The role of collaborative learning on training and development practices within the Australian Men's Shed movement: A study of five Men's Sheds

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Abstract:

This study examines the role and impact of collaborative learning on training and development practices in Australian Men's Sheds. We use a case study approach, underpinned by Peters and Armstrong's (1998) theoretical framework of collaborative learning in adult education, to investigate five Men's Sheds. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with five Men's Shed co-ordinators, and five focus groups with a total of 61 members. In this study vocational education and training (VET) is extended in a unique way to bridge the gap between work and retirement for many men in Australia. Three main themes emerged: the importance of training and development [beyond the workplace] for an individual response to member participation; a shared learning experience between men who teach and men who learn in the Sheds; and the collaborative learning that impacts on the learning of individual and groups. We discuss the urgent need for Shed co-ordinators to develop guidelines for training and development policies and use collaborative learning practices within the Sheds. The key message of the paper is that collaborative learning is critical to ensure effective training and development of men in Men's Sheds. We also highlight the implications of poor training and development practices for Shed growth, legal compliance and member participation and men's well-being. The findings will be of interest to other countries dealing with populations of retired men and others seeking membership in Sheds.

Key words: Collaborative learning, vocational education and training (VET), training and development; skills; retired men's health and well-being

Introduction

This study examines the role and impact of training and development within the Australian Men Shed movement, specifically investigating five disparate Men's Sheds. The 'Mens Sheds' are grass roots community-based organisations that promote good health by encouraging members to feel good about themselves, be productive and valuable to their community, connect with friends and maintain an active lifestyle (Ormsby 2010, Misan 2008). Many of the Sheds also provide information services and access to men's health for members (Ballinger, Talbot, and Verrinder 2009). There are now more than 1000 Men's Sheds in Australia with over 100,000 male members and numbers continuing to grow. The Sheds provide a central location for men to get involved in a variety of community activities in a collegial and supportive environment (Australian Men's Shed Association 2011). Despite the growing number of Sheds there are limited studies that examine training and development practices and more specifically VET and the impact on member participation and outcomes for members.

Vocational education and training (VET) extends learning from school. It aims to equip individuals with both job specific and transferable skills, as well as the underpinning knowledge so as to ensure that individuals become behaviourally competent and that these skills can be effectively utilised in a work environment (Colley et al. 2003). This study is an extension of VET beyond the workplace and explores training and development as a way to keep men engaged and to combat social, health and well-being issues. Research has demonstrated that men are less likely than women to take part in vocational and community education and training and therefore it is important that retired men are involved in VET in this unique way. Due to the increase in longevity, and the fact older learners will find themselves in retirement and semi-retirement for longer periods of time men need to have support for activities beyond the workplace. This urges the need for lifelong learning which extends beyond economic purposes to include social and personal resolutions.

In response to this, the community-based Men's Sheds attempt to offer an innovative approach to VET by providing a platform for men, especially older men who are educationally, economically and socially disadvantaged, to learn informally. The Men's Sheds provide an opportunity for older men to share the skills that they possess and develop

new skills through interaction (Golding et al. 2007). Activities include restoring furniture, fixing lawn mowers, repairing bicycles for children or making cubby houses to raise money for charities. The activities of the Men's shed are closely linked to the ideas of Sennett (2008) who describes 'craftsmanship' as the sustained act of making physical things, which often shapes our identity and cultivates a communal sensibility. The conditions of good work, based on the model of craft, demonstrate the unity of head and hand, thinking and doing, reflection and action, culture and nature.

This study sets out to explore three research questions: (1) what is the role of training and development within Men's Sheds operating in Australia?; (2) how does the context of the Shed impact the adoption of training and development practices?; (3) what impact do collaborative learning strategies have on the effectiveness of training and development in the Shed (4) how does training and development impact upon the participation of members? These are important questions given the promise of training and development research to impact both individual and organisational outcomes (i.e., employee well-being, performance and quality of life (Stanton et al. 2010, Bonias et al. 2010)). We propose that one of the main functions that may impact upon the operation of Men's Sheds is training and development, particularly in occupational health and safety. The study is underpinned by Peters and Armstrong's (1998) framework of collaborative learning that illuminates key mechanisms through which training and development can support members' participation in Shed activities.

This study makes an important contribution to the training and development literature. First, despite the interest among both academics and management practitioners in training and development across a range of sectors (including healthcare), to date there is limited research related to the Men's Sheds. Second, little is known about the relevance, use and impact of training and development in Men's Sheds and its affect upon members' well-being (Ballinger, Talbot, and Verrinder 2009, Fildes et al. 2010). In this paper, we explore the role of training and development in a community, non-profit organisation setting and examine its applicability. Third, our paper makes a novel contribution in linking training and development in facilitating participation of members of the Men's Sheds. Fourth, the current study applies a multi-level approach to unpacking the role of training and development in the Men's Sheds by interviewing Men's Shed co-ordinators, and members. Finally, this paper is innovative in that it examines the role of training and development in member well-being and

education about men's health and well-being rather than the traditional management outcomes such as individual performance and labour productivity.

The paper is organised in the following way. First, we discuss the Men's Shed phenomenon and provide a brief understanding of training and development in the not-profit sector, followed by a review of the literature on collaborative learning and an explanation of Peters and Armstrong's (1998) framework of collaborative learning in adult education is outlined. Third, we present findings from the five research sites and finally, we provide a synthesis of key findings and emergent issues for training and development in the Men's Shed movement in Australia.

The Men's Shed Movement

Men's health and well-being has become an important social issue, particularly given Australia's ageing population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). There is evidence to suggest that in Australia, men have poorer health outcomes, life expectancy and access healthcare services less frequently as compared to women (Smith et al. 2007). The attitudes, behaviours and outcomes of men are the product of a complex interaction of factors such as age, education, indigenity, income, employment, upbringing, and the type and accessibility of health services (WHO 2008, Marmot 2004). Australia's National Men's Health Policy highlights the urgent need for Government policies and community initiatives to improve men's well-being particularly in economically and socially disadvantaged communities.

The role of community and non-profit organisations, such as Men's Sheds, in the provision of healthcare education in Australia is becoming increasingly more important (Heward, Hutchins, and Keleher 2007, Crisp, Swerissen, and Duckett 2000). Research on informal skill development (Golding, Brown, and Foley 2009, Golding 2005) and gender differences in communities of practice across Sheds (Golding et al. 2008) highlight the correlation between activities of the Men's Sheds, learning and enhanced well-being. Researchers have evaluated some of the social and well-being benefits of Men's Sheds. Ballinger, Talbot and Verrinder (2009) conducted a case study in one community-based Shed and found activities in the Shed produced positive social benefits such as engendering a sense of belonging amongst the members. Fildes, Cass, Wallner and Owen (Fildes et al. 2010) used a case study approach through a project, *Building Healthy Men Project (BHMP)*, to enhance the skills of culturally and linguistically challenged members of a Men's Shed. The BHMP

helped to increase various manual and social skills, and in effect helped to build the men's self-confidence. Vallance and Golding (2008) argue in the case of rural and regional Sheds, the Sheds provided an avenue for informal learning. Men's Sheds provide opportunities for men to come together in a community environment and engage in activities conducive to ensuring self-confidence (Fildes et al. 2010) their overall well-being (Hayes 2003). Men's Sheds have also become a central tool in facilitating men's access to health services (Ormsby, Stanley, and Jaworski 2010, Morgan et al. 2007, Ballinger, Talbot, and Verrinder 2009). Ormsby, Stanley and Jaworski (2010) argue more research is needed that provides members of Men's Sheds with an opportunity to voice their opinions about the impact the Sheds have on their lives and their well-being. It is here that we believe approaches to training and development may be useful to enhance the well-being and participation of members in these organisations. It is important because there is a growing number of retired men in this country and their health and well-being is an issue (Ormsby, Stanley, and Jaworski 2010, Morgan et al. 2007, Ballinger, Talbot, and Verrinder 2009). Men's Sheds provide the resolution and collegial environment for men members to participate in activities and learn new skills (Cavanagh, McNeil, and Bartram 2012, Cavanagh et al. 2012).

Training and development and non-profit organizations

Perspectives on VET [training and development] in for-profit organisations have been dominated in recent times by the resource-based view of organisations. Training and development practices are viewed as one source of competitive advantage, as they are distinctive and non-substitutable (Colbert 2004). Furthermore, the various practices employed by training and development may be viewed as strategic capabilities that contribute to an organisation's competitive advantage (Becker and Huselid 2006).

Eaton (2000) argues that the study of training and development in non-profit organisations requires an alternate standpoint, as these organisations are typically 'decoupled from the market logic of the resource-based view of the firm' (Ridder, Baluch, and Piening 2011, 4). Third sector organisations differ from other enterprises in several important ways, which impact on the training and management of members. First, Arthur and Boyles (2007) argue that non-profit organisations adopt different organisational values and beliefs, which in turn, regulates employee behaviour. Second, members may exhibit different wants and needs, requiring distinct approaches to training and development, performance management and reward systems (DeCooman et al. 2011). For example, Borzaga and Depedri (2005)

argue that members of non-profit organisations are more likely to be motivated by intrinsic factors. Third, Nickson, Warhurst, Dutton and Hurrell (2008) suggest that the focus of training and development practices in non-profit enterprises is on 'soft' practices such as encouraging participation, autonomy and member well-being. Wilensky and Hansen (2001) also reinforce the importance of knowing more about the management of non-profit organisations in order to develop and implement human resource development strategies that support the individual, and the organisation's values and goals.

We argue that the training and development practices in Mens Sheds is one step removed from for-profit organisations, due to the fact Men's Sheds seek to employ training and development initiatives to increase the participation of members rather than employees, and to manage this volunteer labour effectively to achieve the goals of individual Sheds. Understanding the multi-level nature of organisations is important in Men's Shed's, given the diversity of members, Shed co-ordinators and the volunteer nature of the organisation. Moreover, understanding effectiveness of the training and development practices in the Sheds may be further explained by level of collaboration learning strategies.

Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning happens in situations where individuals work in a group towards a shared goal (Gokhale 1995). It is a type of shared learning where individuals assume responsibility for their own learning and acknowledge other members' abilities and contributions. There is a sharing of authority and acceptance of responsibility among group members for the groups actions. The underlying premise of collaborative learning is based upon consensus building through cooperation of group members (Gokhale 1995, Panitz 1999). Proponents of collaborative learning claim that the active exchange of ideas within small groups not only increases interest among the participants (Gokhale 1995, Brady 2006). Moreover, reciprocity builds members' work relationships, allowing them to be more committed to their Shed (Molm, Nobuyuki, and Peterson 2000).

Peters and Armstrong's (1998) framework of collaborative learning in adult education is employed in this study to underpin collaborative learning in the Men's Sheds. The framework outlines three teaching and learning strategies required to facilitate collaborative learning in adult education; 1. Learning by Reception, 2. Learning by Sharing and, 3. Collaborative Learning. First, *Learning by Reception* includes teacher-centered pedagogy, which focuses on the teacher/trainer delivering knowledge effectively for learning, often

through a formal lecture mode of instruction (Peters and Armstrong 1998). This strategy is used when individuals are new to the information or when they are in simple training situations. However, this strategy fails to provide a learning environment where individuals are able to actively engage and participate in learning discussions. Individuals take on a passive role and their "role in constructing knowledge based on their own experiences and perspectives is potentially undermined" (Armstrong and Hyslop-Margison 2006, 7). Second, *Learning by Sharing*; includes a discussion style that takes place either between teachers/trainers and learning or between the learners themselves (Peters and Armstrong 1998). Armstrong and Hyslop-Margison (2006) believe that this strategy is particularly important to be able to critically evaluate the information delivered, through workshops, conferences, training rooms, study circles and community education programs where individuals can break down the information and analyse each of the parts. The discussion style is favoured by learners who believe that the most effective learning is achieved through life experience, particularly reflected-upon experience (Jarvis 1999). Third, *Collaborative Learning* focuses on joint construction of knowledge, where the explicit meanings of interactions between a group of people create and enhance the meaning to specific areas of knowledge. The knowledge may relate to solving a problem or completing a project. Collaborative learning fosters positive performance and learning outcomes, which may be linked to the idea of 'craftmanship'.

Craftsmanship is "the desire to do a job well for its own sake" (Sennett 2008, 9). Skilled craft can thus involve playing a musical instrument, designing a building, writing or creating art, developing software, or the work done at a laboratory, hospital, or construction site (Lorenz 2010). Sennett's (2008) research uses multifarious settings, such as ancient Roman brickmakers, glassblowers, Italian-inspired goldsmiths, makers of stringed instruments, computer-assisted architects and Linux technicians (O'Neill 2009) to uncover the seminal links between ability, learning and craftmanship. Sennett's (1998) findings denote that the importance of people working together, building long-term relationships and fostering trust to enhance the learning experience. The concept of 'craftsmanship' is linked to how skills and knowledge are acquired and sustained (Tweedie 2013) and encompasses the process of making things which leads to self-discovery, and enriches one's being (Sennett 2008). Furthermore, craftsmanship enhances the worker's sense of belonging, both to the workforce community and to the wider community (O'Neill 2009).

Most studies on collaborative learning have taken place in an educational setting, rather than one that advocates vocational education and training. Gokhale's (1995) study of 48 undergraduate students in the US found that collaborative learning fosters the development of critical thinking through discussion, clarification of ideas, and evaluation of others' ideas. Similarly, a number of meta-analyses, Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1998) analyses of 168 studies and Springer, Stanne and Donovan (1999) analyses of 37 studies confirmed that collaborative learning enhances a range of student learning outcomes, including academic achievement, student attitudes and student retention (Prince 2004). A recent study by Inayat, Amin Inayat and Salim (2013) of four vocational courses found that collaborative learning practices (group work, team effort, instructor feedback and support material) enhances students' learning experience and leads to positive learning outcomes.

Armstrong and Hyslop-Margison (2006) contend there are three conditions under which dialogue can be facilitated as a part of a collaborative learning experience: (a) an intent, (b) a dialogical space, and (c) a shared sense of the other. *An intent* is understanding the goals and objectives of the teacher/trainer. In the case of a Men's Shed the goal might be to build skills to produce saleable items to ensure resources are available for other projects. While the teacher/trainer may have clear learning objectives and goals, this intent may not be obvious to the learners. *A dialogical space* is where dialogue needs to be facilitated between the learners in order to make sense of the understandings that each individual brings to our learning experience. *A shared sense of the other* is where important relationships are formed which promote democratic participation amongst the learners (Armstrong and Hyslop-Margison 2006). Moreover, when training and development opportunities are optimized the training goals need to be visible to all stakeholders (Chang and Huang 2005) and in this study that means all men who are members of Men's Sheds.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study methodology to examine the training and development practices used in Men's Sheds. Five case study sites, located across three States of Australia, were selected using a non-probability convenience sample: one in Queensland (Shed A), two in New South Wales (Shed B and Shed C) and two in Victoria (Shed D and Shed E). The characteristics of each of the case study sites are detailed in Table 1 below.

[Insert Table 1 here]

The data collection involved interviews with five Shed co-ordinators and focus group discussions with a total of 61 men members of individual Sheds. The rationale for this approach was to obtain information at the individual, organisational and national levels. Institutional ethics approval for the project was granted and data were collected over a six-month period. The purpose was to examine the various Shed related initiatives and to ascertain perspectives on how the Sheds are being managed.

The first phase of the data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews with each Shed co-ordinator. Lofland (2006) argues that interviews advance the validity of findings in social sciences. During the interviews, each Shed co-ordinator was asked questions concerning the goals and objectives of the Shed, the current management and training and development practices implemented by the Shed. They were also asked about the rationale and perceived success of these initiatives, and associated challenges facing the Shed, membership and participation.

Focus groups were used to examine member's experiences of the training and development practices employed by the Sheds. Each focus group was conducted by two members of the research team for approximately 45 minutes. All members who attended the Shed gave informed consent and participated in the focus group. Focus groups involve a group interview of several participants and a facilitator, with a focus on the interaction within the group and joint construction of meaning (Miles and Huberman 1994). Focus groups provide an important avenue to identify the factors which drive or inhibit participation (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). Focus groups were used to encourage discussion regarding the training and development practices used by the Shed, how these practices foster or inhibit mens participation, and perceived outcomes of participation. During the focus groups, participants were asked questions about how they came to be a member of the Shed, their level of involvement in the Shed, what benefits they receive from their participation, the types of training and development practices employed in the Shed, the implications of these practices for the Shed and its members. To protect the identity of the participants the actual locations have not been identified and pseudonyms have been used in the reporting of the findings.

Data analysis

The audio recordings of focus groups and interviews were analysed using NVivo. The process of thematic content analysis outlined by Weber (1985) was applied to the data. Transcripts were coded independently by two coders until saturation, thereby ensuring the reliability of the coding framework. A third rater was employed where there was any disagreement between the primary coders. The reliability and validity procedures involved searching for the convergence of different sources of information to form themes from the research data and within research materials (Creswell and Miller 2000).

Findings

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews with Shed co-ordinators and focus groups with groups of men at each Shed. The findings are synthesised through each Shed as follows:

Shed 'A'

Shed 'A' is the first case study site located in a light industrial area on the fringe of a coastal city. A local council owns the Shed and allows the members to operate at no cost. The Shed was officially opened in 2009 and has a current membership of 90 and *'we receive calls every week from men wanting to join'* – (Joe). Membership is predominantly made up of retired middle-aged men from professional and trades backgrounds and the co-ordinator reported participation was high. Essentially, the Shed is a workshop where men of all ages with diverse backgrounds, some as young as 35 and others over 80 come together to socialise, and share skills and time. The members work on community-based projects such as children's toys for pre-schools and/or individual and specialised projects. The Shed operates Monday to Saturday.

The Shed is self-managed by an elected committee of Shed members and volunteer members perform a range of roles including administration, supervision, planning, recruitment, training and development and, health and safety. According to the co-ordinator the Shed's management evolved from the knowledge of best practice acquired from a pool of experienced members. *'From the day the Shed opened we would try one management method and it if didn't work we'd discuss the issue or process and try something else - usually one of the members would and teach us how it worked in the real world'* – (Kurt). The members provided a clear understanding of the current and documented management practices including how the men were trained.

Harry (a founding member) told the researchers what he believes has made this Shed successful. *'We are fortunate here because we have a lot of resources and we've got great systems happening'*. The researchers observed safety signs, training manuals and all members wore colour coded badges determining the activities they could participate in. Harry explained how many of the donated resources in the Shed facilitate training opportunities, projects and project sales including making children's toys and possum boxes. Gavin reported that *'the Shed is all about the (men's) involvement and being able to learn new things….. and participate in Shed projects'.*

The men are involved in learning how to use power tools and build small items of furniture. One of the members was an ebonist [a specialist cabinet maker who uses ebony and creative design] and had a specialist business in another country. In the Shed he teaches men the knowledge and skills to plan and *'build unique pieces of furniture'* – (Greg). *'I was a builder…..we work on pieces [of furniture] that mean something to us and other group projects'* – (Jim). *'Thought I knew it all [former cabinet maker] but working with an ebonist is another world…..can't wait to get here and get on with it'* – (Max). The men already have the skills, qualifications and experience to use of most of the power tools but they learn how to take their knowledge and skills to another level.

Oliver explained that most of the men initially resisted health education. *'They don't want to know about health issues'* but through the men talking amongst themselves and gradually educating them *'all the blokes had blood pressure test…. some had a few issues'.* He told us *'we also invite different health services to come and talk to the blokes….if they have any issues they can talk about them or get some help'.* This was evidence that teaching men what they need to know about their health was taking place in an informal way and supported by the leader of the Shed. '*We've basically been organising someone (healthcare practitioner) to come every couple of months'* – (Gavin).The planning in this Shed was central to the weekly routine with a large whiteboard displaying the projects for each day of the week over a table where the men have to sign in and out each day.

The co-ordinator handed the researchers a small booklet that outlined the Shed's goals policies and procedures. Workplace health and safety was observable in the Shed and it was evident that training and development supports every-day practice. Michael boasted *'each member of the Shed is compelled to wear a name tag with a coloured dot'*. The dots represent the type of tools the men are allowed to operate. For example, a red dot indicates a new member who has not been assessed and is therefore only allowed to use hand tools. Harry

told us *'I'm a black dot and the only member of this Shed with a black dot'* and therefore he is the only member who can operate or train other members on all levels of the equipment. Only qualified members carry out detailed assessment of new members and assign appropriate levels. The most effective training and development appeared to happen when the coloured dot system was executed. A number of men indicated *'we've got good blokes in charge'* (John), *'nothing's too much trouble for our co-ordinator'*– (Joe), *'our committee's always thinking of new projects and ways to support us….things to teach us'*– (Alan) and *'if we've got anything to contribute someone always listens'* – (Dean). Shed A men told us they want to know more about what other Sheds are doing to learn new things and expand on the scope of future projects.

Shed 'B'

Shed 'B' sits on a hill close to the center of a small country town. This Shed was first opened in 2008 and owned by a local businessman who will not accept rent. However, they are responsible for paying local council rates and electricity charges. The Shed is well equipped with a full kitchen, three computers, library, bathroom, work benches and four dining tables, all made by the men. It has approximately 60 members and most days between 15 and 20 members attend. The youngest member is 25 and the eldest 92 years of age.To get the Shed started Doug organised a public meeting. In the recruitment of members Doug *'dragged people along….and one hundred came'*. Doug further explained '*…..the ones who need it the most are the hardest to get'. They're afraid they don't have the skills. I tell them…just come and we'll teach you!'* Doug is passionate about getting men to come to the Shed and he told us he talks to anyone who will listen to him and at every event in town he gets people talking.

The co-ordinator, Mac, was happy to offer his views of the management practices operating in the Shed. *'We've got a very loose management style here – we like control of our shed – no red tape…no rules'* - he turned to the researchers and said *'now watch this…..'*. Mac reached up and pulled on a cord extending from a retro-style red light fitting. Immediately, the nineteen members in attendance were silenced and each turned to face their co-ordinator. Clearly, the men have been taught rules but Mac was strong in his resolve that no rules be acknowledged or recorded in his Shed. Other 'rules' surfaced; safety signs posted on the walls, and a 'swear jar' on a table. *'The Plan is to run things so that bureaucracy would be minimised'* but now the men realise *'we need help with management and a training procedures manual'* – (Mac).

Even though there were no documented policies and procedures it was evident that training and development was important to the members – *'we've got a big focus on safety— especially since so many members have sight and hearing disabilities'*– (Ross). Ross explained how the men are involved in a weekly training session to learn how to handle tools and equipment. The men assured us *'we've got public liability insurance'* – (Mac) and anyone handling food *'has to complete the course and obtain a certificate'*. The men who handle food were very proud when they showed us their qualification. *'We supervise everyone very closely'*– (Simon). In the time we spent in the Shed it became apparent they may not be aware of the challenges they might face if they do not implement effective management policies particularly in relation to training men about occupational health and safety.

Shed 'C'

Shed 'C' is situated on the periphery of a large country town. It is a fully functional workshop owned by a local businessman who '*allows us to use it without paying rent…..we offered to pay for the electricity but he told us we would insult him if we didn't accept the electricity as part of the deal'* – (Pedro). The Shed opened in 2008 and has a membership of 25, comprising mostly men over the age of 60. The facilities include four separate work rooms and it is exceptionally well equipped with work benches, bandsaws and most equipment needed to support multiple community and private projects. Members are encouraged to attend three days per week from 9.00 am until 12.00 noon.

Due to the fact the premises could provide for up to 200 members *'basically we rely on blow ins – there's no social invitation – if they come, they come'* – (Aaron). *'We … would like organise for guest people….like medical stuff'* (Fitzy) but *'we're not confident that anything will work'* – (James), *'nothing we do seems to be successful'* – (Brian), but *'none of us knows how to do things….we don't know how to train anyone….just help each other out'* – (Ken). The men openly admitted *'we don't know how to organise or execute training…'* (Ron) and there was no acknowledgement of formal workplace policies and procedures.

The management of this Shed appears to be the responsibility of one person and Barry summed up the sentiments of most of the men:

> *'We don't want bureaucracy – no one from the top down telling us how to do things – what we want is….a one page document telling us how to do things. At this Shed we*

> *don't have management type people – we don't know how to apply for grants or design programs…let alone deliver them'.*

Whilst the members claimed the Shed is not formally, but nevertheless, reasonably well managed there were signs to the contrary. We noted there were very clear workplace health and safety signs across the Shed. The men told us there was an issue with funds, *'it's always money. We can do the projects, such as children's toys, but we're out of pocket sometimes between $500 and $600 when we buy the materials and then can't recoup'* – (James). *'Our co-ordinator decided we would have an open day to sell the stuff here at the Shed…but no one came'* – (Steve). The challenges for Shed C are in finding ways or new members, with management skills, to implement planning without the trappings of bureaucracy. The men talked about wanting to apply for grants to be able to train men to make things but acknowledged they did not have the skills to apply. Incongruous with these views the men said they do want some information – *'don't tell us what to do – tell us what we want to know'* – (Clark). It was apparent the men want some level of direction yet they expressed apprehension about what they perceive to be *'slipping back into being back at work'* – (Jeff). In their endeavours to remain non-bureaucratic it appears the members' lack of management and training related skills in effect inhibits opportunities for the Shed's growth and participation of men from their local community.

Shed 'D'

The fourth case study site is a Men's Shed located in a semi-rural suburb approximately 20 kilometers north of the State's capital city. The Shed, which opened in 2008, is owned by the municipal council, and sits within a recreation complex which accommodates the local football club, children's playground and show grounds. The Shed has 35 members, consisting mainly of male retirees, over the age of 60, and all from the local area. The Shed is open to members two days per week. The Shed consists of a large, open work space, a communal seating area and partitioned section which houses an office area and a well equipped kitchen. The work area consists of several work benches, storage, equipment and a collection of wood work tools donated to the Shed from a number of benefactors, including saws, sanders, lathes and air compressors.

The Shed provides members with an opportunity to gather and socialise with other men and get involved in personal and/or community projects. Members participate in fund raising activities, to enable the Shed to meet its operating costs with a view to becoming self-sustaining within five years. The members organise regular 'sausage sizzles' at a local

shopping strip, and sell their goods at local fetes. The members of the Shed have worked on several community projects, including constructing chicken coops for local community groups, building blanket boxes and painting easels. The Shed also provides members with some access to men's health education, and has organised cooking classes for members.

The Shed relies upon an informal mentoring system to ensure that members use the Shed's equipment properly and safely. Stephen, a retired engineer, explains *'there are a number of us that know how to use the equipment, so we take it upon ourselves to keep an eye on the guys, show them how to use them safely, how to take care of machines'*. Keith adds *'we don't sit the new members down and say, this is how to use the saw ...... its more relaxed than that, we just look out for each other'*. Ross notes that this approach to training and development is important to maintaining member's participation in the Shed *'if this training became all formal, I think it would scare some of the blokes off. They'd feel they were back at school or work, having to get certificates to use the jigsaw or the sander .... it just wouldn't work'*.

Access to health services for the members of this Shed result from the close ties between the Shed and the Local Government. Many of the community health services funded by the municipality are advertised to members through the Shed's notice board and newsletter. However, Dennis notes *'it's not planned..... it's up to each fella to decide if they want to go to a talk, get help or get tested ....and to be honest, not many of them take advantage'*.

The members identified three challenges facing the Shed in the short term. A shortage of funding was the most pressing concern. Ted, argues *'we need to apply for grants for more community projects so that we can get some money to buy materials'*. This highlighted the need for someone in the Shed to learn the skills required to complete grant applications. Albert added *'it would be nice to have the cash to buy some computers…then we could learn how to use them'*. There were also compliance issues around health and safety, insurance, the building and the Shed's finances. For example, Brian notes *'we just had the building inspector around and he told us to move the wood outside the Shed because it is a fire hazard. I mean, where are we going to put it?'* Don, the resident cook for the Shed, wonders *'will I need a certificate to handle the food and cook? My daughter thinks I do'*. John explained that most of this compliance work is completed by the co-ordinator, adding *'I don't think this is what he signed up for….but we work together to make sure we meet the requirements'*. There appeared to be a realisation that the relationship between the co-

ordinator and member [and daughter] in this case was not one of teacher and student but rather of adults teaching each other. The final challenge identified by the members was maintaining the 'grass roots' culture of the Shed, particularly in light of an increasing climate of compliance. George articulated the cooperative environment when he said *'in this place is you can come and go, get as involved as you want.....you don't get things shoved down your throat ... it would be criminal to change what we've got here'*.

Shed 'E'

The final case study is a small Men's Shed, located in a relatively low socio-economic, inner-city area. The Shed is annexed to a local community centre, which houses indoor recreation facilities, local government offices and community health services (including a mental health service). The Shed, which opened in 2002, is relatively small and comprises a kitchenette, communal eating area, a recreation section with a billiard table, and a small work zone which contains hand tools such as saws, hammers and screwdrivers. The Shed also has a substantial garden which consists of an outside eating area, barbeque, market garden and fire place. The Shed also has a part-time community development worker funded by local government.

The membership of this Shed is diverse, consisting of male retirees and Indigenous men aged over 40 years and men with physical and mental disabilities. The Shed currently has 55 members, with approximately 20 percent of members requiring full-time care when they attend the Shed. This particular Shed is a member of a network of community organisations, and therefore many members have been referred to the Shed, particularly by health providers in the local area. The Shed is currently open two days per week to all members, and one day a week is devoted to Indigenous members. The Shed is regularly attended by 15 members and ten Indigenous members, with an additional two members visiting each fortnight with their carer. The Shed is primarily characterised as a 'social and recreational group'. A typical day at the Shed involves members talking with one another, playing billiards and working in the market garden. Members are offered a morning and afternoon tea, a hot meal for lunch, and also have access to tea and coffee facilities throughout the day. A few members are working on community projects, such as refurbishing second hand bikes to give to children in the local area. The men claimed *'we don't get training here because we don't have the ply [timber] to makes things'* – (Tom). Some members attend the Shed to make use of the computer, particularly if they have to write a letter or find out information from the internet. However, the overwhelming focus of

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the Shed is on encouraging social interaction amongst members. Many of the members voiced their desire to have more of an opportunity to participate in community projects and outings with other members, but were aware of the lack of resources available for this purpose. For example, the Indigenous members discussed their desire to make boomerangs and didgeridoos for the local children, but did not have the funding available to purchase the raw materials required.

The Community Development Worker acts as the co-ordinator of the Shed, and spends most of his time talking to members about any difficulties they may be experiencing and providing them with assistance. Sam, the Shed co-ordinator, notes *'most of my day is spent making sure the guys are okay... there's very little time to apply for funding for this or that, or to strategise for the future'*. When asked about members' access to health care services and learning about health practices, through the Shed, Sam responded *'...there used to be a few healthcare people come to the Shed ... not so frequent now'*. Alfie, a longtime member of the Shed, adds '*the Local Government really helps us (by funding) a co-ordinator and the building and running costs'*. Any members who are involved in projects typically work on their own or in very small groups.

One of the Indigenous members, Edward, discussed the importance of contributing to the community: *'I'd like to go to schools and talk to the kids and teach them about what it's like to be an Aboriginal, how to throw a boomerang...., instead we sit here and talk. But.... I want to do something'*. Henry added *'and all that takes organising and money'*. Larry said *'we've had five co-ordinators in the last three years. It makes it really hard.... it takes the new people time to learn in this place'*. Malcolm elaborated ... '*we want different things from the Shed ... some want somewhere to meet and chat, others want to learn things and do projects, others want to meet with their own kind and share our culture, and for some it's just a day out'*. Sam, the Shed co-ordinator agreed, noting *'the guys have very different needs and wants. In this environment, it's very hard to deal with it all'*.

Discussion and Concluding Comments

In this study, we argue that whilst traditionally VET is associated with training in the workplace, Men's Sheds provide an inimitable way to extend VET beyond the workplace. The study is innovative because we set out to examine the role of training and development for mostly retired men within Men's Sheds. We explored the impact of training and development on the participation of members and their well-being across five disparate

Sheds. We found that the evidence of congruence between management practices and training and development were present in one Shed (Shed A). In the other four Sheds, the use and sophistication of training and development (e.g. for workplace health and safety) was dependent upon the management function such as the use of equipment or health and safety rules. In these Sheds there was limited evidence of the relevance or understanding of systematic training and development management practices. Nevertheless, it was evident the Sheds provide a place for all members to come together socially and support one another and therefore present as conducive environments to develop training for men. The consequences of extending VET beyond the workplace to the Men's Sheds revealed three main themes: the individual learning and importance of training and development for men and the potential impact upon member participation; a shared learning experience between men who teach and men who learn; the collaborative learnings that impact on individual men and the group. Underpinning these themes was a resistance to formalised training and bureaucratic management practices.

Individual learning was happening in the Sheds where the co-ordinator or designated member gave instruction to other members who had little to no say in the content but accepted the relationship. This kind of direct learning happened in all of the Sheds to some degree dependent on situations. For instance, in Shed A the individual learning strategy was evident when new members join the Shed and attend a compulsory training session on the *'coloured dot system'* which is instructive. The learning environment is one where the men accept what they are learning without question. Another example was found in Shed B where the men have to attend workplace health and safety training and food handling procedures and where members were supervised very closely. Peters and Armstrong's (1998) would argue that a limitation of this strategy is a failure to provide a learning environment where individuals are able to actively engage and participate in learning discussions.

Much of the training and development in the Sheds is closely associated with the second phase of Peters and Armstrong's (1998) model - *individual learning through sharing*. There was evidence of learning through sharing where a member/teacher within the Shed provides instruction to another member and where members discussed the learning. In Shed D it was apparent that the men chose to learn through a mentoring system where everyone helps each other to learn new skills. Due to the fact some of the men know how to use equipment they teach others in what the men refer to as a *'relaxed environment'* with no formality. Therefore, this Shed provides an opportunity for men members to share skills and develop new

skills through their collaborations (Golding et al. 2007). Similarly, in Shed C there was no formal knowledge on how to train, but members would help each other out when needed. Armstrong and Hyslop-Margison (2006) suggest this strategy is critical to be able to evaluate the information delivered and where the men can scrutinise what they have learned and consider how the learning will influence other projects. This is an example of how learners reflect upon their experiences (Jarvis 1999) to gain new understandings of how to approach situations.

Collaborative learning was evident in the Sheds where the men's interactions provided rich learning experiences. For example, in Shed A men who were cabinet makers learned how to make specialist pieces of furniture. Prior to working in the Shed they had the basic skills of building or cabinet making and then they embraced the skills of an ebonist to take their learning to a new level. This is what Peters and Armstrong's (1998) would explain as *'constructing new knowledge'* for individual working together as a creative and productive group. Shed A also has a sustainable practice that earns money to support future projects, the group benefits through working together, and the individual learns new knowledge and skills. In this Shed, Sennett (2008) would champion the level of 'craftsmanship' as an undertaking of making creative pieces of furniture, which contribute to shaping the identity of the Shed. Moreover, a consequence of the training is the way in which the activity units the men as a collaborative community and enhances a sense of belonging (O'Neill 2009). Therefore, collaborative learning needs to be supported and promoted in the Sheds as a way to engage men and ensure their participation. It expands beyond training and development to reduce some of the social, health and well-being issues of men members.

Our findings lend support to the argument that training and development does impact upon the participation of Men's Shed members and their well-being. Shed A reported the highest level of participation and evidence of training and development, followed by Shed B. In these Sheds it was evident that reciprocity also enhances the members' work relationships, allowing them to be more committed to their Shed (Molm, Nobuyuki, and Peterson 2000). Shed A has documented, sophisticated and valued management systems, membership and participation is high. It is clear from Shed A that vocational education practices that support organisational goals are important facilitators of member participation. Participation and regular attendance of members also facilitated men sharing what they know about health information and access to healthcare services. Shed B had a system of informal training practices that appeared to be encouraging member participation largely because they were

supported by a co-ordinator who plans numerous projects, and non-formal training opportunities. However, they realise the limitations of this approach and that they need assistance to formalise their training systems to operate effectively.

There was an evident resistance to formal training and development practices in four of the Sheds. In Sheds B, C, D, and E there were no documented policies and evidence of diverse management and training practices. In Shed C we were told the men did not know how to train other members, let alone plan any training and development and in Shed D there was a very informal approach to training because of a fear of intimidating the men. In Shed D the men were ambivalent about management practices for safety, for example, where to store wood (a potential fire hazard) and the requirements for food handling. Shed D consider rationality and the likely consequences of not having effective management systems, particularly in relation to meeting compliance standards. In Shed B there were no documented policies and a deliberate denunciation of bureaucracy. The researchers were told quite blatantly there are *'no rules'.....no red tape'* – (Mac). However, they also realised the importance of establishing some formalised training and development practices to ensure continued operation of the Shed. Shed C members associated bureaucracy with management policies and practices and they rejected them because of the connections with their past careers. With the rising costs of non-compliance, the training of health and safety should be paramount in all Sheds. These Sheds may well be operating without incident but in the event of a serious breach in relation to safety issues, the critical nature of effective management practices would be self-evident.

Implications

A consequence of this study relates to men's resistance to formalised training and development practices because of an association to past workplaces. Resistance may be connected with past negative work related experiences and therefore present potential consequences for Shed operations and even survival (Peters and Armstrong???). Moreover, some of the co-ordinators did not have the knowledge, skills and abilities to be able to design training and development practices or write an application for funding. There are also practical implications for the current management in each of the Sheds. It is clear that Shed co-ordinators need to develop the knowledge and understanding of training and development and its benefits. If these Sheds want to grow and ensure they comply with legislation (e.g., occupational health and safety) they need to develop clear strategic goals and integrate formalised training and development policies and practices. In addition, all of the Sheds need

to understand that training goals need to be visible to all stakeholders (Chang and Huang 2005). There are also implications for policy makers to make provision for the training and development of men beyond the workplace because of the growing number of men who are retiring in this country. The main issue for Shed co-ordinators in relation to training and development will be how to ensure effective practices whilst avoiding bureaucratic and complex management systems that may stifle member participation.

In conclusion, it is important to ensure effective training and development policies and practices across the Men's Sheds. Whilst there are fundamental management functions that need to be supported across all Sheds the needs of each Shed must be taken into consideration. The diversity of the Sheds and their members must be well thought-out to preserve the positive cultures and ways that support the men's well-being. Men's Shed co-ordinators need to ensure the environments within which the men participate continue to provide social support whilst ensuring effective VET practices and maintaining compliance with occupational health and safety legislation. This can only be achieved through active collaboration between Men's Shed co-ordinators, community health services and scholars all with a common purpose of ensuring the well-being of men within our community.

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