

# Making sense of management



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The *Karpin report*, also known as *Enterprising nation*, was presented to the Keating Government in April last year. Karpin called for 'a new paradigm of management' and the general thrust of the Report was that 'good managers are the key to a more competitive economy and higher performing enterprises'. This is hardly a new concept nor is the approach taken in the report especially innovative. For many decades governments and businesses have analysed management performances in the attempt to provide a more rewarding work environment for the individual and to achieve greater gains for the enterprise. What we have witnessed is the evolution of cultural values and the introduction of new information technologies which have, in turn, produced new fashions in management philosophies. The extent to which these views of management styles and techniques can assist us in our daily lives depends on the view we take of the plethora of information that is contained in the books, videos, audio tapes, conferences, seminars and training programs that are available to us. Quite frankly there's a lot of drivel to wade through on our way to developing any new and more enterprising work culture — but the effort can produce dividends.

As we embark on our exploration of management theories and options for reform we must not undervalue our already substantial capabilities as managers. Library personnel, experienced in the management of information and in the provision of services to a multitude of client groups, have been in the management business for centuries. Add a generous quantity of common sense, a dollop of good humour and an awareness of current developments in business culture and we can identify an alert and competent cohort of managers in the library community.

Nevertheless there remains much to accomplish and management issues are very firmly on the ALIA agenda. A glance at our conference programs confirms the priority that has been given to such matters as the current views of best practice, quality management, marketing, competencies, performance indicators, business planning and the like. Some of our members have noted difficulties in the transition from specialist to manager positions and have urged the Association to play a key role in assisting with the demands of this passage. ALIA has responded by providing networking opportunities and programs for the development of management skills through conferences and seminars.

The Association has encouraged the inclusion of relevant management study units within first-award courses at universities and TAFE colleges. Mentoring programs are underway in a number of our Branches which seek to guide the

development of appropriate skills such as the demands of the workplace might require. Many members are choosing to pursue formal management qualifications to supplement and complement their present information and management skills. Some of the stories in this issue of *inCite* provide personal reflections on management competency among library personnel which we hope will be of value to our readers.

While *Enterprising nation* appears set to sink into the void which accompanies a change of government, there are some interesting facts, figures and observations that can be noted. Karpin told us that Australia has good managers, but not enough of them. Promotion and further development of education and training programs to address this dearth was one proposed solution as was the introduction of mentoring programs. Women were singled out as one group which is under-represented in Australia's management ranks. The report quotes International Labour Organisation research which rates Australia as having the lowest percentage of women in management in the industrialised world. It says that our current management culture does not appear to take serious note of a role for women in senior management positions. We are told that, internationally, we 'perform poorly compared with world best practice on issues such as improving productivity, implementing strategy, international experience, employee relationships, quality and product innovation'.

Karpin provides a picture of current Australian senior and frontline managers as typically Anglo-Celt males working in a turbulent environment with high stress levels, working long hours and fearing burnout. The profile of the emerging manager, we are told, is altogether different. The 'leader/enabler' of the future will be different from the 'communicators' and 'autocrats' of the past. He and she will be drawn from a wide range of ethnic groups, will have a graduate qualification plus a postgraduate management qualification, have a global focus and will work in an environment typified by rapid change with a limited term of appointment. The managers of 2010 will work in an environment which emphasises best practice, benchmarking, quality and customer service. They will work within organisations with flat structures and have a commitment to the development of ongoing skills development for all staff.

Whatever the fate of the *Karpin report*, the development and evolution of management philosophies will undoubtedly be on the public policy and private enterprise agenda for decades to come. The fashion in management styles will change — not always for the better. We must be judicious and thoughtful in the application of these ideas. ■

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