties, for which they receive no consideration of the time needed to do this in their case loads. Their concerns reflected the obstacles encountered when staff are expected to take on new duties without consideration of the impact of this on their other duties, and without any consideration of how new practices and their training should target, and be compensated by, improved productivity.

Technology

The best that can be said about technology is that when it works it is unimportant, and when it fails, it creates a great deal of excitement. The prospect of implementing online learning has given workplace technology a new meaning for staff in corrections, especially training staff. One of the obvious implications of developing online learning is the need for collaboration across operational and service areas in organisations. The technology makes online learning more vulnerable and less predictable than any other forms of learning. As research confirms: “When technology works, it is invisible and students are happy to use it. However, when there are problems, then there is the potential to have the whole online experience destroyed” (Cashion & Palmieri in Guthrie 2003:71)

Correctional workplaces are well resourced with technology. Central office and community corrections staff have universal access to computers and use them routinely in generic applications such as preparing reports, communication through email, and research using the Internet. They all have ready access to the local Intranet. Custodial centres are not as reliably resourced, but all participating organisations have commitments to ensuring that all staff have the use of computers and to the progressive installation of reporting and communication functions as part of routine work requirements. Work locations have access to IT support, although this varies and diminished the further from central office. However, when it comes to technology, it is never as good as it sounds and the limitations of technology have emerged as the single greatest barrier to the idealisation of flexible learning.

Problems with machines and connections

The difficulties experienced with computer technology are the single most cited drawback to online learning according to project groups and survey respondents, and explain the (surprisingly small) incidence of negative experiences with online learning reported by project participants. In some organisations it was difficult to imagine any future for online learning when the technological problems of the system and the security restrictions present such apparently insuperable barriers. The project received this account from a workplace training in a regional centre (written in bold):

My experience with online learning has been minimal (because of the following!!!!) It has proven to be too difficult as connections are so slow - departmental hardware is so antiquated it won't run (constantly freezes up) It is time consuming. No interaction with other students. Feedback is so slow to gauge if you are on the right path.

The infrastructure of hardware and software is not there as well as staff access to web and email as well as the ratio of computers to staff. Along with the problems it will create between staff who will be 'playing' on the computer instead of 'doing their job'.

Note: CD ROM drives in (...) Prison ????? 4 – 6 total (managers computers only). The problems I had to get one for my computer as all the packages I use are on CD was huge ...(justifying it). The Intranet is so slow staff don't bother using it.

This is not by any means an isolated example. The limitations of the technology and the issues of access to information and communication in a security-focused system are key factors for all organisations and their IT sections. Whether these problems are solvable, and how long they will continue is a key issue for management if online learning is to be accepted and used with confidence. Project teams also reported on the difficulty of getting IT support in non-metropolitan locations. One proposed solution is to develop basic computer support skills in key staff such as workplace trainers and supervisors. These skills would not replace the technical and system support provided by IT teams but should provide user support and a role model in good and skilful practice, providing application advice and coaching in basic computer applications. In each location there were trainers and supervisors who already have experience in advanced computer applications and a keen interest in playing a stronger role in local support.

Problems with security systems

The correctional workplace, especially the custodial environment, has a primary focus on security. This creates major problems in access to the learning resources associated with standard online learning practice. Currently there is virtually no access to the Internet for operational staff, difficulty accessing the Intranet, limited availability of and strong management resistance to computers with CD drives, and limited technical support beyond mainstream office software applications. These problems grow as we moved further from central office. This is much less of a problem in single location services, increasing in difficulty with complicated and dispersed work locations.

The project could not address the issues of technology and access but it is impossible not to record the high level of frustration with access problems caused by the security of information systems. In the case studies locations, the problems with technology arose from two features of the technology; issues with physical capacity and system design, and with assumptions about risk exposure from both outside threats and from staff. Both of these concerns were more evident in complex, multi-

site public sector organisations than they were in single site services. In some locations it was not clear what problems might exist with the technology because communication features have only recently been 'rolled out' and, to date, staff have very limited experience.

Problems with attitudes

The tension between staff and management over the issues of computer technology is a two-way issue of trust. The restrictions on access, built into the IT system, are protection from 'elements' in the work culture who are either accident prone or untrustworthy, even subversive. Project group discussions and interviews provided a range of examples of inappropriate communication and use of workplace equipment. Examples were given of staff downloading Internet pornography and distributing this by email throughout the electronic mail system, cleverly using the 'forward to all' button; examples of offensive, inappropriate and tactless comments about colleagues and management in email messages (also distributed widely for maximum effect); playing computer games in work time; using work equipment to copy music; installing copied material on the system and causing capacity and copyright problems. This is on top of introducing viruses or programs which accidentally or deliberately sabotage the electronic security system of the prison. Some examples (pornography and offensive emails) were verifiable, others (sabotaging the security system) were anecdotal and seemed fanciful or worst case scenario. The project did have a report from one organisation whose system would not open an example of a Flexible Learning Toolbox because of protection of the operating system against 'alien exec files' including the 'disabling of Java script'.

In one case study location, just prior to the first research group activities, a group of senior staff were detected distributing pornography and were disciplined and demoted. Because of this, all the CD drives in the computer training centre were taped up, no-one knew for how long. In problem-solving this issue of staff abuse of the system and its damaging impact on work culture and trust, participants concluded that online programs must include clear protocols about professional standards of computer behaviour, and policies or procedures should be clear about individual responsibility and accountability. Staff who abuse their access to the system should have appropriate penalties which distinguish between accidental misuse and deliberate abuse.

The incidents of quite extraordinarily foolish and unethical behaviour were topics of conversation, from Chief Executive to new recruits. Occasionally groups would speculate on whether this problem of trust and the professional ethics and behaviour of staff is special to the correctional work environment or whether it occurs in other industries. It seems that some staff see the resources provided by management as 'fair game'. At the same time, management automatically responds to bad behaviour by removing access for everyone, leading to high levels of frustration amongst those who do behave appropriately. To some, it seemed that staff were being treated in the same way as the clients, and that a new approach was needed to raise the professional standards and behaviour of staff.

Problems with computer confidence

At some stage in any group discussion the topic would move to the problem of staff who have no computer skills, and in particular, staff who have no inclination to develop computer skills. Strategies varied from seeing this problem as a generational factor, which will resolve itself through natural attrition. Others thought it should be a priority of staff recruitment and training. One training manager explained his issues with staff:

usually in the older generation who are computer illiterate (to put it mildly) most are unsure of the basics in computer skills such as finding and opening folders and using basic programs such as email and word.

The same manager reported on the encouragement given to these staff to use the online computer training course and the observation that it “seems to work well”. In one location the focus group divided between those who felt that management should take a hard line with the ‘dinosaurs’ and those (generally in the older age group themselves) who thought that the change process needs patience, positive encouragement and ultimately, job designs which allow these staff to stay in their old roles until they move on. Recruitment strategies and job descriptions are yet to make computer skills an essential requirement of the job on the grounds that it could exclude people with other desirable qualities. Most discussions tended to assume that this requirement was not far off and that it will soon be simply taken for granted as an essential part of modern work in corrections. There was general recognition that online learning will provide an additional opportunity for staff to use computers in a supervised way, contributing to building experience and confidence and breaking down fear and resistance.

In a number of locations the project sought out new recruits who have no computer experience to find out how they felt about using online learning. In one location we met with two recruits (one a long distance truck driver and the other an earth mover in their prior employment) to discuss their impressions of using the computer for learning. They proved genuinely optimistic and philosophical about using computers for learning than with having to use them in critical work functions. They were very distressed at the prospect of doing something terrible to crash the whole security system and being humiliated amongst peers and with their boss. In other locations, when we asked to make contact with staff likely to have problems with online learning, we actually found that assumptions are made about older staff which are either unfounded or are not so much a matter of resistance to developing new skills (which they all said they could do) but their attitude towards having to spend more time at their desk, when they considered paper work to be a waste of time and not part of the job they were employed to do. While some of these explanations could have been bravado, an impressive number of those with an attitude, were clearly very experienced in using their home computers.

Although the incidence of personal resistance was small, it was a frequently reported aspect of correctional culture. Essentially, this determines that any new requirement from management is automatically assumed to be a demand for greater (and unreasonable) effort and an unacceptable impost which has to be resisted until

benefits or compensations are guaranteed. Action groups heard accounts of senior staff who would not touch the computer until training was provided and then refused to attend the training on the grounds that computer use is not in their job description. No-one had any good experiences with forcing people against their will to use computers, although some optimists thought that online learning programs might provide the motivation and structured experience that is currently lacking.

Design of online programs

The action groups used the Internet and visits to other industry training centres to research online learning design. Project groups took slightly different approaches to working on their designs, based on what they had concluded from their investigations. One group used a commercial course builder for which its organisation had an existing licence and undertook management sponsored training in the program. Another group used a simple web page format and a DIY approach. The development groups emerged with slightly different models and resulting guidelines for design.

One project group identified its preferences for the design of online learning to include;

- built-in instructions about using the online format,
- simple and linear navigation; reduce confusion = reduce choice,
- easy and familiar language and expression of content,
- good visual presentations but only when relevant to the learning,
- visuals rather than words if relevant to the context,
- easy replacement of generic information with location specific references,
- interactions based on real learning rather than multiple choice guesswork,
- tests allowing self assessment before final assessment,
- realistic expectations about reading volume and preparing assignments,
- hands on should be real hands on and not only simulated,
- simulations are valuable for some of the high risk performance,
- content relevant to real work requirements and the targeted skill level.

There was debate about how 'stand alone' or how 'integrated' the online component should be with other learning activities. In general, participants with an active interest in the technological aspects of programs imagined the learning benefits of a range of content and interactions and were keen to see the use of simulations and assessment tools, while others considered that online resources should concentrate on quality content and are best used to provide underpinning knowledge, industry and organisation specific information and source material, and to provide guidance for learners as they work through gathering evidence for assessment in their routine duties. There was general agreement that not being able to use the resources of the Internet was a significant disadvantage, and while some accepted the inevitability of this, others were optimistic that advances in IT security would soon resolve the problems. While there is a long held resistance to any expectation that staff take any work home, there was recognition that this is expected of recruits and may be the preference of some staff and that, where possible, courses should be available on CD-ROM so that they can be used outside the workplace.

In another action group working on the design of online pilots, the exercise of converting content from existing training material used in the classroom training illustrated that the online format requires a quite different perspective on content and learning sequences. The group found that the design needed to compress the information down to a screen size, without losing any of the important knowledge. The group also emphasised the importance of personalising the presentation so that it retained the learner's interest. The group was able to determine the intervals at which interest would flag and design a change in presentation or an activity to break the flagging interest. While there were no shortages of proposals for interactive simulations (modelled on games interactions) the simple templates didn't accommodate such sophisticated design and the group settled for reflective exercises, work routine assignments (interviewing offenders, supervisors, practice experts), researching from the reading attached to the course and nominating some websites that the learner could explore if they have access. Tests were designed and were inserted after each three pages on feedback from the first pilots. This group produced the following observations:

- keep it short, concise and simple – don't expect that there will be more than twenty minutes before a work interruption;
- include a range of different avenues to cater for different levels of interest;
- make sure the course talks directly to the learner;
- don't ever assume that the learner knows where they are going, - explain all navigation;
- don't ever expect the learner to know how to progress – always tell them what to do next;

- always encourage learners to go home if they get lost or are in a mess and help them come back again to where they want to be;
- clearly distinguish between what must be done and what might be done with extra effort;
- use text placing and fonts to break up the information into what can be read at a glance;
- unnecessary moving objects are a distraction;
- use graphics to place the course in familiar territory and have fun with the digital camera and the local photo archives!

In the design approach of this development group, there was a consensus that a little choice goes a long way. Experiments with existing products led to the conclusion that a predictable, linear design of navigation with simple options and clear forward and backward movement through content is safer than multiple pathways and complicated navigation options. Existing products provided many examples of frustrating and time wasting pursuit of navigational choice with unclear purpose and frequent blind alleys.

The design preferences of the different action groups were combined in a agreed checklist. The criteria for this preferred model was gathered through a combination the experiences with pilot designs, both what works as well as what doesn't work, and a degree of speculation and included the requirement for:

- clear information about how best to use the program and navigation advice,
- content modularised into short sections, taking no more than twenty minutes (the limit of predictable uninterrupted time),
- self contained resources directly related to the content of each section (to reduce time and frustration spent hunting around),
- each module begin with clear expectations and outcomes (so the purpose is quite clear),
- for each three 'pages' of content, a practical exercise (reflection, quizzes, tests, assignments, supervised work activities),
- each module to finish with a summary of what has been covered (perhaps in the form of a checklist),
- assignments and assessment activities clearly related to evidence for assessment,

- information about moving onto more advanced skills through further online programs or other learning opportunities.

The emphasis in these guidelines changed as the project progressed, and some well-cherished beliefs were reluctantly abandoned in the face of user feedback and some very intense debates. The experience of the pilots showed the importance of active trailing with informed users and the incorporation of constructive and credible feedback. The components of the pilots which created the most debate and which need further development and testing are:

- the role of online communication, such as discussion, between learners and trainers and learners and learners,
- the effectiveness of interactive simulations,
- the reliability of assessment activities,
- the issue of learner motivation and self directed learning.

Creating personal contact and interaction

The literature on online learning, especially that coming from evaluations of TAFE and university courses, places great emphasis on designing the course to engage the learner in a community of learners. This is intended to provide the social interactions which students find rewarding (Brown 2001; Richardson & Smith 2003; Spiceland & Hawkins 2002; Picciano 2002) Project groups were divided about the importance of discussion and chat as a device to establish personal contact, and foster learner and teacher interaction. Because in industry the online programs will be used in the actual workplace, actions groups didn't see the same level of need for artificially constructed interactions. The interactions in the workplace can be easily constructed in real contact between team members and between learners and supervisors or workplace trainers.

The kinds of interactions useful in online programs are assignments or practical workplace activities, which direct and reinforce collaborative learning with real supervisors and team members. This could include activities such as supervised practice, observation of experienced workplace practice, mentoring through shadowing and through email communication, investigation and information gathering, drill, and real problem solving exercises with work teams. The role of 'facilitator' of online learning was considered important, but how this would translate to the role of workplace trainers and supervisors was not explored to a conclusion. Some members in the groups saw great potential for communication between learners from different locations, possibly even across different jurisdictions. The potential for learners to be exposed to different work cultures and practices and to challenging assumptions and values from other organisations was seen as a

significant bonus of online learning, but the logistical implications of doing this remained in the realm of the highly speculative.

Using interactions and simulations

There was division on the value of using interactions in online programs. The more minimalist approach argued for simple content focused products. One sceptical group member observed that the only advantage she could see in online learning was the presentation of Powerpoint slides linked to organisational procedures. Those specialists in physical and concrete practice, who could visualise the use of simulations, appreciated that to have highly interactive simulations and interactive self-testing exercises is expensive and adds complications to the design of programs. Participants familiar with computer games felt that their games-playing colleagues might find that online course animations don't match up to the sophistication of commercial games.

The groups agreed on the importance of having the best level of interaction that can be afforded, especially for self-testing feedback. It seemed clear that there are many applications in a practical environment such as corrections, which could be represented through interactions and simulations, and there is a confident assumption that many staff in corrections would be more responsive to a very visual and kinetic learning approach. However, discussions were less confident about the capacity of online learning to develop the complex interpersonal skills needed for working with demanding and unpredictable human relationships.

Action groups played around with possible strategies for developing 'soft skills' as part of their design assignment, but ultimately concluded that the actual work environment was the obvious place to consolidate practice in these skills. In this model, the online component would provide the underpinning knowledge and theory. Again, it was important that the design of learning programs gave clear direction to both learners and supervisors about the strategies likely to support the transfer of online theory to workplace practice. In these models, the online program would principally provide the underpinning knowledge and theory, with case studies and assignments providing the consolidation and application of that theory. Groups agreed that, where possible, assignments should require the active involvement of supervision, supervised practice and peer support and reflection.

Assessment

In the majority of survey responses, online learning was judged to have a neutral impact on assessment of competency. Information from research reports suggests that institutional assessment has quite different issues and requirements from workplace assessment. Because workplace assessment is inherently transparent and is essentially flexible, there are no major issues with relevance, currency, or reliability. The project groups did raise issues about credibility, including doubts about the quality of assessor training and the monitoring of consistency in assessment outcomes. They also raised issues with fairness and objectivity. Most members of the

action groups are qualified assessors, and shared a high level of scepticism about workplace commitment to the quality and the objectivity of assessments. Where reports on assessment tackled issues of abuse and cheating as a problem for institutional training providers (Booth et al 2003:90,99), action group discussions provided anecdotes of assessments varying from laziness to nepotism. Online assessment was seen to provide a valuable and more reliable addition to workplace evidence for assessment when it includes reports on log-on times, reports on self assessment interactions and documentation from workplace assignments verified by a number of different workplace supervisors and managers, recorded online. Workplace trainers were very aware that a streamlined and credible assessment system could be a significant selling point for online learning with senior management and there needed to be a major focus on this in the design of online material and in the professional development of trainers and supervisors in understanding and use of assessment in online learning. Training teams have undertaken to work on the new competencies for developing and facilitating online learning and to set objectives for training workplace assessors in these functions.

Self directed learning

The issue of motivation and self-management recurred throughout the project, in the context of the design of the product, the embedded culture of the industry and the expectations of individuals. The advantage that industry training has over public training is the degree of employer control and the potential to link learning outcomes with advantages in work advancement and promotions. The supervision of learners can discourage them from dropping out and can address, the individual problems experienced by learners through immediate and routine contact and support. While staff may not need a whole qualification, they may be required by their employer to have recognised competencies in a specific work function before they can be deployed. In an ideal and integrated system, workplace trainers are responsible for ensuring that online courses are well designed, attractive and easy to use, management is responsible for inspiring and motivating staff to realise the benefits of continuous learning, and workplace supervisors provide routine support and performance feedback which links structured learning to workplace experiences.

Some of the barriers to self-directed learning were seen by groups to be logistical and management issues such as recognition of time free of interruptions, quality of equipment, realistic and practical support for learners, formal recognition or rewards for learning achievements. Other barriers were related to the dynamics of workplace relationships including personal confidence, peer culture and values, individual and group rewards and personal self-image. The key opportunity provided by online learning is its capacity to value individual choice and self-determination, and to provide choice and flexibility in how staff manage their learning activities.

Action groups tested the perceptions of self-direction with training staff in other industries already using online learning. The most obvious difference between the circumstances and motivators for learners enrolled in TAFE and university courses, is the perception that the resulting qualifications will improve improving opportunities for getting a job or for career advancement. In workplace training, learners are already

employed. For many staff, there is little advantage in making extra effort to improve career pathways and there are aspects of the workplace culture, which enshrine seniority over competence. Correctional organisations are slowly introducing promotional incentives based on advanced competencies and national qualifications and structured performance management processes, and these expectations will need strong organisational commitment to embed concepts such as continuous improvement in the culture of workplace practice and to ensure that individual responsibility for developing competence is sufficiently valued by the senior staff who will supervise online learners.

Cultural components of learning

The design of the project was very clear that it had intentionally sought to attract participation and contributions from staff with some experience in online learning or with developed opinions on training and online delivery. These participants did not set out to reflect the demographic profile of correctional staff. The project recognised that it needed different strategies to represent the interests of staff who are not interested in training, not confident in using computers, and who are not members of the dominant culture of the workplace. The project recognised that staff who are uninterested in training or using computers are an important consideration in designing and implementing online learning. They are important for two reasons; they will be disadvantaged in being excluded from training which can be important for them and for the development of new practices, and they might represent the influences which create barriers to a positive workplace acceptance of online learning. The project also recognised that women and Indigenous staff are two social groups which have been targeted for increased representation through recruitment and retention strategies, but who continue to be in a small minority, in both their presence in the work profiles and in their influence on workplace culture.

Concepts such as individual responsibility, and self-directed decision-making require a supportive culture which values initiative and personal advancement over compliance and conformity. The action groups identified a range of factors inherent in the history and the service nature of correctional services which contradict much of the rhetoric about continuous improvement and individual responsibility, found in organisational codes of conduct. Correctional services depend on an hierarchical chain of command and strict observance of statutory responsibilities and procedures. While individual learning styles and personal motivation should not be in conflict with a realistic obligation to follow the rules of practice and accountability (many professions expect both individual responsibility and consistency with rules), there is a problem where workplace culture allows individuals to use rules to escape individual responsibility, or where unquestioning compliance saps initiative and personal autonomy. During the project, action groups analysed their personal experiences and observations of the work culture and described problematic values such as:

- the slowest movement sets the pace for the rest of the team;

- raised expectations will become the norm,
- if you stick out you become a bigger target
- difficult is bad
- if you don't want to do it you shouldn't have to
- if you can't do it you shouldn't be expected to
- if it's different it's dangerous
- if management supports it there must be a catch.

The conclusion of such discussions was that the greatest obstacle online learning has to contend with is the automatically cautious-to-negative response to any proposal for change in correctional services.

The culture of negative

Concerns about the negative response to online learning derive from two assumptions; negative values are more powerful than positive values, and conventional training strategies can escape the need for individual responsibility. While it seems that classroom training makes little demands on participants for either deciding to attend or in demonstrating the learning objectives of training in performance outcomes, these characteristics have yet to be tested and compared with the demands of online learning.

During one focus group meeting, when discussion had turned, as it inevitably did, to why there was such predictable resistance to change in the culture of correctional services, one of the focus group members produced the following story:

Four monkeys were used in an experiment to test influences on group conditioning. The monkeys were placed in a room with an adjoining room reached through an open door. In the second room there was a narrow ramp and at the top of the ramp there was a suspended banana. The brightest and quickest of the monkeys was able to dart through the door, run up the ramp and grab the banana. When the banana was grabbed it triggered a shower of cold water from the ceiling of the first room, which drenched the remaining three monkeys. On the second day, the same bright monkey darted through the door, raced up the ramp and grabbed the banana. The same cold shower drenched the remaining three monkeys. When the monkey returned to the room, the three wet monkeys beat him and grabbed the banana. The researchers removed the brightest monkey and one of the other three and replaced them with two new monkeys. Soon the banana appeared suspended from the ceiling of the adjoining room and the fastest of the new monkeys ran up the ramp and grabbed the banana. Same shower, same drenching. When he returned, he was beaten up by all the remaining monkeys and the banana was taken. On the next day,

before he could run for the banana, he was beaten before he could reach the door. The researchers then replaced the remaining original two monkeys with new monkeys. The next day, when the banana appeared, even before one of the new monkeys could make a run for the banana, all three others beat him before he could get to the door. The monkeys made no further attempts to reach the banana.

This story sent out very familiar message for members of the action groups and throughout group activities in different locations, the story provided a metaphor for analysing the equivalents to the banana and the shower. To labour the analogy, there was general agreement that the correctional work environment has fostered a culture which finds it difficult to encourage or reward initiative, innovation, or any challenge to established standards of practice. Clearly, there isn't a shortage of people in corrections who are capable of initiative and who are excited by innovation, but there is an ever-present expectation of unpleasant repercussions if one moves too far out of the safety zone of conventional practice.

Cultural diversity

The project examined corporate commitments to workplace diversity, in particular, cultural diversity, found in strategic plans and codes of practice. The project then tried to identify examples or manifestations of cultural diversity in the content or the delivery of training. Far from training being designed to reflect diversity, it endorsed and reinforced a model of uniformity in both content and methodology. Training in corrections has traditionally used an academy model, where training is organised and coordinated by a small team of full time training staff, drawing upon practice experts from amongst senior and specialist staff. Women are well represented in the coordination of training, but there are distinct gender divisions based on concepts of 'soft' and 'hard' skills in the delivery of training. The project sought to explore with women and Indigenous staff, both long-serving senior staff and recruits, their experiences with the workplace culture in corrections and the implications of these observations for training. It should be noted at this point that there are significant differences between the work environment and culture of community corrections and that of custodial services. The project focused on the experiences of minority cultures in the custodial environment.

Of the survey responses, thirteen of the fifty-seven came from women in central office and in training units. Only four came from operational staff. Of the fourteen interviews which followed up the surveys, ten were with women. The project could not identify any Indigenous staff amongst the survey responses and organised separate meetings with small teams of Indigenous officers or central office support staff and trainers.

The women interviewed and participating in action groups acknowledged the many issues they faced in working in a very 'masculine' environment where male colleagues and clients dominate. In describing their experiences, and in particular, the conditioning they undertook to gain acceptance, they supported the need for a basic level of authority and discipline necessary for them to operate effectively and safely in a security focused and high risk environment. However, senior and experienced women officers contested the prevailing assumptions about the role of

custodial staff and their interactions with offenders. In particular, they provided many examples of the contrast between the tendency in masculine responses to escalate tension with the defusing influence of women.

In one location, with a high proportion of Indigenous offenders, a young recruit was told, in feedback on her performance, that she was too friendly with the prisoners. This was explained by her youth, her Aboriginal background, and her previous work in a community legal service. Despite her personal profile reflected the high priority targets for workplace diversity, these very assets were considered a potential liability to her in her work. She accepted the feedback on her performance and agreed that she had problems in working in the way that was expected, but still reflected that her way has a more positive impact on the motivation and the attitudes of the prisoners she works with.

This example illustrates the tensions between the traditional assumptions of consistency and conformity in maintaining security and safety in a high risk environment and the expectations that encouraging and recognising cultural diversity will have a positive and constructive influence on the workplace culture. Interviews with women explored the contrast between the male colleague perception that women are a liability in a high risk environment, and the women's view that they have more effective skills in communication and personal interaction. The action groups attempted to explore the issue of how training contribute to the enculturing of recruits into the workplace culture and how training deals explicitly with the tensions experienced by the minority cultures. The women's accounts describe examples of dealing with ethnocentricity. As Kohls describes it:

It is our ethnocentrism – all people are equally ethnocentric – that makes us think that our own culture is superior and all others inferior, that our ways of doing things are inherently better than anyone else's.

Training is used as an advocate of cultural diversity where it attacks discriminatory attitudes and practices. Training courses in corrections include programs on equal opportunities and on bullying and harassment, as well as cultural awareness and cross cultural relationships. Generally, these courses take a legalistic approach to unacceptable behaviour rather than a behaviour change objective, simply because the challenge of changing personal attitudes and values is too demanding for the short timeframe of training workshops. As other research has shown, "Staff awareness programs are best delivered in a "just in time" approach, when issues are pertinent and real. This mitigates against a workshop approach, which requires considerable forward planning and organisation." (Limberger & Cameron 2002:2).

Perhaps more relevant to the approach taken by training has been the problematic issue of confronting personal values and the capacity of trainers who come from the dominant culture to be aware of the cultural issues, to have the confidence to challenge them and the fortitude to tackle the critical mass of resistance. A change in personal values is a significant undertaking, on the part of both the trainer and the learner, involving as it must "considerable self-analysis and attitudes and values which can be confronting to some individuals" (Limberger & Cameron 2002:2).

The project groups had the task of discovering what perception minority groups (women and Indigenous staff) have of the benefits, or otherwise to them of using online learning. It was important, in group discussion and interviews, not to assume what the values of minority culture might be about training, especially when discussions were ambiguous about the influences of training on the work culture. One strategy used to open discussions, hopefully without imposing values, was to prepare discussion papers and use them as the basis for reflecting on the experiences of staff from outside the dominant culture (Dyson 2002; Limburger, & Cameron 2002). This was especially relevant when discussions turned to how we can design and provide learning to actively promote different cultural values and to encourage respect for different culturally based models of learning.

While it was hard to draw direct relationships between training methods and the formation of workplace culture, some participants gave examples of how difficult it can be for a minority in a group training session, to openly challenge the covert values of the majority of the group, and indeed, that of the trainers. Nor was there any confidence that the different minority groups could combine together to tackle the values of the majority in learning from workplace experience. Each cultural group sat within its own uncertainties and separation.

Although the Indigenous participants in the project agreed with the general observation that “we need to help reduce the gap between the digital ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ (ANTA 2000:26) there was consensus from all staff who commented on minority culture issues, that culture is no barrier to embracing technology or innovation. The Griffith University research also confirmed that in the development of their cross cultural training program, the indigenous staff had no inhibitions about playing an active role with the technology:

One of the key learning principles and misconceptions that was to be addressed through the learning materials was that of underestimating the abilities of Indigenous people. The task group canvassed a number of Indigenous people prior to developing the learning package, to determine the key issues to be addressed. It was deemed important by the task group that wherever possible the work of the project should be undertaken by Indigenous groups or individuals, debunking the misperception by example. (Limberger & Cameron 2002)

In discussions about technology and cultural differences, the issues were more those of individual learning styles, although groups accepted the conventional assumption that women and Indigenous people are more receptive to personal interactions and excel at using complex communication skills. It was clear that participants supported the contention that “For Indigenous people, information technology can complement human ‘face-to-face’ teaching and learning – but it will not replace it (ANTA 2000:26). Given this, discussions did provide a number of scenarios which suggested that online learning might be an advantage to learners from the minority groups. These concerned the experiences they had in not feeling able to speak out in a group dynamic where they are significantly outnumbered. Groups felt that on some occasions, learners would feel more comfortable not having to deal with the

pressures of peer values. Groups also gave examples of being held back by the 'bottom line' and recounted experiences of having to wait until the rest of the work team were ready to progress. Members of the minority cultures seemed less vulnerable to the workplace values and more interested in their individual learning and progress. Online learning was seen to provide an opportunity for those who wanted to move faster than the rest of the team, without being seen to threaten the abilities of the rest of the group.

These discussions led to the conclusion that in group training and in workplace practice, both the majority, and trainers, look to the minority to defend cultural diversity and different practice, or to concede to the primacy of the dominant values. This was seen to be an unreasonable responsibility for any participants in staff development, particularly where the environment is constructed so that they are always outnumbered, and especially for inexperienced and vulnerable recruits. The project participants debated the advantages of online learning over group learning in providing an alternative to this enculturation through training.

Although some participants saw opportunities for using online learning to challenge discriminatory aspects of work culture, there was little confidence that discriminatory attitudes could be changed through any form of training program. In discussing what support was provided for staff outside the dominant culture, and how training could promote the advantages of a diverse workforce and tolerant work culture, it was easier to find examples of the pressures to have total uniformity of treatment, than examples of encouraging and rewarding different ways of working. These examples were seen in the context of the potential for 'differences' to undermine consistency and to threaten good order and compliance. Ironically, in the correctional culture, equity is associated with everyone being treated the same, a defence against any move to redress discrimination through recognition of diversity.

Online learning was seen to have potential to support staff in resisting pressures to conform or to collude in unacceptable behaviour, by giving them executive ammunition when they are in the firing line. Online learning has the advantage of greater transparency of corporate expectations of workplace standards, and can expose staff to examples of different practices and values, especially where there is statutory accountability or role modelling from high status services. There were close parallels in the experiences of Indigenous staff with those of women in the service. Both accepted that there is a basic level of compliance required to be accepted and to operate effectively and with team trust. In looking at different models for preparing staff for this role, while maintaining independence from the dominant culture, one action group reported that they were impressed with the paper which described a cultural awareness course developed by Griffith University. The success of this course depends on a range of different people involved in a partnership of skills, and particularly, the use of a reflective learning process which promotes active learning from experience and the dynamic construction of learning through action where learning is:

based on the relationship between reflection and action...learning through experience by thinking through past events, seeking ideas that make sense

of the event and help us to find new ways of behaving in similar situations in the future... This thinking through or reflection is the essential link between past action and more effective future action (Limberger, J. & Cameron, H. 2002:4)

The group is now making contact with the authors at Griffith University to see if they can get a copy of the course on cross-cultural awareness the authors developed. The group are very keen to see if they can use the course themselves or if it will give them ideas and confidence for developing a course of their own.

Both Indigenous and women staff felt that the design of training left the demands of discipline and security pre-eminent over the skills of personal interactions, communication, problem solving, behaviour management and change agent. They proposed a model which was supported by many of their colleagues in the action groups; that induction training should concentrate on the very physical and legislative aspects of basic safety and security and that the complex skills of offender management and intervention should be part of advanced skills developed through a blend of training methods and resources, making use of the potential for designing culturally neutral resources in online learning. The advantages of online learning were seen to be:

- its transparent reflection of corporate values (as opposed to those of an individual trainer, or a training school),
- its detachment from the role modelling of a cultural representation,
- its open accessibility and therefore timeliness,
- its capacity to expose the learner to a wide range of values and attitudes, including those of the minority cultures.

At a practical and personal level, some participants felt that online learning would be welcomed by those individuals who are frustrated by the negative influences experienced in group training, particularly by those:

- who want to progress at a different pace than the team but don't want to draw attention to themselves,
- who don't identify with the dominant values of the team but don't want to openly challenge it,
- who want to pursue a particular career pathway with anonymity;
- who are uncomfortable with or intimidated by group dynamics and social demands.

Most of the discussions and interviews on cultural diversity concluded that, like it or not, everyone working in the correctional environment has to require some degree of

conformity to the 'authoritarian' culture of discipline, chain of command, strict compliance with procedures and personal separation from clients. This is aimed at risk minimisation and is in everyone's interest. However, there was support from all levels for the advantages of segmentation of roles within the service. The 'one size fits all' model was seen to be necessary for the initial recruit period, but ongoing learning should allow individuals with special abilities and talents, often associated with their different cultural values, to be developed and employed. Online learning was seen as a potential asset in developing these specialisations and in having the endorsement of senior management for the relevant skills development and practice applications.

Those who don't like learning

When workplace trainers asked what measures could be used to require staff to complete online courses, they were extrapolating from their experiences with staff resistance to conventional training. In this query lay an assumption that if it is difficult to get staff to attend group training, it will be just as difficult, if not more so, to get them to use online learning. The action groups conceded that this may be true, but not necessarily so. To test this, the project teams interviewed staff who were nominated as 'resistant' to training. Their response to questions about training in general, and learning styles and motivation in particular, suggested that although they are resistant, they do make an informed judgements about what they expect and don't want from training and their resistance is often a calculated strategy in relationships between staff and management. For those who admitted to a reluctance to attend training, the greatest single grievance was that it is 'a waste of time'. They equated this waste of time with:

- being instructed to attend training without having any say in it,
- a belief that they were being coerced through the training to do their job differently without clear explanation of what this might be,
- an implied criticism of how they are currently doing their job,
- confidence that they know more about the topic than the trainer,
- impatience with group activities (role play was specifically mentioned) which they feel uncomfortable with and which doesn't contribute to their learning,
- management failure to provide them, now or in the past, with the training they really want (in some cases this is a longstanding grievance).

While this group had no basis to compare past training experiences with the prospects in online training programs, they were simultaneously cynical and optimistic: cynical that online presentation can't guarantee that training will be any more relevant or coercive, and optimistic that they will be better served with greater

choice and flexibility and individual agency. For those who perceived training as some form of penalty, online learning was seen to have the advantage of some form of privacy and discretion (in contrast with the exposure of group training). For those who saw training as an opportunity to advance in their careers, online learning was seen to be free of favouritism and buddyism. For those who lack confidence in their communication skills, online learning was seen to provide a privacy and anonymity, which is appealing to those who are uncomfortable in group-work, and allowed learners to imagine being more honest in their expression of personal values and their challenge to management expectations. As the project continued, discussions about learning and learning styles and preferences became an important feature of the analysis of differences between group learning and individual learning and between individual competence and organisational competence.

Champions of change

A challenge for organisations, and for the designers of online programs is to create incentives, which replace the negative messages in the culture with equivalent positive messages. One strategy is to identify and develop natural role models and practice experts with high levels of credibility and influence within organisations. Participants who attended VET practitioner seminars were impressed with the role of flexible learning leaders and saw great value in having access to champions who have senior management support and have a dedicated focus on supporting innovation and change. Such champions would have added value if they have the role of promoting networks across a range of allied industries, to give colleagues access to other industry expertise and practice. Champions were seen to need a blend of practice expertise and credibility, training skills and the ability to use and support technology.

Policy

For some participants, the role of organisational policy was seen as essential to the sense of purpose and cohesiveness of organisational direction and activities. This group believed that the policy development process should include wide consultation, the active contributions of informed staff, and a confidence that the new practices described in the policy will bring about benefits and improvements. Others, who were more sceptical, had only experienced policy as a form of management directive and saw little advantage in wide participation and consultation. The truly cynical saw policy as management protection to cover potential liabilities. However, there was general agreement that in times of change, policy development can be a slow and cumbersome way of defining and promoting initiatives, but is ultimately essential in giving corporate endorsement to a consensus of principles and practices, once senior decision makers are assured of the viability of the initiatives.

Partnerships and cross industry network

The development of online learning requires a heavy investment in establishing a new learning medium and in the production of resources. This investment far

exceeds the development costs of more conventional training materials. The research project speculated on the potential advantages of collaborating across jurisdiction to share the high cost of the development of online learning materials and to promote communities of practice across organisations. Correctional organisations tend to operate in isolation from each other, even those within the same organisation, and certainly those from the different service sectors. Although the culture is changing, there is still a notable tribal culture, often fostered by a strong team induction, protective employment practices and the deference to local, over corporate control. While each correctional jurisdictions continues to maintain the uniqueness of its practice, the result will be duplication of resources and barriers against transferability of staff and portability of skills across the industry. Progress to develop online learning material should include objective analysis of generic learning outcomes and of programs which can be designed to allow ready customisation of information and practice which is unavoidably specific to a location. While different locations will always have unique characteristics to consider, the extent of these differences needs to be balanced against the cost of duplication and the restricted transfer of innovative ideas, new practices, staff transfers and cost effective use of resources.

Some jurisdictions have adopted a “whole of government” approach to services such as training, and will give priority to sharing and optimising resources such as online learning programs within their own jurisdictions. The development of learning resources in this context could provide useful information to other jurisdictions, especially the extent to which generic material applies to specialist functions and applications.

National partnerships

The adoption of even modest forms of online learning is dependent on the commitment of additional and not inconsiderable start-up resources, and the transfer of resources from current training effort for the maintenance of online material. While online learning will produce some efficiencies in the longer term, the cost of development will be a major deterrent in medium to small organisations.

The research project examined with envy the wide gap between the public resources being invested in the TAFE system for delivering online learning and the capacity for industry to develop its own resources, particularly in industries which have historically provided training from their own internal resources and who don't have advocates within the public training system. The case study locations in the project represent medium to small correctional organisations and participants were very conscious of the limitations on their training budgets and the potential high cost of developing online learning material. The Flexible Learning Toolboxes have contracts of about \$250,000. The experience of an allied industry training unit estimated that online learning requires an investment of about 150 hours of development time for every hour of training delivery. Correctional organisations, though divided by jurisdictional differences and fiscal limitations, may benefit from taking a collaborative approach to online development to capitalise on more cost efficient sharing of investment resources and allow small jurisdictions to benefit from the experiences and resources

of larger partners. If corrections decision-makers determine that there are measurable benefits in using online learning, it is evident that it would be more cost effective to take a national approach. This can be done through the collaborative development of generic and readily customisable materials relevant to the whole of industry. Collaboration should avert costly duplication and should support the widespread access to learning regardless of the size of the organisation and its resources.

Focus groups spent a lot of discussion time debating the issues of generic practice versus location unique specifications. Despite the endorsement of national competency standards, there has been no need, or incentive in the past for correctional organisations to question the assumptions about difference and to negotiate areas of common practice. This was reflected in the strong feeling from focus groups that the jurisdictional differences outweigh the areas of common practice. Staff who have worked in only one location were more inclined to argue the uniqueness of their work requirements and conditions, but this was strongly disputed by staff who have worked in other locations, including other jurisdictions and other countries. After some consultation with more experienced course designers in other industries, and much debate about how individual organisations would need to prepare for implementing online learning the following considerations for a national pilot were proposed:

- The development of online learning courses could be a collaborative pilot between the content experts from all jurisdictions in topics where there is likely to be the greatest area of commonality.
- The software base for designing the courses should be available to all organisations and easy to use, and compatible with Intranets.
- Instructional designer could be shared across developing agencies.
- The basic design should have only generic content and graphics but should be structured in separate modules so that location specific information can be added on or inserted into templates, requiring some level of software expertise in each jurisdiction.
- Each RTO will be responsible for databases, reporting and support/help advice.
- Ideally, courses should have the provision for communication across jurisdictions through real time or asynchronous discussion, but without access to the Internet this seemed a limited opportunity. It could be worth an experiment with staff who do have access to the Internet such as community corrections staff and through an organisational website, or through a both internal and external e-mail networks.
- Issues of copyright need to be addressed through a memorandum of understanding between participating organisations with emphasis on sharing

material between jurisdictions, and allowing individual organisations to develop commercial products where feasible, possibly to training markets in other industries.

The online learning pilots developed during the project, simple though they are, demonstrated that, for a range of practice areas, it is possible to develop materials, which could be used across a number of jurisdictions. The discussions between training specialists and practice experts/supervisors showed that many of the supposed differences between organisations are, in fact, choices made about technical terminology, and ways of describing the work and the environments, which can be negotiated or designed for simple customisation. Organisational approach to core skills and specialist practice may be perceived to be different because there has been no necessity to agree on a consistent model. This can have a costly impact on the transferability of knowledge and skills between organisations. Even different locations in the same organisation have cultivated difference in practice not entirely explained by the different physical environments. The focus groups considered that it should still be possible to explore a range of practice leading to generic resource development and be maintained by in house staff who had simple program skills or html editing. Included in the list were:

- Cross cultural awareness
- Suicide prevention
- Escorts
- Restraint
- Drug and alcohol programs
- Mental health
- Young offenders
- Women offenders
- Addiction
- Violent offenders
- Safe work practices
- Communication
- Body fluid sampling/urinalysis
- Integrated offender management
- Counselling
- Case management
- The principles of report writing
- Court evidence
- Community programs
- Probation and parole
- Observation skills/dynamic security
- Universal precautions
- First aid
- Sexual harassment and bullying
- Discrimination awareness
- Using interpreters
- Dog training and management
- Legislation (template)

The common characteristics for determining the suitability of these subject areas included their inclusion of:

- the generic nature of client characteristics, criminogenic theory, needs and intervention;

- common underpinning principles, knowledge and values;
- universal practice standards;
- key transferable functions

Although the action group members had limited experience with management level training, there was a general assumption that there is a significant generic body of underpinning knowledge and management skills, which would be ideal for online learning, especially if linked to Internet resources.

The practice areas considered not suitable for either generic development or online learning were those which depended on the specific physical location and those which had a high level of demonstration and practical application. Trainers supported the limited use of online delivery in practical applications to provide the underpinning knowledge component and for simulations, testing and knowledge assessment. There was a sense that the more practical the skill, the more specific it might be to a particular location, and the easier and more reliable it was to demonstrate, practice and test in the real environment. Those of questionable suitability included:

- Perimeter security
- Searching
- Responding to emergencies
- Fire equipment
- Control room management
- Self defence
- Team work
- Report writing
- Visitor centre supervision
- Specific location supervision

The characteristics of this training which made it unsuitable for online delivery were:

- the risk of uncontrolled access to security sensitive information;
- the need to ensure that practice can be observed and assessed in real demonstrations
- the ready availability of equipment and the practice environment, and the low cost of training in the real environment by local expert practitioners in the immediate context of routine duties and practice drills.

Online learning and organisational change

In her paper, *Think Strategy: E-learning in four companies*, Kaye Schofield draws attention to the lack of information in contemporary research to explain “what lies behind the decision to adopt, or not to adopt e-learning solutions, or how the corporate context affects that decision” (Schofield in Guthrie 2003:63). Schofield explores the role of strategic human resources in adding value to the organisation and its services, and the human services values which affect decisions about using new technologies and sources of learning. She quotes:

In many companies the HR function remains an obstacle to change. It lacks curiosity and cultivates old attitudes, ways of working and legacy cultures. The HR profession must reinvent itself and attend to a vital new resource: internet worked human capital. (Tapscott, Ticoll & Lowy 2000)

Schofield observes that “Most companies make organisational changes in ways which are ‘incremental, ad hoc and often not the result of a coherent, long-term plan for skills development’” (Schofield in Guthrie 2003:169). In her analysis of four companies she found that for three out of the four, e-learning was viewed as integral to implementing explicit corporate strategies to deal with pressures arising from privatisation, globalisation, technological change or deregulation (p.170). She concludes that:

There are two overarching enablers of successful and sustainable e-learning. First there needs to be the demand for high-performance/high-skills work organisation and this needs to be reflected in an explicit corporate strategy which is widely understood throughout the company. Second is a high level of sensitivity amongst human resource development people to that strategy. (p.171)

In concluding this, Schofield points out that in this sense, e-learning is no different from learning and skills development generally. This conclusion suggests that if an organisation has a healthy and open relationship between corporate needs and conventional training provision, it will readily extend the benefits of that relationship to new forms of learning. An interesting observation, in terms of the connection between e-learning and changes in organisational culture and practice, is the comment that “while the models used in each company differ, e-learning has provided an opportunity to have new and different conversations with business units about training to raise their awareness of its value and increase their investment in it” (p 172). The report also includes the proposition that

corporations will be the fastest to explore this new frontier and to adopt web-based learning on a broad scale. Companies face more economic and social pressures to find new ways of training delivery and encounter fewer regulatory, bureaucratic, financial and technical barriers to implementation of e-learning than other segments of the education industry (p181).

The ANTA report *High Level Review of Training Packages: Phase One Report* devotes Section 1. to “Changing Work – Changing Workers”. This Section describes “Learning –conducive conditions of work” summarised as:

- high degree of exposure to change in the form of new technology and new work methods.
- high degree of exposure to demands from customers, management, colleagues or networks.

- managerial responsibility.
- external professional development including participation in industry forums, conferences, professional associations and networks.
- direct feedback from experiencing the direct results of one's own work.
- management support and encouragement for learning evident in policies and active supervision.
- rewarding of proficiency through direct and indirect recognition of increased productivity and continuous improvement of service quality (p 10).

This report arrives at conclusions which are consistent with the workplace culture and experiences of correctional services examined in the case study organisations. While taking into considerations the special aspects of the correctional work environment, the change agents and decision makers in correctional services should note the universality of their experiences in change management. The ANTA report concludes that:

learning becomes the means by which employees at all levels in organisations are able to contribute to knowledge production, and its swift application in workplace settings. Interest in developing workplace capability has turned to workplace learning rather than structured training as legitimate, indeed crucial, to the development of a workforce capable of meeting the numerous and changing demands of contemporary work (ANTA 2003:p 11).

At all times during the research project, the identification of issues and the proposals for ways of preparing the work environment for online learning took account of the cautious and conservative nature of the industry, the imperatives in such a high-risk environment, the inertia of large bureaucracies, the exposure to external regulatory influence and the dangers of changing too much too soon. Participants gave serious consideration to the balance required to respect the values and experiences of long serving staff, while opening debate about how this fundamentally conservative culture can generate enthusiasm for continuous development and openness to change. Groups acknowledged that it is easy to propose changes but very difficult to guarantee that positive outcomes will ensure the continuing commitment of influential people. While investigation, speculation and application were effective in generating the debate, which was the purpose of the project, it will require a more systematic analysis by correctional organisations and an appreciation of the cost benefits in establishing collaborative arrangements for investment and development to take the debate into decision-making.

The strength of action research lies in its capacity to go beyond mere information gathering and analysis to become the agent for the change it is exploring. This project has had both direct and indirect influence of the thinking of its participating

organisations about online learning. The fortuitous combination of this project and initiatives within participating organisations has had varying but very positive results. One organisation has approved the development of a pilot online training program in response to a high priority training need in a new area of skill not able to be met within existing training models or resources. Another has approved the expansion and improvement of its computer network in anticipation of online learning attached to the newly developed Intranet, and the remainder have confirmed their interest in continuing to examine the positive gains to be made from further development.

The research groups examined the history and influences in their own organisations to identify the factors which might influence management to introduce online learning. From the small sample of our participating organisations, the following factors might influence the thinking of key decision makers:

- changes in high level leadership bringing outside ideas and expectations into the organisation and challenging the established practices;
- independent reviews of training able to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of outcomes from traditional training methods and ;propose alternative measures;
- a critical mass of support from the operational clients of training able and willing to address systemic barriers and workplace attitudes;
- the influence of successful role models from pilots and from other providers;
- links with technology, program and instructional design experts outside the organisation and the development of confidence and vision in training teams;
- recognition of gaps in high priority, high liability operational areas which cannot be met through conventional training effort;
- new practices demanding new practice experts and new leadership roles not accommodated in conventional training management or practice.

The general consensus was that decision makers will act when they are convinced that by investing in change they will generate positive outcomes rather than timebombs. An essential ingredient of successful change is the synchronisation of ideas and movement and the ability to deal with the present while advancing into the future.

Discussions were rich in stories and metaphors. One tale seemed to describe where we often found ourselves in our debates about online learning. The story concerned a visitor to an isolated town who wanted to buy the newspaper. The shopkeeper asked if she wanted yesterday's paper or today's. She said she wanted today's. If you want today's paper, said the shopkeeper, you'll have to come back tomorrow.

Limitations of the research

The most obvious limitation, and one which was raised throughout the research activities was the bias of those participating towards a positive view of online learning and the question of how representative this could be of the confidence of staff in the benefits of computer use for work functions and for continuous learning. Almost all participants in the research expressed confidence in their use of computers and in the prospect of online learning. Most participants expressed concerns about the capacity of colleagues to embrace computer delivered learning and the project undertook to seek out and consult with colleagues who were believed to be resistant. The project did not attempt to explore in depth the extent of computer confidence or resistance but evidence from anecdotes and interviews suggested that determined resistance is very sketchy. There was general acceptance that the use of computers in all aspects of the correctional environment is inevitable and that work roles, job descriptions, recruitment criteria and training content and methods will very soon have to reflect this move.

The project was also limited by the immature experience in online learning amongst the participating organisations, in contrast to the unexpectedly high level of experience amongst the participating individuals. It will be very useful to continue the action research processes established in this project throughout the progress of introducing online learning programs. The limitations on maintaining the momentum of action groups in the face of workplace pressures and uncertainties of leadership support has been raised within groups, and processes should be formalised if the groups are to continue.

The project had intended to analyse the capacity of online learning to act as a catalyst for cultural change. It was proposed that current training practices reinforce the influence of the dominant culture. While participants made valuable observations on the issue of organisational culture, it was very difficult to maintain a focus on the particular aspects of culture relevant to the role of women and Indigenous staff, and on the tensions between established workplace values and practices and the aspirations of innovative leadership through new work practices. These are areas recommended for more detailed research and monitoring through any future implementation of online learning.

The active involvement of the managers of training in the action research was instrumental in making it happen, but there were occasions when their presence may have inhibited a more critical discussion about current training programs. It was not the intention of the research to propose or demonstrate that online learning is superior to the training models currently used. Nor was it intended to promote online learning as the solution to any of the problems in the current training program. The project took its educational and awareness raising role seriously, stressing the speculative basis for the research, and directing participants to a wide range of contemporary research papers and information. Nevertheless, there was a small number of concerned stakeholders who were anxious that the project might create unrealistic or very premature expectations, and that any further debate should be set

in the context of the individual organisation's strategic objectives for corporate directions, training plans and policies.

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