Co-operation, Collaboration and Co-ordination

— the challenges of working together on unemployment and poverty

by vivian Hutchinson

vivian Hutchinson is a trustee of The Jobs Research Trust and the editor of
The Jobs Letter which publishes essential information on employment,
unemployment and the future of work and income. He is a long-time writer and
activist on employment issues, and provider of social services in Taranaki.

WHEN NO-ONE IS "IN-CHARGE"

U NEMPLOYMENT IS STILL the major social issue in New Zealand. It is what
the 1994 Prime Ministerial Task Force described as "New Zealand's greatest
challenge". Creating "real jobs" was also the issue at the front of the 1998
Hikoi for Hope — with unemployment seen as the major reason for poverty in this land
of plenty. The call for people and organisations to become more effective on these
issues has been one of the key demands of the 1990s, and will continue to be so into the
next century.

We sometimes forget that unemployment was once considered an extraordinary
thing. We certainly have never talked so much about poverty in this country as we do
today.

Twenty years ago, the idea that New Zealand's largest religious denomination
would walk the lengths of these islands to protest against poverty would have been
unbelievable. Ten years ago, the picture of a former governor-general leading a call on
parliament grounds that "enough is enough" ... would have been unimaginable.

When I first started working in the unemployment issue in the mid-70s, it was an
issue that was considered an aberration of the way our economy was working, and we
were hopeful that it would go away soon. At the time, there was increasing alarm as to
the long-term effects that technological change and global commerce would be having
on jobs ... but we felt we had the time to do something sensible about it.

By the early 80s, there was a public committee on unemployment in most towns
and cities around New Zealand. When Labour came into government in 1984, concern
about unemployment (then at 50,000 people) was such that it was declared "a national
crisis". An employment summit of community and business leaders was held at the
Beehive to develop a consensus on how to address the issue. At that time, we knew what
we were facing, and we also knew that we had to work together to beat it.

But now, at the turn of the century, unemployment seems almost routine. The idea
of "beating it" is no longer really on the agenda. Unemployment has become a part of
the framework of economic management in this country — and in the global economy.
Joblessness is seen by too many people as an inevitable by-product of the national
competitive psyche that says there will be winners and losers — and this is seen as the
best way to run our affairs.

Many in our communities have lost the capacity to see unemployment as a continuing central and critical issue ... let alone address it. This is despite the fact that the unemployment statistics are over four times the numbers of people out-of-work compared to a decade ago, when it was considered "a crisis".

But our world is very different today. The community groups of the 80s have either completely disappeared, or reinvented themselves as businesses which contract training and social services to government agencies. The government agencies themselves have been on a constant path of restructuring as the economic and social policies of the past fifteen years have pulled the Public Service to bits. And businesses and corporations continue to "re-engineer" their operations — downsizing and discarding people in the relentless pursuit of efficiency and market-share.

And we are no closer than we ever were to solving our unemployment problems. Politicians, government officials and community contractors may say they would wish to see an end to joblessness ... but their efforts so far have simply explained unemployment, or merely set up schemes which organise the unemployed.

Don't get me wrong: there is certainly a great deal of important and effective work being done on these issues. When I do workshops around the country on employment and the future of work and income, I get to speak to many managers of government departments, local authorities and leaders of community-based agencies. They are proud of their front-line work in this field and the many daily successes they are achieving on a personal level, and they should be.

But while there has been tremendous improvement in the business and delivery of social services in the last decade ... it is also clear that the overall problem is just not going away.

As the managers and leaders share with me their strategic plans, their mission statements and their performance objectives and outcomes ... these front-line people still know that this economy is not creating enough jobs for people, and significant parts of our population are slipping into poverty, homelessness, ill-health, bitterness and despair.

These managers and leaders share with me stories of concern for the working futures of their own children. They share their fears for the nature of the society that we are leaving to the next generation. And, beyond the official explanations, they are still looking for answers and solutions ...

I HAVE OFTEN WRITTEN my view that it is a mistake for any politician, bureaucrat or community leader to tell us that they have the magic answer to unemployment. We would be deluding ourselves if we believed them.

To some extent, unemployment is a huge social issue in which no-one is "in-charge", and there is certainly isn't any "one way" to solve it.

Unemployment stacks up alongside many of the great social issues of our time in which nobody really is in-charge of "the big picture". Sure, there are Ministers and Chief Executives ... but is anyone really in-charge? Is anyone really in-charge of the health system in this country? Is there anyone really in-charge of the education system?

No. Despite the posturing of various politicians and the solutioneering of departments and contractors ... it is very clear that there is no one person or agency at the helm of any authentic solution to these major public challenges.

It is almost like the big social issues that we wish to have some impact on have become *so* complex, with *so* many details within them, and you've got to know *so* much about everything and have effective relationships with *so* many people ... that we are kidding ourselves if any one individual or agency thinks they can do it all alone.

The agenda has changed. There is no organisation, community group, business or government department that has the legitimacy, intelligence or capacity to act alone on these major issues ... and still make substantial headway against them.

This could lead a perfectly rational person to feelings of cynicism and despair. But, after twenty years of involvement in social services, I have come to know that there are literally hundreds of worthwhile answers to unemployment and poverty in this country, and a tremendous amount of creativity still available to address these issues.

My perspective is to see the hundreds of individuals, businesses and agencies in this field that are each carrying *a part* of the solution. Perhaps they each hold 1% of the overall answer. The challenge before us is to learn the pragmatic skills of how to connect these pieces of the solution together — so that we all can be more effective in solving "the big picture".

We are not going to solve unemployment and create enough jobs for New Zealanders unless a great variety of organisations learn more effective ways of working together. The issues of unemployment and poverty today are calling out for leadership that has very different skills — the skills that can build collaborative action, and skills that can work across sectors and vested interests and achieve a common good.

The *strategic question* is this: How do we share power between all these groups, so that they can more effectively get on with their part of the solutions?

Just how we might start to answer this question ... is the subject of this paper.

WORKING FOR TARANAKI

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE in collaborative action — meeting with people from other sectors in order to address unemployment — was with a committee called *Work for Taranaki*. It was established in 1989 by the Taranaki United Council in response to what its researchers were saying would be a worsening employment situation for local people.

Under the chairmanship of the Taranaki United Council chairman, Ross Allen, the group brought together employers, local body politicians and officials, the regional managers of the major government departments, community social service agencies, and representatives of unemployed people and beneficiaries.

It was interesting that this group met in the Civil Defence Headquarters, right in the heart of New Plymouth. This was a brand-new spacious building with phones and whiteboards everywhere ... all set up to respond to natural disasters.

Work for Taranaki was not facing a natural disaster, but a social and economic one. There weren't the roofs being blown off houses as in the Cyclone Bola which had struck Taranaki the year before ... but we all knew the equally compelling reality that hundreds of Taranaki homes and families were being blown apart by chronic unemployment and growing poverty. The Civil Defence HQ therefore felt a very appropriate place to take initiative and to forge collaborative action that would make a difference.

The early meetings of this committee were full of enthusiasm. In fact it was remarkable to find the level of creativity and lively brainstorming amongst this varied and provincial group. In the first year, a 50-point plan for action was floated, public meetings were held, and submissions were made to government on the ever-changing diet of official programmes we were being offered.

In the next couple of years, however, this sense of hopefulness and initiative petered out. When it became clear that the key players with significant resources had their hands tied by policy decisions made elsewhere, the levels of frustration and hopelessness within the group began to rise.

The enthusiasms we shared faded into what some members chose to describe as "reality". The meetings became a theatre for posturing amongst very well-worn characters. There was patch-protection and cynicism and a gradual lowering of trust.

There were outbursts and outrage. One business development leader at a meeting described his complete dismay at what he had discovered was a tremendous amount of money and resources coming into Taranaki to address unemployment or to support beneficiaries. He could see there wasn't much co-ordination of this taxpayer support ... but he also had to conclude that the *Work for Taranaki* meetings were not helping.

The main government participants found other "priorities", and the group started to lose a consistency of members turning up to the meetings. In the end, the TUC chairman put an end to his sponsorship of the committee, saying that we should leave these affairs "...to the professionals."

As I packed away my foot-thick file of papers from the meetings of *Work for Taranaki*, I shared a sense of defeat at the closure of this initiative. Where had we gone wrong?

At the time I was quick to blame the behaviour and the vested interests of many of the individuals involved. But really, this was no use.

I came to see that I was very much a part of the problems we had experienced. I had certainly played my own part in the posturing and patch-protection that was going on around the table. When I reviewed this three-year experiment, I found that I had learned that the call to "collaboration" was a very much deeper challenge than I had expected. And I had not expected it to be such a challenge to my own character.

I also learned that "co-operation" means much more than just getting a variety of people to sit in the same room for a couple of hours every month. I learned that in addressing the issues of "co-ordination", we cannot avoid facing the pragmatic issues of power and control of the choices and resources.

For all the worthiness of our goals, the *Work for Taranaki* experience taught me that our communities are wasting their time in creating these local action groups ... unless they also invest in the skills of how these people can work together more effectively.

For me, it was only then that I was ready to start exploring how to make just such an investment ...

T HIS EXPERIENCE STARTED me on a journey of reading, study and research into the skills of how groups could become more effective in addressing unemployment and poverty. And this is a journey I am still undertaking.

To some extent, the last decade has been a good time to begin such an enquiry. There has been a virtual explosion of all sorts of seminars, books, and technologies inspiring groups to work together better. Much of this has been led by trainers in the corporate environment who have been promoting greater teamwork within business groups so they can "co-operate to compete". There have also been important insights gained from cross-cultural research, and the co-operative, peace and personal growth movements have all added their experiences to this pile.

It was during the year following the demise of *Work for Taranaki* that I came across some of the areas of research which struck a chord for me. I had traveled to America to study and write, and it was also a chance for me to reflect on the work I was doing on employment issues back in New Zealand. While I was there, a friend showed me some material by John Bryson and Barbara Crosby, two US academics who teach in the field of public policy. Their writings were part of a whole area of scholarship in public issues, particularly focussing on questions of how to operate in what they termed a "shared-power" world.

They defined this as a world where organisations "must share objectives, activities, resources, power and authority in order to achieve collective gains or minimise losses..." Their approach was certainly an eye-opener for me. And after my experiences with *Work for Taranaki*, I could immediately see how it could help my understanding of collaborative dynamics. I obtained a copy of the Bryson and Crosby book "*Leadership for a Common Good — how to tackle problems in a shared-power world*" and began to explore a series of models that addressed the issues of sharing power between groups.

I have been working with these models for a few years now, both in my consulting work and in my personal leadership within groups. My view of these metaphors have changed and developed, especially more recently as I have been working with this material within the Local Employment Co-ordination groups. And I expect these perceptions will continue to change.
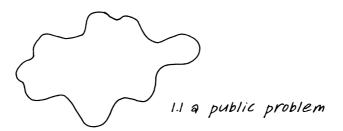
The models don't describe reality — they are simply imperfect metaphors which enable us to have a discussion on deeper and wider issues. The word *model* comes from its Latin roots in *modulus* and *modus*, meaning measure, rhythm and harmony. So perhaps these metaphors provide us an opportunity to give ourselves a small measure, and to sense the rhythms and harmonies of our behaviour.

When it comes to discussing issues of just how we can share power and control, inspire greater collaboration, and be more effective in all of this ... I have found these measures particularly useful.
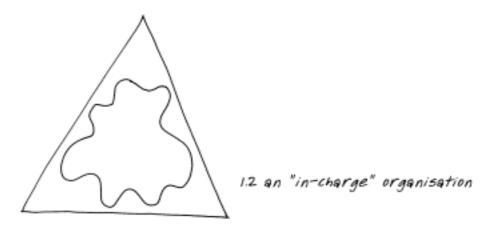
Lets take a look at one model of how major social issues are addressed by various organisations:

THE "SHARED-POWER" WORLD

IMAGINE A MAJOR social issue or problem which can be depicted like this:
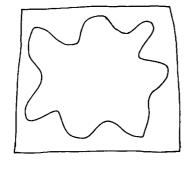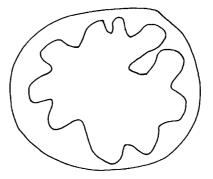
1.1 a public problem

The standard "in charge" model of an organisation is one which tries to surround this problem with its solutions and programmes. You might depict it like this:

1.2 an "in-charge" organisation

Perhaps this organisation is a government agency or local body. This institution has the statutory authority to fully encompass the problem area. The organisation at work here is often very hierarchical, like this image of a pyramid. It engages in highly-rational, expert-based planning. It is powerful and it usually makes short work of the problem — or at least it seems to.

There are, of course, a couple of varieties on this picture ...

1.3 a business opportunity   1.4 a community group

The picture on the left represents an organisation that sees a particular public problem as a business opportunity. In the field of unemployment this might be something like a private training provider on contract to a government agency.

The picture on the right represents a community group. These have a variety of organisational structures and may not be simply hierarchical. These groups are usually created to criticise the lack of official action on an issue ... and/or to have a go at doing something more effectively. The sorts of groups here might be a collective of unemployed people advocating alternatives to structural unemployment. Or they might be a collaboration between churches and service clubs, trying to run local innovative solutions to joblessness.

B UT THERE IS another picture, or another way of looking at how complex social problems are being addressed. Bryson and Crosby call this the "shared-power" model. It is rooted in the world-view that accepts that a social problem like unemployment is so complex that no-one can say that they are "in charge". This view accepts that you cannot completely surround our public problems with your organisation or your solutions.
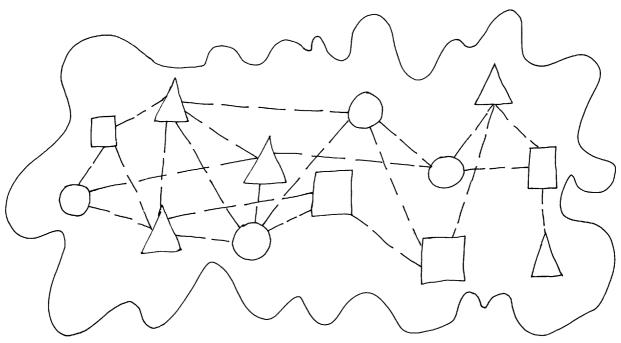
In a "shared-power" world, the problems *surround us*. And within the problem area, there are a whole range of groups and organisations involved in getting on with their part of the solution. A "shared-power" model might look something like the picture in figure 1.5 (*over*).

You'll notice there is a whole variety of organisations at work here. But they are not operating alone. They are in relationship with one another within a whole system of fluid and chaotic networks.

No one is pretending they are "in-charge" here. They are taking care of their piece of the problem and getting on with their unique solutions. "The big picture" is addressed through the *connections* that exist between organisations.

In the "in-charge" model, your effectiveness comes from your programmes and the resources you have to get the job done. In the "shared-power" world, your effectiveness is ruled by the quality of the *relationships* between key players, and especially their ability to work together to build trust, agreement and consensus.

The challenge of leadership within this world-view is to encourage diverse people and groups to make choices *together,* and how to inspire the sharing of objectives, resources and authority.
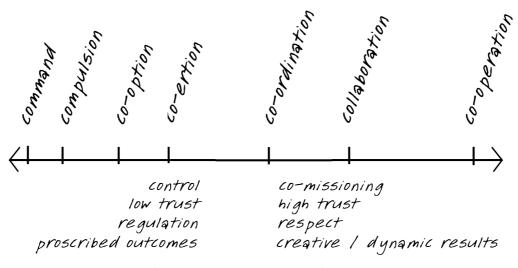

1.5 the "shared-power" matrix of organisations

Now I know from working in community development groups that this "shared-power" world can be a very difficult world to work within. For a start, we can't even say that it is likely that all these different players will agree with one other. Just gaining a *rough* concensus or agreement on how the problem is defined ... is often a major part of the battle in itself.

But, whether we like this situation or not, when I have shared this picture of a "shared-power" world to my colleagues, they have been quick to affirm that this is a realistic portrayal of the landscape they do their daily work within.

FROM COMMAND TO CO-OPERATION

THE SECOND PICTURE I want to share here is a model I developed with Jan Francis during our work with the Local Employment Committees. It is a continuum, or a line, drawn to illustrate the different ways we can "work together".

control
low trust
regulation
proscribed outcomes

co-missioning
high trust
respect
creative / dynamic results

2.1 the "working together" continuum

On the left of the continuum you have people working together because they are told to. This extreme is where the motivation for group activity is "commanded" or "compelled". The line moves through the territory of "co-ertion" and "co-option" down to the right-hand side of the picture where we have "co-ordination", "collaboration", and "co-operation".

On the left-hand side, the impetus for why we should be working together is because we are being ordered to — or it is part of our job description. The push for collective action is coming from *outside* of ourselves.

On the right-hand side, we are working together for reasons which are more *inwardly* motivated. We have a much greater personal commitment to the mission of the group. This inward motivation leads to a greater understanding of the word *commissioning*. It literally becomes "co-missioning" as we bring together the goals and strategies of a variety of people and organisations ... allowing an overall mission to emerge.

On the "command" side, the landscape for collective action is still very much a *low-trust* environment. There may be teamwork here, but there is also probably patch-protection and watching-your-back. On the "co-operation" end of the line, you can't really operate unless you also have a *high-trust* environment — one which nurtures and develops the relationships between the diverse people involved.

On the one side of this picture, the "outcomes" from your collective action are very much proscribed or regulated — you can list them, or count them — they may even be written into your contract.

At the other end, the "outcomes" are not easily written down or counted. They are often serendipitous — emerging or "unfolding" out of the environment you have created. This is not to say that you don't get "outcomes" from collaborative action ...

they just don't readily respond to lists or counts. In a co-operative environment, you shouldn't be surprised if you get all sorts of creative and dynamic results that you never planned for in the first place.

This continuum is also a picture of power. And here I am defining power as "the control of the choices."

On the left-hand side, perhaps within an "in-charge" organisation, there is often a few players making all the choices, leading or dominating all the other participants. This may be simply excellent team work with a good captain — but it may also be a "bully culture" that just tells people to work together, or face the consequences.

As you move across the line, the power moves to absorb or influence the choices of other players. When we arrive into the region of "co-ordination" and "collaboration", we start to see choices being made *with respect* to the other players. This respect involves showing consideration for the values and differences of the participating players.
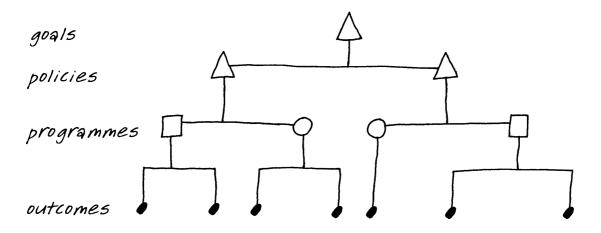
As we get to the other end of this continuum, we start to genuinely share choices, and talk about sincere *partnerships*.

SO HOW DO YOU GET THINGS DONE?

T HIS MAY ALL be very interesting to think about ... but how does it help us get things done?

Well, the "in-charge" model has a very clear and pragmatic way of addressing the task: it is often called the "rational planning process". This is an action strategy that rests on a very clear concensus on the goals ... we all know what the mission is, why we are there, how we are going to get on with it, and how we will measure the results.

A picture of the rational planning model looks something like this :

goals

policies

programmes

outcomes

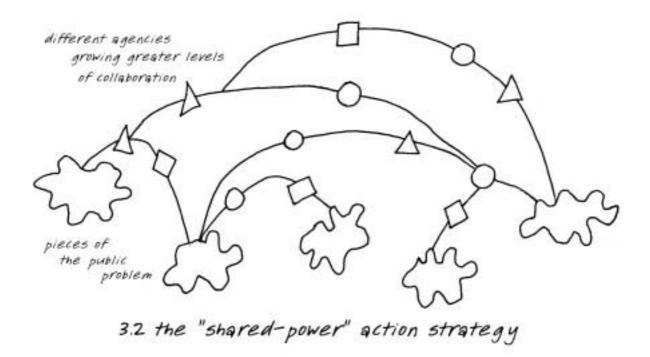### 3.1 the rational planning process

This planning model goes from "goals" to "policies" to "programmes" to "outcomes". We could quibble over the terms ... but this is a pretty standard framework for strategic planning.

But there is an alternative view which is no less professional in its approach. This is the "shared-power" planning model which starts out by *not assuming* that consensus exists over the goals. I have found this to be a critical insight in understanding how to develop co-operation *between* groups: do not start by assuming that we have to see things in the same way.

In the "shared-power" world there are almost always conflicts between the different groups involved — conflicts in terms of how we define what a success is, conflicts on how we define the means for collaborative action, how we define the culture and philosophy of the programmes, conflicts over timing ... and conflicts over how many of the organisations involved enjoy greater advantages and privileges than the other groups.

How we get things done here is through relationships. We grow these relationships from the ground up — by building ever more general connections of trust and consensus between the main players. In this model, we have the maturity to say to each other: "I might not agree with you on everything, but I do agree with you about this bit. So let's get on with that..."

A "shared-power" action strategy might look like this:

3.2 the "shared-power" action strategy

The logic and reasoning behind the rational planning model is *deductive*. You can trace your choices back to an origin. With deductive logic, you state the premise and your actions lead progressively to a conclusion. The whole system moves from the *general* to the *particular*.

In contrast, the logic and reasoning behind the "shared-power" model is *inductive*. It's going completely in the reverse direction ... as it moves from the *particular* to the *general*. The strategies at work here are about starting from the particular choices and shared actions you can agree on right now ... and letting greater and greater levels of agreement unfold as relationships grow.

Trust grows through small acts of collaboration. This model is a strategy for how "the big picture" is addressed by biting through the little pictures first.

In a "shared-power" environment, we don't sign up to our "mission" before we start to work together. We grow the mission together, being flexible and open to changes as we co-operate.

In an "in-charge" model might talk about *goals* but in a "shared-power" world the talk is more about *trajectories*. How many of us have been in organisations with mission statements and goals that sit on the wall ... and two years down the track it is obvious that they are no longer appropriate?

With a deeper understanding of "co-missioning", we can start to trust each other to adjust the mission as we go. Here, there is the recognition that a goal may be a preferred end-point ... but getting there will never be in a straight line. In the meantime, we will be constantly re-evaluating and redefining our goals in the light of new information, wisdom and collaborative experience.

A MATURATION OF LEADERSHIP

N OW, NONE OF these models are helpful to us if we reduce them to "either/or" options. It is not useful for us to say that one scenario (e.g. the "in-charge" way) of organising your affairs is bad, and the other ("shared-power") model is good. Perhaps we need to get away from the cartoon-like nature of this oppositional thinking.

Although my own background has been in the community sector which has been more at-home in a "shared-power" approach, I have also enjoyed working in "in-charge" organisations. I have found that there are fundamental truths within each perspective, and also *shadows* within each approach.

A "shared-power" world is much more complex than the rational planning approach — and it is also considerably more fragile. The leadership skills needed here are very different to those found within the "in-charge" world.

The skills at work here are not questions of management, but questions of politics. Leadership here is a political task in the precise sense of the term "politics" where it means "the craft of sharing choices". The skills we require here are more to do with what Bryson and Crosby describe as "illuminating the contours of agreement between us" ... rather than highlighting how different we are from one another, and cutting out all the creative areas of our diversity.

With this in mind, the leadership skills required in a "shared-power" world will include:

- how to persuade and lead by example;
- how to create respect, alliances, agreements and even "treaties" between people;
- how to share information and wisdom on how to get on with the job;
- how to share access to resources and power;
- how to mediate and shape the expected conflicts between groups;
- how to avoid bureaucratic capture of the smaller initiatives by the more powerful players;
- how to show sincere acts of appreciation to people.

I N MY WORKSHOPS I have heard a great many stories of how managers and community leaders have struggled to achieve greater collaboration within the employment initiatives they have been working with.

We have often started the workshops off with a "time-line" where people tell the stories of their participation in employment and poverty issues, and the stories of their groups, departments and agencies.

It has been fascinating for me to see how, in almost every city and town in the country, people have shared in some way the same struggles that I have experienced in Taranaki.

We were certainly learning the same lessons:

- our goals for greater collaboration are deeply reliant on the level of relationships and trust between the people involved.

- we need to make a longer-term commitment to developing a co-operative environment for action.

- our communities need to invest in the facilitation and leadership skills needed for "local action groups" to work together effectively.

- the participants in these groups need to value and develop a whole new set of collaborative professional skills in order to get on with the job.

To some extent, the stories and models I have shared in this paper are part of a "work-in-progress" on maturing our skills and capabilities in working together more effectively. I am sure that there are many other stories and pathways that will contribute insights and understandings as we address our major public problems.

My vision is that in the next ten years we will be seeing the growth of completely new types of organisations — in government, in business and in the community — which will better understand the processes of co-operation, collaboration and co-ordination, and will know how to take leadership in achieving a common good.

And when the different sector groups in our cities and towns start again to take on the challenges of unemployment and poverty ... we will all be better equipped to get on with the job.

vivian Hutchinson

vivian Hutchinson
March 1999

NOTES FOR READERS

• This paper is based on a series of workshops vivian Hutchinson gave in 1998 to the co-ordinators of the Local Employment Co-ordination groups, and also his speech to the *Summer Heart Politics Gathering* at the Tauhara Centre in Taupo, in January 1999.

• This paper is also available on the internet at www.jobsletter.org.nz/vivian/ccc99.htm

• vivian Hutchinson has been one of the pioneers in community-based action for jobs in New Zealand, especially in establishing programmes for the support and education of unemployed people. He was a founder of the Taranaki Work Trust, and its associated projects in the Starting Point Employment Resource Centre, Skills of Enterprise Business Courses, and the Enterprise Centre. He has been involved in establishing many practical training programmes for unemployed people, and also local employment and trading networks such as Green Dollars.

• The Jobs Research Trust was established in 1994 to "develop and distribute information that will help our communities create more jobs and reduce unemployment and poverty in New Zealand."
Contact: P.O.Box 428, New Plymouth, Taranaki, NZ phone 06-753-4434
email jobs.research@jobsletter.org.nz or visit the internet website at www.jobsletter.org.nz

• For current "*Statistics That Matter*" on the levels of employment and unemployment in New Zealand, also visit the website at www.jobsletter.org.nz/stt/stathome.htm

• The Local Employment Co-ordination Groups were set up by the Department of Labour. They were established after recommendations from the 1994 Employment Taskforce report, which called for greater co-ordination and collaboration between local groups at a local level. At the time of writing, there were 42 committees throughout New Zealand with a total of 750 active members drawn from different government agencies, local authorities and community groups. These committees now operate under the new Department of Work and Income (WINZ), under the leadership of the WINZ Regional Commissioners.

• A paper "*Local Employment Co-ordination — What can a Regional Commissioner Do?*" by Jan Francis and vivian Hutchinson is available on the internet at www.jobsletter.org.nz/art/lec99.htm
• A report "*Local Employment Co-ordination — Spotlight on Good Practice*" by researcher Vicki Wilde is also available from Work and Income NZ.

• "*Leadership for the Common Good — tackling public problems in a shared-power world*", by John M. Bryson and Barbara C. Crosby, is published by Jossey-Bass Publishers, 350 Sansome Street, San Francisco 94104, and is available on www.amazon.com.
John Bryson has also the author of "*Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organisations*", and "*Creating and Implementing your Strategic Plan*" (a Workbook), both are a part of part of the Jossey-Bass Public Administration Series.

• A paper by Fran Peavey and vivian Hutchinson on "*Strategic Questioning*" is available on the internet at www.jobsletter.org.nz/vivian/stratq97.htm

• Dale Hunter, Anne Bailey and Bill Taylor and their management training group Zenergy are an important national and international resource in teaching facilitation and collaborative skills. They have three books in print — "*The Art of Facilitation*", "*The Zen of Groups*", "*Co-operacy — a new way of being at work*" and "*The Essence of Facilitation*" ... all published by Tandem Press, Auckland, NZ.
For more information email zenergy@xtra.co.nz